Christian Faith, Formation and Education

Edited by Ros Stuart-Buttle and John Shortt

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FOREWORD

Christian Faith, Formation and Education is a very welcome and timely addition to the contemporary academic discussion of the role of Christian faith in education. The role of any religious faith in education, especially in more formal education, can, of course, be highly contested and presents a sharp contrast to secular viewpoints of the aims and purpose of education and the focus of educational endeavour. As a number of the authors in the book point out, the debate becomes ultimately focused on anthropological and theological issues: the understanding of what it is to be human, to be a human in the world and the role of Christian faith in this understanding. The chapters in this book propose that there is a role for Christian faith in education and the explanations and examinations of this role are accomplished with conviction and nuanced argumentation.

As with all of the edited collections that provide a series of genuine insights, the different chapters provide original and innovative research, an invigorating diversity of perspective and a variety in the methods of research. The chapters in the book tackle a broad range of themes including the underpinning and, arguably, foundational concepts and terminology; the role of faith in Catholic schools, universities and adult theological education; promoting agency in learners, interpreting scripture; Christian leadership; Catholic pedagogy and the challenges faced by the new generation of Catholic teachers. The research methods range from various types of theory to empirical studies to drawing on data from a major research project. The book also strikes a good balance between the theoretical, the practical and the professional, and this enables the creative and the troublesome tensions to emerge, be identified and be addressed.

A number of the authors engage in a close analysis of some of the prevailing modes of thinking and world views such as subjectivism, relativism, positivism and neo-liberalism. The authors critically explore and probe these and present vigorous counterarguments and counterpositions. Some of the authors consider the thorny issues of the confusing and ambiguous terminology that can be used in discussions of themes such as *faith, faith formation, faith development* and *Christian Education* and provide a clarification and critical reappraisal of some of these key terms.

The individual chapters in the book are very stimulating and engaging and are characterized by a high level of scholarship. The chapters are very readable and thought-provoking. The authors all have different academic histories and come from a variety of disciplines and scholarly backgrounds. Some of the authors also represent important international views on the role of Christian faith in education. It is instructive to reflect on the consonances and dissonances between the experiences in Australia and Canada and the UK. Interestingly, a good number of the authors adopt an interdisciplinary approach to their research and this produces fascinating blends and syntheses of some of the following: theology, philosophy, education, developmental psychology, religious education and biblical studies. This creates an academic richness and sophistication in the positions and arguments adopted in the book, but also demonstrates that Christian faith, formation and education cannot be confined or reduced to a small number of academic disciplines and, indeed, can and must be studied and researched within and between a wide range of disciplines.

This is an edited collection that deserves careful reading, study and reflection and will be an important academic resource for students and academics and all those with an interest in Christian faith, formation and education. Ros Stuart-Buttle, John Shortt and all of the authors are to be congratulated on producing such a valuable academic work.

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CONTENTS

Editors

John Shortt is Professorial Fellow in Christian Education at Liverpool Hope University and Senior Adviser to the European Educators' Christian Association (EurECA). His most recent book is *Bible-Shaped Teaching*. He was the founding editor of *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* and co-author with David I Smith of *The Bible and the Task of Teaching*.

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Introduction

Ros Stuart-Buttle and John Shortt

Overview

This is a book about Christian faith, formation and education, written by theologians and educators who are friends and esteemed colleagues. The idea for this volume originated early in 2015 at Liverpool Hope University when a number of staff members working in the field of Christian education met to discuss the theological context and to attempt to identify important issues relating to a Christian engagement in education in terms of teacher formation, school impact and education as a potential force for good in society. The thinking behind the initial meeting was further developed at a colloquium held in October 2015. This was later followed by an international conference held in June 2016 at Liverpool Hope University, at which a number of chapter contributors presented papers. So the process behind this book, which has been some time in the making, is a story of partnership, collaboration and coming together in dialogue, debate and discussion in the interests of better understanding and of serving Christian education in its broadest sense. Here the role of Liverpool Hope University Centre for Christian Education and Pastoral Theology together with Canterbury Christ Church National Institute for Christian Educational Research is acknowledged, along with the contribution of our many friends and supporters.

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How can we approach the relationship between faith, formation and education, assuming, of course, that a relationship can be shown to exist in the first place? This edited volume explores this question within a context of much current thinking and changing policies and practices affecting the educational sector. The importance of shared values and character education has risen to the fore across all schools, colleges and universities, promoted by governments and educational bodies and seen as urgent in light of ideologies and actions that threaten the common good. But the idea of nurturing or developing a particular religious faith is viewed as far more questionable. Indeed, many today view the separation of faith from the educational context as desirable or even essential, on both philosophical and educational grounds, and given the pluralist twenty-first-century society we inhabit. However, the aim of this book is to provide an accessible, practice-related yet scholarly resource that demonstrates how Christian faith can contribute to a rich vision of education that encompasses the formation of the whole person in their intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual and moral dimensions across all stages of life and work.

Christian educators invite individuals and communities to be formed and transformed as they are inspired and challenged to better come to know themselves and the world and experience something of the realm of God. This suggests a view of education that goes beyond the instrumental to the formative, in other words towards the growing and shaping of the human person with their attitudes, beliefs, values, motivations, experiences and worldviews. This needs to be done in fidelity to the deep roots of the Christian tradition yet, at the same time, with commitment to and engagement in the contemporary plural and secularist context where religious faith can no longer be assumed to be supported by civil society. As such, it invites debate and reflection about the role and relevance of faith and theology within approaches to, and practices in, education today.

What makes this book distinctive and worth reading? This is a question that might well be asked. Our response is that the chapter contributors, who are recognised exponents and leading international and ecumenical practitioners in the field of Christian education, each demonstrate that faith really matters, both to the agency of the individual learner and to the identity formation of educational communities where specific teachings, ethos, values and relationships are encountered. This holds significance not only for personal conviction and worldview but also for how professional work and educational activity are interpreted and performed. The book argues against any supposedly 'neutral' form of education, which is

where much thinking about contemporary secular education lies. It also advocates strongly against an indoctrinatory or uncritical sense of education that promotes any form of religious exclusivism or confessionalism. Instead, the chapters bring to bear the fruits of fresh thinking about how Christian faith can play an important part in the meaningful formation of the human person and an education for the common good of society. This is a timely and important witness, given the fast-changing political, educational and socio-cultural forces of today.

Framing the Discourse

Part I opens with Jeff Astley's chapter which explores the foundational concepts of faith, formation, development and education. These concepts are employed across a wide variety of contexts but have often been used without much clarification or consensus. Astley's chapter considers these component elements and their differing applications, recognises the importance of a critical dimension within Christian education and makes a significant distinction between faith formation and faith development. In Chap. 3, John Shortt discusses the question of whether talk of Christian education is even meaningful. He reminds us of arguments that suggest that Christian or indeed any other faith-based education is necessarily indoctrinatory and therefore fundamentally anti-educational. In contrast, he proposes a holistic form of Christian education that seeks the promotion of shalom and is relational in pedagogical approach and appropriate for plural contexts, not just those of Christian schools or churches.

Mario D'Souza, writing in Chap. 4 from an international (Canadian) context, considers how universities in recent decades have seen the humanities and liberal arts being pushed to the side-lines in a mounting pressure for early specialisation. He argues that the Christian university can respond by showing how and why education is more than a preparation for a profession. His chapter suggests an opportunity to broaden religious literacy and prepare students to become reflective adults. Relying on a Christian anthropology, the Christian university can witness to knowledge and understanding that lies beyond the immediacy of the material, the sensory and the experiential.

Clare Watkins in Chap. 5 also discusses the modern questioning of faith in the academic context. She resituates this within the current trends of a late modern reading of culture and through reflection on qualitative data gained in research with Catholic school leaders in England and Wales. In

turning to Aquinas' account of Christian pedagogy, which demonstrates a deeply theological and anthropological reading of faith and intellect from which late modern educators can learn, Watkins articulates a theology of the 'faith-full intellect' as a fundamental quality of personhood and one that holds deep significance for teaching and learning today.

In focusing on the situation in the United Kingdom, David Ford in Chap. 6 advocates an approach to education that is deeply Christian yet at the same time healthily plural. Drawing on the Church of England's recent *Vision for Education* he demonstrates that to be healthily plural, education should foster all-round education that serves the flourishing of children and the common good of society, encouraging a pluralism of multiple depths that has means of negotiating and adjudicating disputes. This is contrasted with less healthy forms of pluralism and with less plural systems. Ford exemplifies this from the Church of England's new vision of an education that is 'deeply Christian, serving the common good' and built around wisdom, hope, community and dignity.

John Sullivan in Chap. 7 presents the dialectic between doing justice to the score of the living tradition of Catholic education and empowering personal rendition of it among learners whose agency is brought into play. He explains what he means by promoting agency in learners before drawing upon two philosophers of education, Graham McDonough and Pádraig Hogan, to comment insightfully on different aspects of the need to develop agency in students. The principal risks and benefits incurred by giving salience to learning agency are outlined before the chapter underlines the importance, for both educational and religious development, of eliciting an original response from those we teach. In Chap. 8 Trevor Cooling considers three starting points to faith education, namely instruction, formation and education, as discussed in an influential report on English schools. He notes that the idea of religious formation has been a problematic idea since the 1970s and traces the current discomfort through intensive case study research with teachers in church secondary schools. His chapter develops the notions of formation and instruction, arguing that the concept of instruction is based on a positivist understanding of Christian learning whereas the concept of formation is better understood through a hermeneutical model of learning.

In the closing chapter of Part I, Ros Stuart-Buttle outlines the challenge of defining theological education and enquires about the interrelationship between adult theological education and professional practice. Her chapter considers the professional teacher as theological learner and

draws upon on social work research to present the concept of the 'faith closet' but linked to theological and faith formation approaches for professional practice in church schools. The chapter concludes by advocating a hermeneutical-dialogical-participatory encounter with Christian theology as one way to hold relevance and enable today's teachers to connect and apply theological thinking to professional practice and personal faith identity.

Reflections on Practice

The chapters in Part II take on a more concrete focus and practice-based emphasis. In Chap. 10, Andy Wolfe discusses a growing momentum of challenge to James Fowler's theories and related linear approaches to faith development and he calls for something of a paradigm shift for our contemporary social context. Through an examination of the impact of social media, his chapter unpacks the nature of identity formation in teenagers through the framing of 'journeys of faith' and a *multi-logue* of 24-7 interaction, narrative shaping and identity formation. Wolfe suggests that through a deepening understanding of this social context, schools can become better equipped to provide the support, guidance, experience and celebration of narrative to allow faith to develop. In Chap. 11, Ann Casson considers how a sense of belonging to a Christian community contributes to the spiritual development of pupils. Drawing on data generated by the Ten Leading Schools research project, her chapter explores the ways in which pupils and staff identified a sense of belonging to a Christian community and reflects on the potential implications and significance of these findings.

The following two chapters offer further insight from international perspectives, this time from the Australian context. Graham Rossiter reflects on the trajectory of Australian Catholic school religious education between 1965 and 2017. He portrays the creative tension of the 1970s between ecclesiastical interests in the outcomes of Australian Catholic school religious education and the concerns of religious educators to promote the personal development of their students, whether or not they were churchgoing. Since then, the discourse has come to be dominated by ecclesiastical terminology, with Catholic identity, faith formation and new evangelisation as the current most prominent constructs. In critiquing this development, Rossiter proposes that the discourse of religious education needs to become more outward looking, and more overtly concerned with

what it means to educate young Australians spiritually, morally and religiously for life in an increasingly challenging culture. Richard Rymarz in Chap. 13 brings the focus of his chapter to rest on offering a framework for the formation of younger teachers in Catholic schools. Recognising that young teachers have a key role in maintaining the religious identity of the school at a time of significant cultural change, he reports on an empirical study which examined school principals' perceptions of the religious experience and background of younger teachers in their schools. Key findings emerge that younger teachers are reflective of the wider cultural shifts in religious practice and belief but are open to greater engagement with the religious tradition.

The final two chapters take on areas of particular focus and pressing contemporary concern. Robert Bowie in Chap. 14 reviews research that identifies weaknesses in teaching the Bible in English schools and reflects on a new project that is trying to develop a better reading of the Bible in the classroom. Religious education in England has recently changed to focus more sharply on the study of religion at examination level, creating an opportunity for the better use of religious texts as sources but with a risk of replicating existing problems in what is sometimes viewed as an examination factory system. Bowie explores the hermeneutical challenge to develop a capacity for wiser explorations of the Bible that build on common ground between important and influential theological and educational writers in faith and education contexts. The final chapter of the book, from David Cracknell, considers the much-debated and often thorny topic of Christian leadership in education. His chapter aims to show how Christian faith can engage effectively with the personal and professional challenges that Christian leaders experience in schools, colleges and other educational organisations. From an exploration of what is meant by Christian leadership in education, its relationship to the wider study of educational leadership and how leaders might be challenged and transformed, Cracknell proposes that Christian leadership needs to be God-centred, God-led and God-empowered. This means a concern with relationships and interdependence. It is about knowledge but even more about wisdom and a search for truth. It develops as discipleship and service, not status and self-importance, in community, not autonomously, with empowerment, not exploitation, and with a vision for learning that leads to life and hope.

Resonant Themes

It is not surprising that, in a book like this, there are themes that recur in some or even all of the chapters. Identifying these resonances throws light upon the underlying approach being taken by the authors as they reflect upon faith, formation and education.

Formation is a key theme throughout the book. Several of the contributors present formation as being of the whole person. For example, Stuart-Buttle talks of an educational vision for the formation of the whole person in body, mind and spirit. Wolfe commends a holistic vision that values not only students' academic achievements but also their all-round development socially, morally, culturally and spiritually. Astley argues that teaching and learning have dimensions of not only the formation of beliefs, attitudes, skills and other aspects of the whole person but also critical evaluation of what is being taught and learnt. He says that something important is lost if both dimensions are not present. Christian education is both formative and critical. Cooling argues that all education is formative and that Christian education affirms pupil agency. Agency is also a central theme in Sullivan's chapter as he calls for a Christian education that fosters a learning space supportive of the development of the student's agency.

Another recurring theme is an emphasis on community rather than on the lonely individual. In his chapter, Ford calls for a Christian education wherein students are shaped in learning communities. It is 'an education for community and living well together' because our humanity is 'utterly relational co-humanity in a shared life on a finite planet'. Watkins places teaching and learning in 'that mysterious place of human relationship, friendship and affection' because people learn and grow when they are bound together in relationships of love. Casson's research found that a sense of belonging to a school community contributed to spiritual development through relationships of trust and openness that encouraged and supported it.

D'Souza writes of an education which seeks the common good, a common good which is 'not a collection of individual goods lumped together' but rather the good human life of people living together in communion. Shortt says that Christian education is education for *shalom* and this calls for a relational pedagogy which promotes an *ubuntu* relationship with our fellow human beings as well as with the physical creation and with God.

Watkins says that relational education is characterised by a practice of 'humility before the mystery of the learner', a *kenosis* of the teacher before

the student as made in the image of God. Cracknell says that *kenosis* should characterise the Christian leader in educational and other contexts. Cooling and Bowie both call for humility on the part of teachers and learners before that which is being studied, an epistemic humility before the text. Shortt writes that relational pedagogy calls for humility before the learner as Other as well as humility before that which is being taught and learnt. This humility before the Otherness of the world we are studying is contrasted by D'Souza with a reductionist attitude that treats it strictly as something to be mastered.

Casson, Rymarz and Stuart-Buttle all make use of the idea of the narthex, the exterior porch of a church, as a metaphor for the Christian school in that it should be a safe space in which there is opportunity to explore the spiritual dimension of life and to reflect upon it. Rymarz says that such a narthical learning space provides opportunity for people from different backgrounds and outlooks on life to meet and converse. He links the idea of the narthex with that of the Court of the Gentiles near the Temple in Jerusalem. Stuart-Buttle argues that it is a place where encounter marked by critical openness takes place and not a place for catechesis or religious persuasion. Wolfe calls for schools to become communities which are 'rooted in the inter-play of narrative, allowing pupils the space to develop their own identity, at their own pace and in their own way'. Bowie advocates a hermeneutical approach to religious education that creates space for learners to engage with each other, with teachers and with the voices of different Christians and Christian communities and with those of other faiths. This all resonates with Ford's call for an approach to teaching and learning which is both deeply Christian and healthily plural and with his account of the practice of scriptural reasoning.

Wisdom is another theme mentioned by many of the chapter contributors. Ford expresses puzzlement at how little place it is given in educational discussion, especially in the United Kingdom, despite it being a central emphasis in the major religious and other traditions of education. Christian education, he says, should be not only for knowledge and skills but also for wisdom. Stuart-Buttle calls for an approach to theological education that is not so much about handling abstract doctrines as it is about developing spirituality and wisdom in the person and the community. Watkins talks of understanding as not so much about cleverness and

struggles to learn but more to do with 'the restful knowing of things, wisdom, an ability to look, gaze upon and see'. Bowie wants religious education to move away from studying religion and towards studying wisdom texts.

If all these are elements called for by the contributors in a Christian approach to teaching and learning, then how distinctively Christian are they? Distinctiveness is a subject discussed by several contributors. Shortt argues that Christian education should aim at faithfulness rather than viewing distinctiveness in term of difference and that this faithfulness is a matter of the shape of the whole rather than of each and every part, a matter of building a rich whole informed by faith, not of whether each component is trademarked as 'distinct'. Watkins calls for a nurturing of 'faith-full instincts' seen in contemporary Catholic educational practices—instincts 'around love, humility/*kenosis*, freedom, and relationship'—because they are deeply rooted in and with a long Christian tradition.

The themes and chapters of this book bring out the fruits of fresh thinking about how Christian faith and formation can illuminate and inspire, as well as disturb and challenge, the work of contemporary education in our schools, colleges, universities, dioceses and church institutions. It is our belief as editors that the chapters offer a rich diet and source of new thinking and scholarship in the field and we wish to express our gratitude and sincere appreciation to our fellow authors and indeed to all those who have supported the writing of this volume in any way. We hope that all who read and reflect on the chapters of this book will discover new understanding and appreciation for faith, formation and Christian education in our time.

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Framing the Discourse

The Naming of Parts: Faith, Formation, Development and Education

Jeff Astley

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will explore the meaning of certain key concepts that are employed across a wide variety of contexts where adults (including clergy), young people and children are educated into Christianity.

WHY BOTHER?

Readers may wonder why they should bother with what many now regard as a narrow, out-of-date concern for the meaning of terms. Haven't we left behind those spurious claims for an impartial analysis of meaning, to relax among the rich and ever-elusive range of human language with its variety of connotations?

Well, yes, of course. But also no. We certainly have not progressed to the point where we can ignore what readers and listeners understand by the terms that an author or speaker uses, or what either group intends by using that language. Surely only charlatans would wish to hinder a careful analysis of what people mean by what they say and write. Analysis and definition will not take us all the way along the road we need to travel, but

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they offer a better place to start from than some other departure points. And they also provide us with resources that will be of great assistance during our intellectual journeys of exploration. Further, my experience over many years of reflecting, speaking and writing about the topics listed in my title has shown that the result of *not* bothering with the meaning of terms is frequently mutual confusion, bogus agreement or the premature closure of sensible and worthwhile discussion.

I do not believe, however, that such outcomes have been engineered. Rather, they represent the unintended consequences of an emphasis on practice that regards all theoretical concerns as irrelevant to those practical men and women who are so keen to 'get things done' that they are unwilling to put much effort into thinking through what it is they are thinking of doing.

I recently supervised a professional doctorate that explored, among other things, the official Church of England reports on ministerial education, in order to seek to 'understand what might be meant by the word "formation" in this context'. The author concluded that even within the more important reports there was often 'no clear definition of the meaning of "formation" in the context of training for ordination'. Indeed, the term was on one occasion acknowledged to be at best 'a convenient shorthand', alluding to 'elements of transformation' into the likeness of Christ. But Sue Groom's research among these documents uncovered 'various other, related and overlapping' understandings of formation, including 'formation as integration, as induction into a tradition, and [simply] as preparation for ministry' (Groom 2016, pp.184–186). This term is used not only here, but also in many other educational contexts and across the denominations. And more often than not it is put to use without any explanation, comment or definition about what it means.

For over three decades I ran an institution that had the phrase 'Christian education' in its title (the North of England Institute for Christian Education[1]). At its inauguration, I lamented that everyone else seemed clear about the meaning of the expression, but I was still pondering it. By the time the institute closed, I was at least sure that Christian education was a systematically ambiguous—and therefore potentially misleading—expression, which may be used to label:

(1) non-confessional[2] teaching and learning about Christianity ('Christian studies');

(2) general education of some Christian kind, mainly in Christian schools, colleges or universities; or

(3) educational processes that not only lead people to learn about Christianity, but also intend that they become more Christian, in the sense that they come to hold for themselves (or hold more firmly or strongly) Christian beliefs, attitudes, emotions and values, and the disposition to act and experience in Christian ways (Astley 2016).

A range of applications of this term may be found within the three-volume *Encyclopedia of Christian Education* (Kurian and Lamport 2015). Its editors advise that Christian education exists in two contexts: in formal faith schools and seminaries, and in informal faith community settings. Its focus, they write, mainly reflecting understanding (3) above, is 'to nurture faith in the context of shared values, beliefs, and attitudes' (vol.1, pp.xxiii–xxiv).

It is worth remarking that we are here immediately plunged into the domain of figurative language. Later the editors not only use this language of 'nurture' (derived from the Latin for 'to suckle'), but also adopt other biological, even agricultural, metaphors when they argue more broadly that Christian education is 'the cultivation of wisdom and virtue by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness, and beauty, so that, in Christ, the learner is enabled to better know, glorify, and enjoy God' (vol.1, p.xxxiii). Other contributors extend this vocabulary of tropes, writing of Christian education in what I do not think are entirely dead metaphors as 'forming' and 'transforming' (e.g. Westerhoff, in Kurian and Lamport 2015, vol.2, p.886 and vol.3, p.1427; Groome, vol.3, p.1465), 'crafting' (Groome, vol.3, pp.1464–1466), 'shaping' or 'moulding' (Berryman, vol.1, pp.258–259; Kay, vol.1, pp.259–260; see also Astley, vol.2, pp.887–888).

While these and other entries sometimes also mention critical thinking, reflection, evaluation or openness, those references occasionally appear to be an afterthought; and Kurian and Lamport admit that 'critical thinking seems undervalued in educating Christians', even though 'the nature of the Church is collectively a discerning community who together reason

with godliness' (vol.1, p.xxxv). The underestimation of criticism—which is a neutral rather than a negative term, synonymous with appraisal, assessment and evaluation—is a fundamental issue in many areas of Christian education. This is particularly the case when it leads to a depreciation of the status of the learner and her contributions to her own learning.

Despite the real cognitive value of metaphors in education, as in other subject areas and disciplines, they can mislead unless we work at sharpening, qualifying and specifying them so that their conceptual power is no longer limited by the imagery that makes them such creative resources. As another entry in the *Encyclopedia* argues, metaphors for learning are reductive when they 'reduce learners to objects to be controlled or learning to an economic transaction' (Smith, vol.2, p.799).[3]

There is still some conceptual clarification for us to do.

FOCUSING ON FAITH

A focus on faith is increasingly common in Christian education discourse. This can be very helpful, but only if the component elements of the word and their applications are identified and understood, and faith is envisioned in its entirety. Traditionally, a basic distinction has been made between:

(1) the content or (grammatical) 'object' of faith—'The Faith', 'that which is believed'; and
(2) the human process or activity that is sometimes referred to as 'faithing'—'the faith by which this is believed'.

This way of naming the parts of faith seems to sit most easily with accounts of faith's object as a set of beliefs about God (which are *human* beliefs as it is humans that hold them, even if they are thought to be divinely revealed, otherwise authorized, or infallible).

However, theologians have cautioned against limiting faith to its cognitive component. We may respond to this advice by adopting a more holistic account of faith, construing it as an activity 'that engages people's heads, hearts and hands—their entire way of being in the world', in Thomas Groome's phraseology (Groome 2011, p.26). Practical theologian James Fowler's understanding of human faith, as a generic form of meaning-making, is described in similar inclusive terms. He argues that faith is almost universal because everyone believes in something, while

religious faith is the species of human faith in which people believe in religious things.

For Fowler, all faith is our way of knowing, valuing and 'being in relation' to whatever we take to be our 'ultimate environment'. He contends that whatever we believe in, our faith is of great practical importance because it shapes the 'responses a person will make in and against the force field of his or her life' (Fowler in Astley and Francis 1992, p.5; Fowler 1996, p.56; Fowler and Keen 1978, p.25). Faith possesses a 'logic of conviction' that includes but goes beyond any mere 'logic of rational certainty', in a manner that incorporates our spiritual and affective natures (attitudes, feelings and emotions) and our wills. (For a critical overview, see Astley 1991; Astley and Francis 1992, sections 1–4.)

Viewed in this way, faith as *process* certainly consists in (a) an intellectual assent (sometimes labelled *assensus*) or 'belief that' some proposition or claim is true. But it may incorporate in addition (b) positive evaluation, (c) trust (*fiducia*) and (d) a disposition to express this faith by (e) acting upon it in (f) commitment and allegiance (in loyalty or 'faithfulness', *fidelitas*). Besides all this, faith is sometimes said to include (g) faith as *visio*, a way of seeing. This is a matter of how we view and interpret the whole of reality, and 'look on' and 'see it as' related to God—as God's world, God's children, God's gift (Borg 2003, ch.2). Hence the philosopher John Cottingham describes religious conversion as 'a characteristically emotional shift' that permits the world 'to be seen differently' and in its true meaning (Cottingham 2009, p.123).

This idea of Christian faith relates closely to, and perhaps may be said to absorb, notions such as the Christian way, the Christian life and a form of Christian experience, thereby giving us a much broader understanding of what it means to *have* a religious faith and to *be* religious, compared with merely espousing certain doctrines. As Cottingham puts it, 'it is to follow a certain way of life and to take up certain commitments'. And that, he insists (significantly for our concerns), is in part 'a project of *formation*, of forming and reforming the self, a process of *askēsis* (training) and *mathēsis* (learning), to use the ancient Greek terms' (2014, p.148).

But what is the *content* of this faithing, the *object* or target of the activity or process of human faith? If we continue to say that it is only a set of beliefs (and perhaps of values, virtues and practices, too), faith would largely be restricted to believing *that* Christianity is true (and good, worthy and a way to be followed). Alternatively, the broad view of the process of faith that has been outlined above suggests that faith should be understood

as 'belief *in God*', even as a relationship with God. This inevitably involves more than merely believing impersonal truths about God; just as our relationship with other people is more than simply our knowledge about them, particularly if that knowledge leads us to highly value and trust them, and seek to come close to, imitate or relate to them (and/or leads *from* such respect, affection, reliance, love and commitment).

Catholics who follow Aquinas may adopt the former position (faith as belief-that or belief-about truths; faith as an intellectual conviction), whereas Protestants (like Luther) seem to prefer the second (faith as a belief-in that comprises belief-that and trust, approval, commitment, and so on). But that distinction is not at all clear in practice. And if we accept Fowler's view that *everyone* has faith, including atheists, agnostics and adherents of religions that take ultimate reality to be an impersonal Absolute rather than a personal God, then defining faith as a personal relationship with God will seem far too narrow.

The Catholic theologian Terrence Tilley has defined faith as our relationship with 'the irreducible energizing source of meaning and center of value in one's life', something that is best understood by analogy with love. He adds that 'the appropriate designator for the object of the faith relationship is a *god*'.

> What makes them *our* gods is the relationship we have with them. Whatever is (are) the irreducible, energizing center(s) of value and source(s) of meaning in our lives is (are) our gods. Our gods are not just our ideals—they are what makes our ideals ideal. Our gods are not just our goals—they are what makes our goals worth pursuing.

> What makes something our *god* is that it is the *source* of what is meaningful and valuable in our lives. (Tilley 2010, pp.26, 32, 34)

This interpretation has parallels. According to Luther,

> To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in one with our whole heart … the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol … Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God. (*Large Catechism*, first part, first commandment; Luther 1908 [1529], p.44)

And Fowler defines the content of all human faithing as constituted by whatever are the 'centres of value' and 'images of power' in which we believe, and which constrain and direct our striving, together with

whatever the 'master stories' are by which we live our lives (Fowler 1981, pp.276–277). These objects of our faith may range (for good or ill) across the 'gods' of our status, wealth, possessions, career, achievements, pride, honour or health; and our parents, family, exemplars or friends. They may extend to elements of Nature, strangers, even the entire natural and human creation; or to historical or mythological narratives, and moral or spiritual ideals. But we may also go beyond these 'penultimate' objects of faith—especially if we come to see any of them as 'false gods'— and give our minds, hearts, allegiance and life to what Christians would regard as the only true god, who is alone worthy of worship: the one God and Father of the Lord Jesus, our Christ.[4]

Tilley's view permits us to think of faith as a relationship to God that is channelled *through* our beliefs about God's nature, character and activity, in the same way that our relationships with other people are mediated through and clothed in the ideas we hold about them. Our faith in others is never separate from what we take to be truths about them—and particularly from the values we find in them. So theists do have faith in God, but this faith is not a belief-less, content-less, 'theology-less' faith. *Belief in* God is a species of believing because it always incorporates this *belief-that*.

Focusing on Learning

Faith, then, is a multifaceted, multidimensional whole, as is religion. Inevitably, therefore, 'learning a faith', 'faith learning' also has many dimensions, when construed as learning by which the learner enters into and grows in a particular faith relationship, as well as learning about the object or content of this faith—in Christian terms, 'learning Christ' and not just learning about him (Astley 1994, pp.119–123, 2002, pp.25–34). This confessional religious learning inevitably encompasses cognitive, affective and 'lifestyle' (way-of-life) learning. It is an education *into* Christian faith that subsumes learning *of* and *for*:

(1) Christian knowledge and understanding;
(2) Christian valuing, feeling and experiencing; and
(3) Christian 'performance', in the sense of 'living and serving in a Christian manner' (Sullivan, in Kurian and Lamport 2015, vol.3, p.1098).

It seems to me that 'learning' is a more helpful term than the word 'education' here, because it is more holistic, learner-focused (rather than teacher- or tradition-focused), and wider in application (Berryman, in Kurian and Lamport 2015, vol.1, p.258). The idea of faith education has frequently fallen foul of certain normative understandings of what constitutes 'real education', especially those that restrict it to cognitive (and sometimes solely to critical) learning outcomes, or limit it to formal settings like schooling (Astley 1994, ch.3; Astley and Francis 1994; Kurian and Lamport 2015, vol.3, pp.1472–1473). It is usually an advantage in this area of debate to keep our educational concepts as inclusive as possible.

Cottingham's appeal above to the Greek word *mathēsis* suggests that word's Latin equivalent, *disciplina*, which underlies our English word 'discipline' and derives from *discipulus* ('learner'), from which we get 'disciple'. Such reflections move us towards what I call 'discipleship learning', learning to become and become more of a Christian disciple (see Astley 2007, ch.1, 2015). This entails a type of journey or apprenticeship that may include the broader notions of transformative learning-for-practice required in spiritual, religious and moral disciplines (compare Foster 1989; Astley et al. 1996, sections 3, 7, 8; Dykstra 2005). Attempts to prune the discussion by applying restrictive (and sometimes implicitly anti-religious) criteria to the definition of educational terms may result in cutting away some of the most fruitful branches of Christian learning.

Focusing on Development

I think that Christian educators and educationalists need to be more careful in their use of the language of development. The etymology of the verb 'to develop' relates it to unfolding, 'un-enveloping'; and dictionaries usually define it in terms of *growth* in complexity and maturity, becoming 'larger and more advanced' (COED 2004).

Schools and Church bodies, however, frequently use the language of development to refer to *learning*, and particularly to its intentional facilitation through teaching. Examples include *Developing Discipleship* (Archbishops' Council 2015), and any publications that talk about the tasks of 'developing' the students' knowledge and understanding of some topic, or their skills and attitudes (including character virtues), through learning strategies and experiences.

This usage is not wrong. It assumes the transitive form of the verb, in which to develop is 'to cause to grow', 'to make active or promote the growth of' some entity (COED 2004; Merriam-Webster 2017), recalling the metaphors of cultivation and nurture we noted earlier. But, as we have seen, the verb is used in an *intransitive* form too, without a direct object, simply to refer to a change in something, especially its progress through a sequence. In this sense, 'developing' labels the gradual coming into being of something, or its becoming bigger, stronger or more advanced, through 'a process of natural growth, differentiation, … or evolution by successive changes' (Merriam-Webster 2017). This usage is widespread not only in biology but also in human psychology, including the psychology of education. Here the term denotes the natural growing up or developing of our cognitive, affective or volitional capacities through a largely *internal* or internally driven process of growth and maturation, rather than primarily as a result of learning experiences contributed by the *external* world of the learner's environment.

Naturally, we should recognize that nature and nurture can never be isolated and that they should not be opposed in a facile manner. Human development is never a matter of one set of causes (internal genes, or the outside environment) working entirely independently of the other. The phoney war of nature *versus* nurture, insisted on by some sociologists, must yield before a proper biological insistence that nature operates only *via* nurture (Ridley 1993, ch.10, 2003).

Nevertheless, Fowler's 'faith development theory' sits within a research tradition in developmental psychology that patently refers to such internal changes. While this idea of faith development may be less well known than it once was, it remains illuminating and is supported by many current researchers, although often now understood as a sequence of several overlapping faith styles rather than a movement through discrete stages of the form of faith (Streib 2001, 2003).

To avoid any possible confusion, I recommend that educators avoid using the phrase 'faith development' in a transitive way to refer to changes brought about by religious learning experiences. Those changes are less ambiguously described as 'learning faith', 'faith formation' (e.g. Barnes 2012, pp.24, 26), 'faith education' or 'education in/into faith' (Groome 2011, pp.94–103).

Focusing on Formation

Finally, I return to the word 'formation'. One concern here is whether we should use this as a generic term. In this broader usage, it would denote *all* the processes of teaching and/or learning that help to shape a learner in a tradition and its beliefs, experiences and practices, in a way that leads to the learner's acceptance of that tradition in her thinking, valuing, feeling and perceiving, and her dispositions to act and experience, *together with her appraisal of the tradition's merits and faults*. For Christian educators, such formation intends not only to create a person who thinks, values, feels and so on in a more Christian manner, as (more of) a disciple of Jesus and member of the body of Christ, but also someone who 'thinks for herself' about her faith.

This is how the concept is chiefly used, akin to John Hull's understanding of religious nurture as inclusive of what he called 'critical openness' (Astley and Francis 1994, pp.251–275). Thus construed, Christian formation is not entirely a one-way process of transmitting a tradition, but encompasses the learners' assessing for themselves what they have inherited.

I would argue, however, for a more specific—and, in *this* case, limited!—employment of the term formation. In doing so I build on the distinction that the adult Christian educationalist Leon McKenzie adopted between two types of facilitated learning that represent 'points on a continuum'. These elements complement each other and often appear together (to different degrees) within specific, concrete examples of learning and teaching:

(1) a *dimension of formative education* that aims 'principally at the formation of the learners' and their acceptance of 'educational "givens"'—especially, perhaps, (Christian) beliefs, but also appropriate attitudes, values, dispositions, skills and so on; and

(2) a *dimension of critical education* that maximizes the learners' evaluative thinking and powers of judgement, and is 'ordinated toward the examination of [these] educational "givens"'—as the learner 'critically assesses that which is taught in the light of his own experiences' (McKenzie 1982, pp.36–37, 64–66, 1991, pp.29–32).[5]

On this analysis, the emphasis in formative education is on the tradition, 'the Faith', as it is understood, spelled out and passed on *in its own*

terms (although in its great variety as well); whereas critical education enables the learner to analyse and evaluate, take apart and reconstruct these traditions rather more from the learner's own perspective and in *the learner's own terms* (and those of the learner's culture).[6]

This feature of critical education should make it fundamental to what Catholic theology calls *reception*: that is, receiving the teachings and other traditions of the Church, appropriating them and responding to them. This is how individuals comes to possess the 'Christian thing' (the Christian tradition, the Christian Faith) *for themselves*, and often in their own specific and idiosyncratic ways, through an act of interpretation that arises in an implicit dialogue or 'conversation' in which the Church and its leaders speak, the Scriptures speak and Christian history and liturgy, prophecy and moral authorities all speak; but in which the learners of Christianity also have their say. Those who learn any tradition must be permitted in this way to respond, to 'answer back', or they will never really learn—and never really hear those other, traditional voices either (compare Astley 2007, pp.106–111, 117). In religion, we only actually learn a belief, value or practice when we truly receive it. And reception is 'not merely passive acceptance' but 'a genuine test of a teaching's truthfulness; its liveability, as it were' (Healy 2013, p.19). Will it 'work' for us? Will it 'do' for us?

It is this critical (evaluative, testing, discerning) feature of Christian education that allows learners to *embrace* the Christian Faith honestly (see Astley 2002, pp.27–33, 2012). Reception involves an evaluation, a valid discriminating movement, as does any true and wise embrace. Both are dependent on our discernment, recognition and acceptance of that which is embraced as true, good or right. Through this embrace, Christians testify that their questions are addressed, and their desires and needs are fulfilled—as *The* Way, Truth and Life becomes *their* way, truth and life as well.

Although this critical process essentially requires cognitive skills in the learner, it may engage certain imaginative skills and affective dispositions too (Astley 1994, pp.84–87, 2002, pp.140–145; Green 1990, pp.80–83, 91–96; Groome 1980, pp.186–188), like 'attention' and 'imaginative grasp' (Wood in Astley et al. 1996, pp.350, 355). But its consequences are more significant than its composition, for 'Christian self-criticism' ultimately determines whether any particular practice of love or worship, or any other aspect of being or behaving, is to be judged to be 'Christian' or not. This critical reflection on their own faithfulness to the central Christian norm of meeting, worshipping, living and believing 'in Jesus' name' is

crucial to Christian self-identity, and it even requires some 'critical examination of whether and why [they] should engage … in the Christian thing at all' (Kelsey 1992, pp.139–141, 187, 206–207). Critical Christian education is *that* important.

I would argue, therefore, that 'something is lost … if the language of formation, with its powerful metaphorical connotations' (of shaping and moulding people into a pre-conceived pattern or form) is 'not balanced by this second, critical dimension' (Astley 2015, p.6).

CONCLUSION

While I do not doubt that some will regard this sort of clarification and critical analysis of concepts as 'mere semantics', or even as philosophical and theological 'nit-picking', I hope that others will be more willing to acknowledge that, while it is not everything, clarity is a friend rather than an enemy of our reflections—even in matters of faith and education.

NOTES

1. For details, see http://community.dur.ac.uk/neice/.
2. In the United Kingdom this adjective is generally understood to mean 'the attempt to impart religious understanding without also imparting religious beliefs' (Hand 2006, p.1), although arguably 'beliefs' should be widened to 'faith'.
3. Hence Nicholas Wolterstorff's preference for the term 'nurture', and its connections with growth and maturation, as permissive rather than imposing—allowing for the learner's self-governed appropriation—by contrast with any formation and moulding that involves socializing people into society-determined shapes (see Wolterstorff 2002, ch.7).
4. Thus Christians often distinguish Christianity as 'the only true faith'—or the one that is closer to the truth, or more complete in other ways—by comparison with all other faiths.
5. These cognitive skills and other learned critical attitudes, dispositions and perspectives are themselves partly *formed* in the learner. Further, critical self-reflection requires that a person have some beliefs, values and a 'position' of their own to evaluate, and we may argue that much of that will have been inherited through some sort of formation rather than created by the learners themselves. Thus there can be no 'pure' critical education that is wholly independent of formation.

6. However, many of the key moral, spiritual and theological criteria for the self-critical appraisal of other parts of a religious tradition are themselves embedded in that tradition and therefore passed on in religious formation. This is how religious traditions change from within, as their adherents question some aspects of what they receive (e.g. slavery or the status of women) from a perspective grounded in other received elements that they have come to regard as more normative for that faith (e.g. elements of Jesus' teaching and life). Those elements develop this status because people have come to embrace them; and that is the result of an internal dialogue between such elements and people's original criteria of meaning, value and truth, whose origins partly lie within the culture that they have also inherited (Astley 1994, pp.92–94).

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Is Talk of 'Christian Education' Meaningful?

John Shortt

Introduction

In this chapter, I comment briefly on how people who find it meaningful to talk about Christian education may nevertheless mean somewhat different things by their use of the phrase. I then outline and briefly discuss some arguments put forward by those who regard the whole idea of a Christian approach to education as a kind of 'non-sense'. I go on to respond to the charge made by some that Christian or any other faith-based education is necessarily indoctrinatory and therefore fundamentally anti-educational. Finally, I attempt to sketch out a positive alternative in the form of a Christian vision for education centred on the biblical concept of shalom.

What People May Mean by 'Christian Education'

When people talk about 'Christian education' they may have one or more of a range of meanings in mind. Some think of it as mainly or only the teaching or discussion of Christian beliefs in educational settings. Here what makes the educational activity Christian is a matter of content and a typical setting would be a religious education class. Other people with a focus that

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is wider but still primarily on content think of Christian education as being a matter of what is often termed 'faith-learning integration' (see, e.g., Heie and Wolfe 1987). Here the talk is often of how Christian presuppositions may shape an approach to content in different curricular subject areas. For example, a personalist view of the human being may be preferred to a behaviourist one in the teaching of psychology.

Another conception of Christian education sees it in terms of institutional forms. Christian education is viewed as that which takes place as part of Christian church programmes or in Christian schools, colleges and universities. These may be the church schools or the older independent Christian schools found in the United Kingdom or the relatively new Christian schools that have multiplied in the last few decades across Europe and in other parts of the world. The Christian ethos of the institution is often seen as a main ingredient of the Christian education that it provides.

Others think of Christian education as the education of Christians or of the children of Christian families. Some of the newer independent Christian schools are closely linked with churches and provide exclusively or primarily for children whose parents are church members or otherwise closely linked with the churches. An example of this is Christian Education National, one of the main associations of Christian schools in Australia (formerly known as 'Christian Parent Controlled Schools').

Later in this chapter, I will sketch out a more holistic vision in place of one that reduces Christian education to content or ethos, institutional form or pedagogical approach, important though these are. It will not be restricted to the education of Christians or the children of Christian families.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

Some argue that all talk of 'Christian education' is a kind of non-sense. The most forthright, influential and possibly the strongest case was put some years ago in a paper entitled 'Christian Education: A Contradiction in Terms?' (Hirst 1971a).

The author was Paul Hirst who was shortly afterwards to take up the post of Professor of Education at Cambridge University. He is a philosopher of education for whom I have a very high regard and from whom I have learnt much, having been a student of his. However, on this matter,

I think his arguments are answerable. It is quite a while since his paper was published but there are many today, especially among secularist and humanist educationalists, who advance cases similar to those put forward by Hirst against Christian schools, colleges and universities (see, e.g., Copson 2012). This is notwithstanding the fact that philosophy of education has changed markedly since those days so that contemporary writers in the field would now be generally much less convinced of the rationalist approach that Hirst and others were taking at the time.

Paul Hirst's twofold argument against Christian education is that (1) in practice, little if anything can be produced under the label of 'Christian education' that is both distinctively Christian and educationally significant; and (2) in principle, the pursuit of a Christian approach to, or philosophy of, education is fundamentally mistaken.

On the first point, Hirst says that what is offered under the label of Christian education is often 'very dubious from both an educational and indeed from a Christian point of view' and he continues:

> Much of it is based on very general moral principles, backed by perhaps Scripture or Christian tradition, which, having little or no explicit educational content, are applied to educational problems in a highly debatable way. … What is more it seems to me the general principles on which the whole exercise is based are usually not in any sense significantly Christian either, though people might appeal to Christian texts, or Christian tradition, in support of them. Working from this end of general moral principles, I suggest that one can simply not produce anything that is in any significant sense a distinctive Christian view of education. (1971a, pp.44–45)

The case is that general moral principles alone do not determine particular educational principles. There are many other considerations we need to take into account, for example, 'matters of psychological and sociological fact, the structure of our social institutions, the availability of money and manpower, and so on', and, he adds, 'none of these considerations has anything to do with Christian beliefs' (pp.44–45).

Hirst considers another possible starting point—what Scripture says specifically about education—but he concludes that this too produces little, if anything, that is both distinctively Christian and educationally significant. He writes,

> If one works from the other end, formulating educational principles from what is specifically said in Scripture about education, one seems to run into an equally impossible situation. … The problem then is how to extract the principles without entering on inconclusive debate about Biblical interpretation. If that hurdle is surmounted is one likely to achieve much that is both educationally significant and distinctively Christian? I think not. And even if one does get so far, how much agreement can there be amongst Christians on particular applications of these principles? Experience suggests very little if any. (p.45)

With both these starting-points, Hirst sees the development of an approach to education to be a matter of moving logically from principles to their application in practice. This is, I believe, too narrow a conception of the possibilities for relating Christian faith or other faiths to educational practice. In a book entitled *The Bible and the Task of Teaching* (Smith and Shortt 2002), David Smith and I have argued that there are a number of strands to a rope linking the Christian scriptures to teaching and learning in a contemporary twenty-first-century classroom.

Statements of principles or statements from which principles are derived have their place as one of the strands. The fact that they are not sufficient to determine education practices does not mean they have no part to play in the development of a Christian approach to education. The relationship between beliefs and practice is not only a matter of strict logical *requirement*—biblical statements or principles derived from them may commend some attitudes and practices, they may permit others, they may debar others.

But the Bible is not only a source of principles: its images and metaphors may resonate or clash with the dominant images and metaphors we live and teach by. The Bible tells us an ongoing story, a meta-narrative in which believers are called to live and work. The Bible provides models for teaching—most obviously Jesus himself who is widely acknowledged to have been an outstanding teacher. The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann (1982) finds three distinct modes of teaching in the shape of the canon of Scripture—the Torah mode, the prophetic mode and the wisdom mode—and David Smith and I suggest that Jesus exemplifies all three modes (Smith and Shortt 2002).

In a recent book (Shortt 2014), in place of the rope image, I have suggested that a helpful metaphor for the Bible can be that of an environment in which we may live and move and have our being, an environment in

which we may be shaped in different and interrelated ways through principles, stories, metaphors and so on.

As with aspects of our physical environment, we may never have noticed many elements of this spiritual environment before or may have only the vaguest sense of their influence. While we may be more familiar with certain elements, we may not realize the full extent of their influence or be too preoccupied to see how they relate to form the larger whole of how we are shaped. The central idea is that teachers are shaped as whole persons for relationships with students as whole persons in the community of the classroom and that, for Christian teachers, the Bible can be a shaping influence or, more precisely, God the Holy Spirit can shape them through their reading of the Bible and meditation upon it. This formation cannot be reduced to the rational consideration of principles and their application to practice. However, that is not to say that our critical faculties have no place in this formative process—on the contrary, they have a very important role in our coming to think for ourselves. The formative process of being shaped by the biblical environment is one in which the Christian educator is actively engaged.

Does this produce anything that is distinctively Christian? Hirst's case is that, in practice, it is not possible to produce 'anything of substance that deserves to be labelled a Christian view of education' (1971a, p.46). Even at the outset of the process of building an approach to education based on principles, he says, the general moral principles and specific educational principles appealed to are not distinctively Christian.

I think there are several points to be made in response to this. First, I would suggest that Christian education should aim at faithfulness rather than difference. In an important paper entitled 'The Distinctiveness of Christian Learning in Church of England Schools', Trevor Cooling interprets Christian distinctiveness in terms of 'faithfulness to a Christian vision of life' (Cooling 2012, p.168).

Nicholas Wolterstorff has much to say on this. In response to Christians who seem to expect uniqueness of Christian scholarship, he asks,

> Why assume that the scholarship of Christians and non-Christians *must* always and everywhere be different except for … thin points of commonality? Why not instead let the differences fall where they may? Why should the Christian project be defined primarily in terms of its *difference* from that of others? Why is fidelity not enough? Why is it not enough to urge that Christians be *faithful* in their scholarship? Why not be thankful for genuine

agreement rather than ever suspicious and querulous? (Wolterstorff 2004, pp.77–78)

I suggest that Christian beliefs in general revelation and in God's common grace to all give grounds for such questions.

Wolterstorff goes on to say, 'Faithful scholarship as a whole will be *distinctive* scholarship, I have no doubt of that. But difference is to be a consequence, not an aim' (p.78). Wolterstorff's talk of scholarship *as a whole* brings me to a second point about distinctiveness. Both critics and advocates of attempts to develop a Christian approach to education may share the expectations that distinctiveness means uniqueness at every point and that this should be an aim of Christian education. However, Wolterstorff is arguing that distinctiveness is a matter of the whole rather than of every part and that this is a consequence rather than an aim.

If education is a matter of promoting human flourishing, as I believe it is, and if this has a lot to do with developing moral and intellectual virtues, the constellation of virtues the Christian educator seeks to develop may contain the same stars, the same elements, that those who are not Christians seek but the appearance of the whole may be different.

In part, this may be because certain stars shine more brightly in a Christian constellation than they do in another constellation and vice versa. Take the virtue of humility for example. This is a virtue that is not only prominent in the Bible and supremely modelled in Jesus but it is also a virtue some degree of which is, as Mark Schwehn puts it, 'a precondition of learning' (1993, p.49). (I would argue that it is also a precondition of good teaching!) I therefore suggest that it should be a bright star in a Christian constellation of virtues. It may shine rather less brightly in another constellation or even be entirely absent. David Hume dismissed it as one of the 'monkish virtues' that are vices rather than virtues (Schwehn 1993, p.46).

Distinctiveness is therefore both a matter of faithfulness to a vision rather than difference from others and also a matter of the whole rather than of parts. This is helpfully commented upon in the website of the What If Learning Project in talking about distinctiveness of the exemplar classroom activities suggested in their materials:

> (T)aken piecemeal and one by one it may well turn out that many of the particular actions suggested in the examples on this site could be adopted or invented by teachers of various beliefs. We make no large claim that at the

level of individual strategies these examples are unique to Christians, though many of them occurred to the teachers concerned because of their faith. We are more concerned with whether they represent a way of teaching that is faithful for Christians, and we suggest that it is when the individual examples come together into a consistent pattern over time and get connected with the Christian story that we can talk about distinctively Christian teaching. It's a matter of building a rich whole that is informed by faith, not of whether each component part is trademarked. (Whatiflearning 2017)

Paul Hirst's first argument against Christian education is that in practice little, if anything, can be produced that is distinctively Christian. I have argued that this is based on an inappropriate view of distinctiveness in matters of religious faith.

Hirst's second argument is that, in principle, the search for a Christian form of education is a mistake. It is the central thesis of his paper and he writes,

(T)here has already emerged in our society a view of education, a concept of education, which makes the whole idea of 'Christian education' a kind of nonsense and the search for a Christian approach to, or philosophy of, education a huge mistake. (1971a, p.43)

He opposes this view of education to what he terms 'the primitive concept of education', the idea that 'education … is concerned with passing on to children what we believe, so that they in their turn come to believe it to be true'. He writes,

On this view, clearly there can be a Christian concept of education, one based on what Christians hold to be true and valuable in education, according to which Christians seek that the next generation shall think likewise. (p.47)

He goes on to ask,

(I)s bringing up children so that they believe what we believe, *education* in any sense that is nowadays acceptable? Indeed I suggest that this pursuit is now increasingly considered immoral, wherever it is conducted. (p.51)

In contrast with this 'primitive concept', there is 'a second, sophisticated view of education' and on this second view, Hirst says, 'the character of education is not settled by appeal to Christian, Humanist or Buddhist beliefs … for the basis is logically more fundamental, being found in the

canons of objectivity and reason' (p.48). Elsewhere, Hirst talks of the development of rational autonomy as being the central purpose and defining characteristic of education and of developing in human beings the 'final court of appeal in all human affairs' (1972, p.300). In reply to one of his critics who put to him the *tu quoque* argument that no education was ideologically neutral, Hirst writes,

> To the suggestion that no education is ideologically neutral, so why not speak of Christian education, I would reply that it seems to me we are now able to see what an ideologically neutral education can be—one committed to the development of reason. And to reply in turn that this is to follow the ideology of reason, is, to my mind, no answer when the term ideology only has meaning if contrasted with the tenets of objective reason. (1971b, pp.190–191)

These quotations come from several decades ago and are, it seems to me, rooted in a quite rationalist, individualist and reductionist view of human nature. It was the dominant perspective in philosophy of education of the time and, although it is no longer so, I suggest that something of it is at the root of at least some contemporary opposition to Christian and other faith-based forms of education.

Is Christian Education Indoctrinatory?

I will shortly attempt to sketch out some features of an alternative view but, before that, I want to comment briefly on the charge of indoctrination that is suggested in Hirst's statement that bringing up children in the faith is increasingly considered immoral and unacceptable.

It is true that the way some children and young people are taught as members of a captive audience in day schools, Sunday Schools and in homes may be indoctrinatory and manipulative. There may be little or no place for helping children to develop their critical faculties, little by way of encouragement to think for themselves. It may seem at times that anything goes where teaching is concerned provided the desired outcome of firmly implanted beliefs is achieved. What is lacking in such situations is a proper respect and indeed love for the learner as Other. Teaching and learning are at heart relational matters and they call for humility before the Other as well as humility before what is being taught and learnt. This is

especially important when what is being taught and learnt is a matter of ultimate commitment.

Such a relational and humble approach was advocated by Wittgensteinian philosopher D. Z. Phillips when he suggested that the teaching of religious beliefs was a matter of 'elucidation … displaying a thing of beauty' that:

> calls for a sympathetic relation to religion in the teacher, since … it involves unpacking the significance of values, ideals, different conceptions of worship and love, and the roles they play in people's lives. (1970, pp.163, 166–167)

Teaching that something is beautiful involves talking about it and drawing attention to its features in the hope that learners will come to see for themselves. They should not be indoctrinated or brainwashed into seeing it and they cannot be argued into seeing it but, in the appropriate conditions, they may find themselves with the belief that it is beautiful. Christian education can be indoctrinatory but it is not necessarily so.

Education for Shalom

I turn finally to a positive alternative vision for education—a relational education that aims at shalom. I have written elsewhere on this in greater detail than is possible within this chapter (Shortt 2016), so I will limit this account to a sketch drawn with broad brush-strokes.

The Hebrew word 'shalom' is usually translated in English as 'peace'. English dictionaries define 'peace' mainly in negative terms as the absence of war or conflict but shalom is a rich, full and positive concept in the scriptures of the Old Testament. It signifies wholeness, completeness, integrity, soundness, community, connectedness, righteousness, justice and well-being. Its New Testament Greek equivalent of *eirene* (the word that is also used in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament in place of 'shalom') is also full, rich and positive.

Shalom embraces the idea of human flourishing and it includes the idea of the common good but it predates Aristotle because, for example, the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah wrote a letter in which he called on his readers to seek the shalom of the city. What city? No, not Jerusalem! Jeremiah was in Jerusalem writing to the exiles in Babylon. The call to seek shalom is a call to be outward-looking and inclusive, not inwardly and exclusively focused on fellow-believers. This was the city of Babylon with

its wonderful Hanging Gardens, a city where there were ziggurats dedicated to the worship of gods other than Jehovah, gods like Marduk and Shamash.

The Jewish exiles may have sat by the rivers of Babylon and, in the words of Psalm 137, wept as they remembered Zion and longed to be back home in Jerusalem. However, the call is not to retreat from the world but to seek the shalom of Babylon, the alien and pantheistic community in which they were living.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, in a volume of his writings on education, has this to say about shalom:

> Shalom is present when a person dwells at peace in all his or her relationships: with God, with self, with fellows, with nature. … To dwell at peace in one's relationships, it is not enough, however, that hostility be absent. Letting live is not shalom. Shalom is enjoyment in one's relationships. A nation may be at peace with all its neighbours and yet be miserable in its poverty. (2002, p.101)

He goes on to say:

> Shalom is enjoyment in one's relationships. … To dwell in shalom is to enjoy living before God, to enjoy living in one's physical surroundings, to enjoy living with one's fellows, to enjoy life with oneself. (p.101)

Shalom is therefore relational. And it is a matter of right and good relationships, a matter of justice and fairness. Wolterstorff is adamant that justice is indispensable to shalom (p.103).

If the calling of the Christian educator is to faithfulness to a Christian vision of life, I suggest that shalom is central to that vision. We were created for right relationships, relationships with our fellow human beings, with our physical environment and supremely with God but these relationships were broken by our self-centred sinfulness. Christ came to restore these relationships and bring peace through his death on the cross, thereby bringing in a kingdom of shalom which is both now and not yet.

The focus on relationships that teaching for shalom therefore calls for is, I suggest, quite a way removed from the rationalism and individualism that is implicit in the attacks on the idea of Christian education at which we have been looking.

This focus upon relationships is faithful to a Christian vision for life and education. It is about knowing but not just any kind of knowing. It is about what I call 'knowing of the third kind', not 'knowing that' (factual knowledge) or 'knowing how' (skilful knowing) but knowing with a direct object, knowing a person, place or thing. It includes 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' but is not reducible to a combination of them. It coheres with a biblical view of knowing. The word used almost always in the Old Testament for knowing of any kind is *yada*. This is the word used when intimate sexual relations are written about in terms of 'knowing' a man or a woman. The same word is used for knowledge of God.

Knowledge in the scriptures is therefore not the detached contemplation of reality of the Greeks: it is about relationship with the experienced world of people and things and involves being and doing as well as thinking.

Education is therefore not simply a matter of minds in the making or limited to the development of reason. It is about persons in relation to one another, persons in relation to Otherness of the physical creation and persons in relation, people of many faith traditions believe, to the Transcendent Other, to God, whether or not he is acknowledged by all and whether or not he is even explicitly mentioned.

On relations with our fellow human beings, Scottish Christian philosopher John Macmurray writes,

> The thesis we have to expound and to sustain is that the self is constituted by its relation to the Other; that it has its being in its relationship; and that this relationship is necessarily personal. … We need one another to be ourselves. This complete and unlimited dependence of each of us upon the others is the central and crucial fact of personal existence. Individual independence is an illusion; and the independent individual, the isolated self, is a nonentity. (1991, pp.17, 21)

In a similar vein, Archbishop Rowan Williams, drawing upon the work of the Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky, writes of 'an essential mysteriousness about the notion of the person in the human world, … which is something about the place I occupy in terms of being the point where the lines of relationship intersect'. He continues:

To be the point where lines of a relationship intersect means that we can't simply lift some abstract thing called 'the person' out of it all. We're talking about a reality in which people enter into the experience, the aspiration, the sense of self, of others. And that capacity to live in the life of another—to have a life in someone else's life—is part of the implication of this profound mysteriousness about personal reality. (2013, p.12)

Our interrelatedness is also present in the idea of Ubuntu in the language of the Xhosa people of South Africa, often translated as 'I am because we are'. Another archbishop, Desmond Tutu, writes,

Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. (Tutu n.d., cited in Deardorff 2017, p.15)

One of the things that follows from thinking of knowing, teaching and learning in this relational way is that it is not only about teacher–student and student–student relationships. It is also about everything we know and come to know. It therefore has implications for the whole curriculum.

In her book *Loving to Know*, Esther Meek writes this:

We will be better knowers if our epistemic efforts more fully conform to the dynamics of a healthy interpersonal relationship. The process of coming to know in some way transforms knower and known. The paradigm, of course, applies well to knowing people. I believe it applies well to knowing muskrats and cures for cancer, also. And if it feels a bit strange to think of knowing, say, trees or car motors interpersonally, let me offer a deal. For centuries we have construed all knowledge on an impersonal paradigm, and, in the process, we have damagingly depersonalized people and known defectively. Let's try it the other way for a while. (2011, p.100)

In her book, Meek draws from a number of writers whose works resonate with one another, including John Macmurray's *Persons in Relation* (Macmurray 1991), Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* (Polanyi 1958), Parker Palmer's *Knowing as We Are Known* (Palmer 1983) and *The Courage to Teach* (Palmer 1998) and, perhaps towering above all of these, Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (Buber 1937).

Meek points out that we have been dominated by an I-It paradigm for all knowing and she calls us instead to see all knowing through the lens of I-You knowing. This resonates with what Parker Palmer says about 'the grace of great things':

(O)ur conventional images of educational community ignore our relationships with the great things that call us together—the things that call us to know, to teach, to learn. … By 'great things' I mean the subjects around which the circle of seekers has always gathered—not the disciplines that study these subjects, not the texts that talk about them, not the theories that explain them, but the things themselves.

I mean the genes and ecosystems of biology, the symbols and referents of philosophy and theology, the archetypes of betrayal and forgiveness and loving and loss that are the stuff of literature … the artifacts and lineages of anthropology, the materials of engineering with their limits and potentials, the logic of systems in management, the shapes and colors of music and art, the novelties and patterns of history, the elusive idea of justice under law. …

(H)umility is the only lens through which great things can be seen—and once we have seen them, humility is the only posture possible. (1998, pp.107–108)

We teach and learn in community before the Others of those whom we are teaching and alongside whom we are learning and also before the Others of the 'great things' around which we are gathered. We teach and learn *coram deo*, before the Transcendent Other who is God.

This suggests a meta-narrative within which Christian education can be meaningful. It is not limited to relations with fellow human beings. The idea of Ubuntu on its own is humanist: a fuller Christian picture is framed not only by 'I am because we are' but also by 'I am because the physical world is' and supremely by 'I am because God is'. To focus exclusively on the second of these is materialist and to focus exclusively on the third is spiritualist. All three are fundamental to a Christian view of reality and knowledge.

The Christian belief is that without God we would not be. This is the primary relationship in which we live, move and have our being. I am because God is.

The Christian belief is that we are made of the dust of the earth. I am incomplete without my body. He gave us work to do to care for the physical world and to teach others to care for it. I am because the physical world is.

The Christian belief is that we are made in the image of God, the relational God who is Three Persons and One God. He made us for himself and he made us for each other. That is why Ubuntu is true. I am because we are.

It is this Big Picture that makes talk of Christian education meaningful.

Conclusion

Is talk of 'Christian education' meaningful? Not if we assume with Paul Hirst and some contemporary secular humanist writers that the central aim of education is the development of rational autonomy. I have argued that this is based on a reductionist view of human nature and knowledge. It assumes that the only way to develop a Christian approach to teaching and learning is to proceed from Christian or biblical principles to practical applications and that the outcome must be distinctive in the sense of being unique. I have argued that a meaningful Christian vision for education seeks shalom. It is focused on formation of the whole person in relation to other persons and in a caring relation to the physical world. Ultimately, it is all done in relation to God.

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The Christian University
and an Anthropology for Adulthood

Mario D'Souza

Introduction

Much has been said and written as to how we have reached the socio-cultural context of our time, which is also the context of the Christian university. The movement from modernism to postmodernism to hypermodernism and now, we are told, to post-postmodernism, leaves one dizzy. However, in spite of an often-confusing social and cultural scene, Christians have grown in their understanding of the social context of preaching and proclaiming the Gospel. It would be an interesting study to see how often Christian universities have used the terms 'society', 'social', 'societal', 'sociology', and the prefix 'socio' as they reflect on their mission and purpose in the world. It is a reflection that is situated between history and culture as the theatre of Christian faith and belief, the world as the theatre of one's salvation or one's imprisonment. Christ's call to follow him is an invitation to transcendence, with the reminder that his disciples are in the world but 'do not belong to the world' (John 17:16); indeed the injunction, 'Do not love the world' (1 John 2:15).

However, while openness to the world and situating the Gospel within history and culture have shaped the understanding of Christ's call to

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45

follow him, there is the caution of an undifferentiated 'openness to the world' that has resulted in a crisis of values as well as confusion as to who the human person is, what is meant by human flourishing, and what is entailed in the pursuit of the human good. Furthermore, the rise of an autonomous culture is fraught with theological and philosophical difficulties, giving rise to the questions: 'what kind of autonomy produces intelligibility?' and 'what does it mean to develop one's self culturally?' (Rowland 2003, pp.32, 36, 72).

Having banished universal theories, and seemingly celebrating the place of the individual in knowing, postmodernism actually cuts the individual off by diminishing who is doing the knowing—the nature of the person, the subject, particularly as the knower—and what is known—the nature of the real and reality. The individual's subjectivity is celebrated as the authentic locus of meaning and values, but nothing seems to anchor the authority of meaning and values except a seemingly rudderless subjectivism, one cut free from religious, cultural, and social moorings.

Today, reality is understood in individualistic terms; one person's reality may not relate to another's, thus there is no necessary 'relationship between what is regarded as reality today and what will be regarded as reality tomorrow' (Burns 2015, p.66). Consumption is what shapes and determines society. Persons are being sculpted by the political and economic ideology of neo-liberalism, reducing life 'to market exchanges, and therefore to money value' (Crouch 2016, p.2). The market distorts knowledge, which in turn distorts the 'knowledge that we have of ourselves. To act fully effectively in the market involves being a self-centered, amoral calculating machine' (p.3).

This radically changes the notion of personal and communal freedom, and while *choice* shapes and determines *personal freedom*, the result is that language, shaped by neo-liberalism, is deprived of even the most basic, non-specialized vocabulary of philosophy and theology that would have been part of a general Christian lexicon a generation or two ago. Today's public vocabulary is at the mercy of a one-dimensional lexicon where the hills and valleys of human experience are flattened as the market now shapes knowledge, and anything that falls outside the measurable, material, and malleable influence of the market is ignored. The neoliberal subject is characterized by change, but not change in relation to progress, for that would require knowing the external world. Change, rather, is not under the 'control or direction of human agency [and] implies no *telos* of progress or increase in the bounds of human agency'. While change is

outside the *control* of human agency, it emerges as a 'product of human interaction and agential choices and behaviour' (Reid and Chandler 2016, pp.13–14). Given the emphasis on change, the real is declared to be what can be measured, manipulated, and calculated. The success of the consumer market, then, depends upon subjects conceiving of themselves 'as self-interested calculating machines'.

The neoliberal assault on knowledge has two additional features. First, the competence of educators to speak about education is contested and dismissed. Second, 'knowledge itself is re-evaluated as that which is of use in the market or corporations; knowledge, culture and their pursuit have no intrinsic value' (Crouch 2016, pp.27, 87–88).

The Subject and the Real

Asking university students, outside a class of philosophy, what *real* or *reality* means is likely to produce a stare of incomprehensibility, for the absolute reliance on the senses and the permanent fixity of the material world warrants such enquiry superfluous. However, it is surely one of the fundamental questions of human existence and flourishing, and should be a foundational question of the Christian university. Who is the person, the human subject, is a question that has occupied Western philosophers since Plato, with contributions from other religious and philosophical traditions. Choosing a philosophical theory as to who the human subject is seems daunting, but choosing as a Christian philosopher must surely be influenced by Jesus' invitation to follow Him. Philosophers advocating for personalism and those calling for a turn to the subject, the knowing and intentional subject, offer a rich fair. The philosopher and scientist Michael Polanyi famously said, 'The freedom of the subjective person to do as he pleases is overruled by the freedom of the responsible person to act as he must'. He held that while knowing, including scientific knowing, depend on our senses, it must transcend the senses 'by embracing a vision of reality beyond the impressions of our sense, a vision which speaks for itself in guiding us to an ever deeper understanding of reality' (1974, p.309). Knowledge is both passive and active; passive in allowing reality to reveal itself according to its own laws and methods, and active in that the knower does not *make* or *construct* the real but *discovers* it. We are duty-bound by the truth. Persons must pour themselves 'into an existence closer to reality' (1974, p.335). To realize this, the subject is heavily dependent upon language and vocabulary in order to encounter the analogical diversity of

the real, and to allow reality to reveal itself. The vocabulary of neo-liberalism is decidedly flat and one-dimensional, and this should alarm us as language enables subjects to reveal ourselves to others, but also for subjects to hear themselves through the self-revelation of language. The more constricted language is, the greater is the risk of concluding that the self to be revealed has been revealed, a revelation narrowed by a deterministic, mechanistic, materialistic, and an objectified vocabulary.

For Joseph Pieper, the real and reality is the foundation of our existence as created beings invited into a relationship with God. Pieper gives new meaning to the *is/ought* question of moral philosophy. The *is* of the created order cannot be fully revealed or understood without the *ought to* of our actions and intentions, what we must do as a result of who we have been created to be (Pieper 1989). To do what is right, prudent, and good requires some knowledge of reality, a knowledge that does not emerge through a cold, antiseptic, scientific, and disinterested objectivity, but by becoming conscious of our own sins and biases that prevent us from perceiving the truth of things. Sin imprisons reality and the real (Pieper 1989). Selfishness and/or selflessness shape reality.

The speed of modern life is marked by constant activity and movement, which exalts *making* over *doing*. Such a mindset cannot comprehend that the real is not limited to merely existing things, what is made and materially external to us, but the real also as immaterial, and discovered through prudence and virtuous choices and actions (Pieper 1989). Choices and actions shape and determine reality. When the world is perceived merely as material reality and not as created and ordered by a divine plan, mysteriously hidden in divine providence, and discovered through the efficacy of human freedom and guided by the Holy Spirit, then the world is reduced to 'raw material [for] human activity' (Pieper 1989, p.117).

Bernard Lonergan offers a comprehensive understanding of the real and reality. The real and reality are not so much discovered by looking and seeing, what he refers to as *picture thinking*, *naïve realism*, but by first going through self-reflective acts of consciousness, as opposed to introspection. This is to counter a 'dominance of analogy of ocular vision for knowledge. This signals a triumph of [the bias of] perceptualism in the West, which both legitimates and is justified by ontological primacy of the "already-out-there-now" as the really real' (Lawrence 2000, p.101).

Knowing is more than looking, objectivity is more than identifying existing material things, and reality is more than the 'immediate experience, of the senses' (Lonergan 1974). In constructing an anthropology

for Christian adulthood, indeed for all responsible adulthood irrespective of religious affiliation, Lonergan's method—secured upon four transcendental principles: be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible, and three levels of conversion, intellectual, moral, and religious—enables adults to increasingly become conscious of themselves, their intentions, biases, and the effects of sin in their lives. Such awareness provides a reflective and intellectual structure to choose wisely amidst the buffet of plurality and diversity.

Today culture is understood empirically rather than normatively, which requires a new understanding in responding to Christ's invitation to discipleship and the perennial reflection leading to personal conversion. The personal unity of the subject depends upon the subject's knowing, choosing, and deciding, which establishes a normative pattern, and is not essentially external. In the absence of unifying universal principles, the subject is now situated within an empirical understanding of culture, 'a set of meanings and values informing a common way of life, [thus] there are many cultures as there are distinct sets of meanings and values' (Lonergan 2004, p. 73). Lonergan distinguishes this with an older 'classicist' approach to culture, largely Western, declared normative, and considered the only expression worthy of the title *culture*. Thus a classicist understanding of culture consisted in 'assimilating … tastes and skills, the ideals, virtues, and ideas that were pressed upon one in a good home and through a curriculum in the liberal arts' (Lonergan 1974, p.160).

Knowing must guard against the traps of the purely empirical and the purely rational. The movement is from immediacy of sense experience to the more deliberate and reflective realization of meaning, value, and decisions leading to the 'existential discovery … where one finds out for oneself that one has to decide for oneself what one is going to make of oneself' (Lonergan 2004, p.145). When the *real* and *reality* are understood in terms wider than seeking and looking, beyond the senses, then the diversity of reality is affirmed, and one must then decide regarding the good and right thing to do as a result of what one knows and understands in order to avoid an existential contradiction (Lonergan 2004).

Lonergan's method is particularly helpful regarding the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. Being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible means growing to be an authentic subject; it is a cumulative process. An authentic subjectivity grows into an authentic objectivity, (Lonergan 2004). Lonergan develops his understanding of genuine objectivity elsewhere (Lonergan 2007). While authentic

subjectivity is open-ended and heuristic, subjects are present to themselves as subjects, not objects: objects are present by being attended to; but subjects are present as subjects, not by being attended to but by intending, (Lonergan 1993, p.210). Subjects are present to themselves by presence to the self, not by introspection or increasing one's activity, relentless activism, but as beings who deliberate and choose, thus growing in their subjectivity and shaping the world. The subject and the world grow authentically insofar as the subject moves away from bias, selfishness, and sin through acts of self-transcendence.

Subjects know through their authentic subjectivity, and such knowing reveals more than just knowledge, 'since we know by what we are, so also we know that we know by knowing what we are' (Lonergan 1997, p.86). Most transformative is the realization that one's knowledge of truth and one's knowledge of oneself are inseparable. Thus, 'the truths affirmed by judgment are so necessary that they couldn't be otherwise' (Lawrence 2000, p.116). The objectivity of truth and knowledge depends upon the relationship between knowledge and self-reflection.

The Christian University and Adulthood

Critics see the turn to the subject as fertile soil for relativism, individualism, and scepticism. Proponents see it as the only viable way of proceeding in the absence of a unifying worldview and amidst other diversities, and as the authentic way of assuming responsibility and appropriation for one's learning, understanding, and decisions, maturing into adulthood. Discovering who and what we are depends upon our acts and reflection upon our acts (Giussani 1996).

Treating 'the world strictly as an object of mastery' (Steel 2014, p.236) is reductionist, and offers no clarity given the infinite number of things to be known. Such a subjection of the world does not provide a method for subjects to situate themselves amidst a multitude of things, or to understand how they shape one's subjectivity and becoming. The secularization of universities—the term is not being used pejoratively, but as the academy's attempt to play no religious favourites, hence questioning the place of theology, as distinct from religious studies—and the marginalization of the liberal arts and the humanities have left the university marooned, ripe for an endless scholarship: 'the purpose of the university appears to be a conversation about the purpose of the university' (Snell and Cone 2013, p.1). Apart from theology and biblical studies, Christian universities have

depended upon the liberal arts and the humanities to communicate life as a whole, a comprehensiveness that depends upon meaning and value, and the education of the whole person. Early technical and scientific specialization has eclipsed these fields, and runaway philosophical and cultural theories have led to their further erosion. Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Freud, for example, all point to the dreaded beasts at the bottom of the abyss, an abyss which today has been socialized, intellectually sanitized, rendering the beasts to be 'only pale reflections of ourselves—of our particular race, class and gender; or worse yet, when we see only the metaphorical, rhetorical, mythical, linguistic, semiotic, figurative, fictive simulations of our imaginations' (Himmelfarb 1994, p.25). Today a teacher would probably need to explain why *The Confessions* of St. Augustine are more formative compared to the confessions on reality television shows. Plato's *Republic*, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, and Dante's *Divine Comedy* may be part of a great books curriculum, but what makes them great finds no common ground in the absence of an anthropology of the subject and human becoming. The hierarchies of knowledge and values that not long ago were taken for granted no longer exist, and referring to them becomes more difficult as students are bereft of such contexts.

What has Athens got to do with Jerusalem? God may be missing from the university, but is he missed? Is it not the role of the Christian university to show why God is missing and why he should be missed? Such a self-reflective turn depends upon a restructuring of consciousness whereby 'God is not a being alongside other beings in the world' (Lane 1997, pp.362–363).

Harkening to a golden age when university students were united by a curriculum of the liberal arts and the humanities is a chimera, for it was largely an elitist education, secured upon a classicist view of culture and learning. The *Preface* to Newman's *The Idea of the University* opens with the affirmation that the university 'is a place of *teaching* universal *knowledge*… [and] that its object is … intellectual, not moral' (Newman 1976, p.5). Even though the modern Christian university cannot, even with an undergraduate curriculum of the humanities and the liberal arts, make such claim, proponents of Newman's model rarely refer to his major epistemological work, *The Grammar of Assent*, where he develops what knowing, understanding, and certitude involve, demonstrating that his vision for the university is not founded on a classicist model of learning and culture. While the university's means and methods are intellectual in

nature, the will and the heart must be enlightened by the intellect. And though the greater impediment to education may be not 'ignorance but the existential disorder of sinfulness' (Snell and Cone 2013, pp. 8–9), the Christian university is neither a seminary, nor is it meant to view the world suspiciously from a distance. And though the intellectual dimension distinguishes any university, the Christian university must accept this responsibility by educating its students to use this intellectual lens to see the world as the theatre of God's gift of salvation, and how learning and knowledge are transformed into a sense of love and service of one's neighbour.

Diversity and plurality are usually celebrated as ends in themselves, which confuses more than it clarifies. While diversity and plurality brighten the world and acknowledge the colours of human expression of meaning and value, living amidst religious diversity and cultural plurality, particularly in the West, requires something more solid than the obvious realization that plurality and diversity reveal a variety of expressions of human engagement and cultural and religious practice. Celebrating diversity for diversity's sake is not an end; it is a cul-de-sac. Lonergan's reflective method provides an anthropological foundation, but it is the task of the Christian university to show how there is a unity of the intellectual community brought about by reflection, acts of judgement, and the pursuit of meaning and value though choices and decisions. Such an intellectual foundation is more unifying than an exclusive reliance upon sensory knowledge. The history of Christian universities is based upon the relationship between faith and knowledge, but that relationship needs a new expression, more than just reliance upon tradition. The heart of that expression is the acknowledgement that the Christian university is ultimately not about courses, essays, and degrees earned, but about people, their hopes, fears, and the burden of sin and the freedom of forgiveness. Its *telos* directs the gaze of such an institution of humanity redeemed and offered the gift of salvation, but that still needs to be realized and actualized in the life of each person. Technocratic society has 'no interest in ultimate goals but only in realizing whatever goals people actually choose' (Kalb 2016, p.4).

A Christian anthropology enables an enunciation of the common good and the nature and purpose of life in society. Neo-liberalism and materialism reduce the common good to the good of the solitary, solipsistic individual, with the social networks and agencies of the state as the protector of the good of all. The common good, however, is not a collection of

individual goods lumped together. It is the *common* good in that it is 'the good *human* life of the multitude of persons; it is their communion in good living … the common good of the city implies an intrinsic ordination to something which transcends it' (Maritain 1972, p.51). Ultimately, the common good is not 'only a system of advantages and utilities but also a rectitude of life, an end, a good in itself, … [the] *bonum honestum*' (Maritain 1972, p. 3). And while material life and progress make their contribution to the good, the betterment of life, given the spiritual nature of the person, is 'principally moral and spiritual' (Maritain 1947, p.43). The human person needs society to actualize all those potentialities that constitute personhood, and realized in authentic subjectivity. For a Christian anthropology, persons are wholes unto themselves, ontologically distinct. Indeed the concept of *person* is an 'analogical idea … realized fully and absolutely only in its supreme analogue, God' (Maritain 1972, p.56). With such a view of the common good and the nature of society, the purpose of the Christian university is 'to enable, as it can and in its own way, the collaboration of humans with each other and cooperation with God towards the goal of self-transcending love—authentic cosmopolitanism' (Snell and Cone 2013, p.181).

The Christian university must be ultimately concerned with religious literacy and fluency, a way of helping faculty, staff, and students to see themselves in the world but not of it; to see themselves as pilgrims in time called into relationship with God, but whose pilgrimage depends on allowing God's providence and love to shine forth in the world through their choices, decisions, and actions. Religious literacy and fluency need to be expanded beyond knowledge of creeds, dogmas, and morals, for without a sense of historical consciousness and appropriation for one's time and culture, they are rendered meaningless. In such a vacuum, the materialistic constriction of earthly life becomes the model for eternal life. Heavenly life is envisaged as the continuation of earthly life, where we shall want for nothing, and be freed of the contingencies of existence, particularly suffering and death. With such a mindset, the Christian pilgrimage of life becomes meaningless, as does a collective Christian journey. Religion is reduced to religious practices, its moral and ethical teachings are seen as legislative and intrusive, and the social is viewed narrowly through a communitarian lens of social justice. Eternal life, it would seem, has nothing to do with one's heavenly relationship with the Trinity and one's presence before the absolute holiness of God. However, to be worthy of such company requires that Christians love their neighbour and strive for the

common good, but it also requires the continual struggle for freedom from the perniciousness of personal and communal sin. Education, as distinct from training, means choosing not to drift through life, an easy trap that reduces persons to conduits of neoliberal consumerism, comforted by the illusive security of materialism. But such literacy for a Christian sense of adulthood is hardly the sole responsibility of the Christian university. The other agents of education—families first, and the Church second— must each share a third of this role.

Isolated thinking and learning are dehumanizing; there is always a *personal* dimension to knowledge, and so serving the life of the mind, in the context of Christian faith, requires that a Christian university be grounded in academic excellence. But it must also show how the traditions that gives it birth shape and influence concrete living (Hughes 2003).

Education is often reduced to jumping through academic and professional hoops. But in its claim to educate, the Christian university must attend to the rigorous search for truth; second, the intellectual engagement with the plurality and diversity of the world; and third, judging, deciding, and choosing from that diversity and plurality (Hughes 2003), that provide a method for students to understand how their personhood, their subjectivity, grows through a reflective and responsible intellectual engagement.

But the bridge between professionalism and education as human development will require a Christian understanding of freedom. This stands in opposition to a constricted materialist notion of freedom where autonomy and choice serve individualistic moral and political goals based on the narrow choices of economic rationality, but offers no enlightenment when it comes to the ultimate questions of human flourishing and choosing the good. For such flourishing and choosing, the varieties of knowing and knowledge will need to be identified and distinguished.

A diversified curriculum enables students to understand the diversity of knowledge and the diverse ways of knowing truth. Physics, chemistry, and biology demonstrate truth, but so do history, literature, music, and sports. Knowing and truth depend upon an analogical frame of mind, rather than an equivocal or univocal mindset. It is an analogical framework that sees God as the ground of all reality, and that the expression of that reality is multidimensional, and shows the richness and variety of human experience expressed through different ways of knowing and understanding. This stands in opposition to a narrow scientific and materialist mindset, one

that boxes truth and verification into the confines of the observable, measurable, and what can be consumed. Early school specialization robs students of the diversity of knowledge, and the demands for technical competency narrow the focus of the university to professional competence and technical training. It is one of the main reasons why, in North America at least, the university is seen as the mandatory culmination of education, a culmination that is meant to prepare one for a profession and earning a living. The demise of more and more polytechnic institutions and vocational colleges has meant that university has assumed skills training as well, and so it no longer claims to impart an integrated knowledge. That universe of integrated knowledge is replaced by solitary disciplines, getting increasingly more specialized and technical, and thus more solitary, and unable to communicate with each other. Ironically all the disciplines of the university, in one way or another, concern the person, the subject, and the university's inability to communicate across the disciplines only further diminishes the human subject.

A Christian anthropology affirms the relational and dialogical nature of the person, and rejects 'the idea of individuals as faceless components' (McArdle 2005, p.225). What is the relationship of knowledge and learning to the rest of one's life? The choices and mindset of a career and profession are hardly neutral. How are work and employment related to the rest of life, or do they determine the rest of life? Our therapeutic culture obsesses as to who we are and have become through our psychological history. But it is an atomized conception of the person, rather than a responsible and relational one. An 'opening of the Christian mind' must confront 'values relativism', 'the loss of a worldview', and a 'lack of personal responsibility', and why human flourishing requires that they be replaced by 'the objectivity of values', 'the theocentric nature of truth', and 'the nature of persons', and how and why they are realized and integrated when faith and learning come together (Holmes 2003, pp.111–113).

In spite of the advances of electronic forms of technology and communication, the world seems even heavier with matter. Joseph Ratzinger writes,

> (W)hen it comes to being, the art of existence, [the world] looks very different indeed. We know what can be done with things and people, but what things and people are is something that we do not talk about. (Ratzinger 1991, p.10)

In the midst of the weight of the world added by consumerism and materialism, the philosopher Leibniz's historical question, why is there something rather than nothing, takes on new urgency. Our world would see this as an unnecessary question: the material world is the real world, and our engagement with that world requires there to be infinite s*omethings*. For the Christian, intentionality and choice render the materiality of the world intelligible. The good is not something external; it is constituted and realized through intention and choice. So Leibniz's question is no longer just philosophical; it is, for the Christian, a deeply religious question as well. It is a question that is enlightened by the Incarnation, the reality of God taking on human flesh, God living in space and time, living amidst the diversity of the things of the world, the Son of God who encounters things as the son of a carpenter.

In spite of our seeming freedom made possible through material and technical progress, human society seems imprisoned by the material and the tangible. A perceptible tension lies between earthly existence defined in immaterial and spiritual terms, and, on the other hand, economic progress and democratic security as ends in themselves, but a vision of life that offers nothing beyond the gates of death. The clash in the West is more than just a clash between consumerism and materialism versus faith and religious belief. It appears more like a clash between two societies in time, one with a philosophy of history, life with a *telos* beyond the material and sensory existence, and one without; two different and opposing conceptions of the purpose of existence and the inevitability of death. Life is either the theatre of redemption and salvation, or life is confined to material and economic satisfaction, but nothing beyond that. It is the reduction of the world to mere materiality. Leibniz's question can be asked with a twist: 'Is it really good to be alive and be a human being [today]?' (Ratzinger 1994, p.156). It is a difficult question to answer if one's context is a secular-material culture where there are 'no longer values apart from the goals of progress' (Pope Benedict XVI 2007, p.227). To limit human progress to scientific, economic, and technical accomplishments changes the understanding of history. Human flourishing requires 'a vocabulary less charged by matter' (Maritain 1943, p.15).

CONCLUSION

The question why is there something rather than nothing offers students the framework to take the materiality and technical and scientific progress of the world seriously. Such a question offers them a broader framework to reflect upon their lives and their being and becoming in wider terms compared to the prevalent mechanistic and deterministic rationality and vocabulary of today. The willingness and desire to go beyond such a rationality and vocabulary are, ultimately, matters of religious conversion and faith. To see the world as created by God liberates the materiality of the world, and in placing technical and scientific progress to a higher order, demands of them a greater level of accountability in serving persons and society. Such accountability is necessary, for Christian education is ultimately about the internal and spiritual freedom of the student and growing into their personhood.

A Christian anthropology offers the Christian university an intellectual means to reflect on Christian revelation, particularly the relevance and appropriation of the message of the Gospels and Christ's call to discipleship. Such an anthropology enables students to grapple with the existential question of the Christian life: what has Jesus Christ have to do with life in a society and culture that is radically different from his? Is the religious worldview of his world and its conception of the human person the result of superstition and ignorance—medicine and psychology, for example, have taught us so much about who the human being is—or is his message still relevant to us today in our being and becoming? Jesus' question to the disciples, 'but who do you say that I am?' (Matthew 16:15) is one that every adult Christian must ask perennially, and the answer to that question shapes who one is and who one must continually grow into becoming.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, Catholic universities often operated from a classicist understanding of culture and learning, a largely Western-based curriculum. In particular, the study of philosophy and theology were based on a *manualist* method, truths and first principles set down in manuals and fixed for all times. As Lonergan notes so pithily, 'truth [becomes] … so objective that it gets along without minds' (Lonergan 1974, p.30). The task of the Christian university is undoubtedly a difficult one, but one that is surely intellectually exciting. Keeping with Lonergan's remark, the Christian university can offer a deep reflection showing why Boethius' definition of the person as 'an individual substance of a rational nature' (Aquinas 1946, p, 155) is both true but also

needs to be understood anew and afresh in the context of religious diversity and cultural plurality. The second challenge is to make a bold counter-cultural assertion and say why human beings, as Jesus reminds Satan in the desert, 'do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Matthew 4:4). There is more to life than the bread of materialism and consumerism. And finally, to reflect on the injunction of St. Basil the Great's sermon, 'Be Attentive to Yourself':

> Be attentive, then, to yourself, that is, neither to what is yours nor to what is around you, but be attentive only to yourself. For we ourselves are one thing, and what is ours is another, and the things around us are another. (St. Basil 2005, p.96)

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The Faith-Full Intellect: Catholic Traditions and Instincts About the Human Person and Their Significance for Teaching and Learning

Clare Watkins

Introduction

The question of what place—if any—faith might have within contemporary teaching and learning persists as one of sharp relevance, and one with potential economic significance. Whether it concerns the relationship between religious education and catechesis in schools, or the appropriateness or otherwise of confessional theology in university faculties the challenge can be keenly felt: what, after all, is the point of theology, the use of faith?

In this chapter, this modern questioning of faith in the academic context is first briefly resituated within the current trends of a late modern, post-secular reading of culture, through reflection of qualitative data gained in research with Catholic school leaders in England and Wales. What emerges is the questions of how a distinctively Catholic pedagogy might be drawn from Christian faith concerning the nature of the person.

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61

To enrich and respond to this question the argument turns to the struggles of Thomas Aquinas in speaking of teaching and learning in the Christian life. Although much of what Thomas writes is concerned to justify study to those who assume the pre-eminence of faith, his account demonstrates a deeply theological and anthropological reading of faith and intellect from which late modern educators can learn. In particular, this chapter seeks to articulate for our own time a theology of the 'faith-full intellect' as a fundamental quality of personhood of deep significance to teaching and learning. Such a theology is shown to have a number of implications for educational practice.

The Faith-Full Intellect: Learning from Pre-Modern Theology for a Late Modern Pedagogy

Between 2012 and 2014 I was part of a research team researching leadership in Catholic schools in England and Wales. The *Visions for Educational Leadership* (VfEL) project[1] worked with qualitative data from over a hundred school leaders from seven Roman Catholic dioceses across these nations, and used theological action research methods[2] to attend to what was being embodied, theologically and pedagogically, in the practices of Catholic schools, and of their senior leaders in particular.

The findings were rich and varied; but, notably for the theologian, they included a strong set of reflections around the distinctive nature of Catholic education. Beyond the perennial questions of Catholic ethos and values of the school, there persisted more penetrating questions. In particular, these focused attention on three distinct but inter-related areas: spirituality, 'whole-person' formation, and pedagogical relationality. At the same time, the leaders of Catholic schools worked practically and realistically within a state sector which has its own approaches, processes and procedures—approaches increasingly seen by them as involving the instrumentalising of learning.[3]

Detailed reflection on the data from the project, led the final research colloquium to report that, among a number of key questions and themes, one especially demanding of attention could be expressed: 'Whether a clearer account of specifically Catholic pedagogy might be given, in particular relating to the faith assumptions concerning the nature and "ends" of the human person' (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014e). This identified question, recognised as importantly at the service of educational practice in Catholic schools, also reflected the teaching of Vatican II on education that:

a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, [sic] he is a member. (*Gravissimum Educationis* 1965)

Education is not only for the building up of human society, in line with the common good; it is also a formation of the whole person towards his or her 'ultimate end'. As Christians, this language of the person's 'ultimate end' has a particular paschal content and eschatological flavour, based on our anthropological understanding of human beings as made for friendship with, and in, God, made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection, and by life in the Spirit.[4] It is this understanding of the vocation of the human person and their place in God that, *Gravissimum Educationis* tells us, is to inform our educational processes.

The equation can, of course, be read the other way: not only do we draw on an anthropology to shape our teaching, but the way we teach tells us something about what we really believe about people. Our pedagogy always implies an anthropology, a doctrine of the human person; and this embodied anthropology may or may not really reflect what is our Christian belief about people. For example, if, in practice, our educational processes emphasise simply the worth of education in terms of earning more money, or—worse still—achieving the highest grades, we run the risk, whatever our rhetoric, of embodying a theology of the person which is shaped by material attainment only. It is, of course, our *practices*, rather than our words, which form us and those we work with most powerfully.

It is this relation of pedagogical practice and theory, and the faith understanding of human person and its educational implications, that is the focus for this chapter. Core to the argument is the exploration of one particular Christian tradition's approach to the human person and its implications for pedagogy. Significantly, however, the relationship between pedagogical practices and the theology of the person will be, as it were, 'read both ways'. So, to begin with, I will briefly reflect on aspects of the VfEL project data so as to read out of these senior school leaders' practices, elements of the embodied theologies of the person which underpin their work. I will then move to the main body of the paper, which explores a number of questions related to teaching, learning and the person in the writing of Thomas Aquinas. By putting alongside each other contemporary understandings of the person and the educational processes, as embodied in current real schools practice, with the pre-modern Thomistic tradition, I hope to show how this earlier thinking may contribute to late modern accounts of Christian pedagogy.

This choice of Aquinas as conversation partner with contemporary practice is not arbitrary. The decision to look to pre-modern thought is a deliberate move on my part, following an instinct that late modern thinking about education, as articulated by our Catholic school leaders, is increasingly working to free itself from some of the less helpful restrictions of post-Enlightenment, modern notions of learning and rationality (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014b). Faced with the instrumentalisation of education, which might be argued to be the logical conclusion of a highly rationalistic and material modern focus on instruction and the role or 'use' of the person, many people of faith in teaching are struggling to articulate the 'something else' of their experience.[5] My suggestion is that one place where we might find ways of expressing this 'other thing' going on in teaching and learning is through attention to pre-modern understanding; and here Thomas Aquinas, whose own work is so rooted in teaching and learning, and treats explicitly of the questions of what is going on among human beings involved in education, stands out as particularly appropriate.[6]

The Mystery of Teaching and Learning, the Mystery of the Person: Reflections from Experience of Education in Catholic Schools

The exploration of these themes begins with contemporary school practices—practices which, themselves, are 'bearers of theology' embodying faith in our own contexts.[7] The late modern context of education today provides a vivid backdrop against which to hear and learn from the voices of leaders of Catholic schools. In what follows I present some key points from the VfEL data by way of grounding in contemporary teaching and learning the thinking-through of Thomistic approaches which will follow.

In my opening remarks, I recorded how the VfEL research colloquium identified as a key question of the research that of whether a clearer articulation of 'specifically Catholic' pedagogy might be given, especially in relation to the nature of the person, faith and the place of education. This question arose particularly though reflection on that perennial question about the 'distinctiveness' of Catholic/Christian education. An opening point to note here is that none of those interviewed imagined that Catholic or church schools were 'inherently better' than other schools, or that Christian education could really be seen to have the monopoly on good education, good pastoral care of students and so forth. Indeed, some 'sec-

ular' schools were clearly better in these areas than some Catholic schools (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014d, pp.13–14).

Related to this was the keen sense that, when speaking of the possible 'distinctiveness' of Catholic education, there was little appetite among our participants for a simply counter-cultural model of Catholic education. Our Catholic school leaders simply did not understand why we should think there might be tension between being 'professional', doing their jobs well according to the things asked by society and the state, and their clear and often passionate sense of Christian vocation to their work. To be a good Catholic head teacher was to be a good head teacher (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014a, p.20). On a superficial level, at least, the identification of any 'Catholic distinctiveness' appeared illusive.

At the same time, however, certain characteristics of Catholic teaching can be identified from these school leaders' testimonies. First, and strikingly, there was a strong coherence around the language of 'loving' as best describing the 'vocation' of the Catholic teacher. So, speaking of her work as a head teacher as a vocation, one participant said:

> Vocation is about love. I think I am very lucky that I am able to love the kids. (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014a, p.5)

Teachers coming into Catholic schools often remarked on the use of the language of love in the school, and the quality of relationship.[8] This is summed up by one senior leader's response to the question of Catholic distinctiveness:

> I think that one of the things that characterises Catholic schools is the quality of the relationships. I've learned that if you get the relationships right, you can do just about anything with a pupil. You can get them to do just about anything you want. So we're modeling to the children … We use the word 'love' a great deal. Love for the pupils is expressed freely and easily, and we tell the pupils we love them. They're told in assembly and in more casual ways, in a small group. The word 'love' is used in that way without there being any unpleasant connotations to it. (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014c, p.19)

This enables us to name our first, and most fundamental, theme: that of teaching and learning as *a practice of love*. Certainly for these Catholic

teachers there was a clear witness to their work as embodying a theology of education as loving, and exercise of the theological virtue of charity. This places teaching and learning squarely in that mysterious place of human relationship, friendship and affection, with the implication that it is in the nature of people to learn and grow as individuals precisely when they are bound in relationships of love.

This theme of love is in danger of being just too bland sounding—and, indeed, risky; but it is worked out in the data in a number of telling ways. A second theme can be identified here: that of the *humility* or *kenosis* of the teacher before the pupil. One of the recurring characteristics we identified is the sense of *wonder* that the teacher has about the ones they are teaching—a sense of humility before these other mysterious people, in whom thoughts, feelings and insights are clearly at work beyond the simple instruction or influence of the teacher themselves (a theme, which as we shall see, resonates deeply with Aquinas' pedagogy):

> I teach Year 6 and sometimes what those children come out with is absolutely stunning and it leaves you almost speechless. Maybe as teachers we can be a little bit patronizing towards children and then these children will just reveal who they are, the real child, and you are just blown away by their relationship with God and with the world that they live in. (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014c, p.19)

So, education as a practice of love is characterised by a practice of humility before the mystery of the learner, an openness to their uniqueness and inherent dignity and wisdom as made in God's image. This trait is one the researchers came to name as 'kenotic'. We used it specifically to refer to that apparent ability our teachers had to be empty enough of themselves and their own sense of how things *should* be, to be able to receive from the learners how things *might be*, or, indeed, how this really *are*.

It is this kenotic quality that is reflected, too, in what was seen as a characteristically Catholic instinct not to 'ram things down people's throats' (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014c, p.20). Rather:

> We say 'this is what we believe and this is why we believe it and you can either accept that or not.' Everybody has their own faith journey and everybody will go places in their own way. People have to be allowed to question and they have to be allowed to journey and they have to be allowed to

develop their relationship with God in their own way. We teach the children that there is a God who loves them deeply and who is always there for them. Your religious life is about the relation that you develop and how do you develop that. Through conversation, through prayer, through going to Mass, whatever that may be. It is about deepening that relationship and these are the ways that you can do it. People will either accept it or they won't and you have to allow people that choice. (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014c, p.20)

This leads us to a third theme or characteristic—that of *freedom* as the necessary context for learning. For our teachers here reflected a sure-founded Catholic instinct for this necessity of the freedom of the person in learning, and the sense of journey that must accompany this sense of freedom.[9] Knowledge, and that strange kind of knowing that is faith, can never be *made* to happen. It is both deeply personal and essentially communal, as people converse together and so come by free assent to truth.[10]

It is this relational, kenotically respectful context which provided for our research participants the clearest locus for the communication of faith and truth in schools. Essentially, whilst many of our school leaders felt it important that religious education was properly and rigorously taught as a serious subject with proper content, this was not the place where the Catholic nature of the school resided. Nor was it a matter of how many Catholics attend these schools, or how many teachers were 'practising' their faith. What was glimpsed, again and again, was something more subtle, more pervasive, more personal and inter-personal: a practice of love which enabled a process by which each learner could take the next step closer to the truth of things—a process which has its form not in procedures or policies, but in the mysterious realm of human relationships, and the hit-and-miss experiences of communication around things known and, as yet, unknown. This identification of relationship as the proper educational context can be recognised as a fourth anthropological theme in the data. A such, it is the theme that brings together the other three—love, kenosis and freedom—in describing how these Catholic school leaders embodied their educational work.

It is this embodiment of a vision of education in our own time, based on a faith concerning the human person, that I now want to explore through the theology of education offered by Thomas Aquinas. My suggestion is that the instincts we see in our contemporary educational practices—around love, humility/kenosis, freedom and relationship—are

deeply Catholic and faith-full instincts, resonating powerfully with a longer tradition. The ways in which Aquinas sets out the strands of this tradition can enable us, today, to nurture these instincts, and give them clearer and more confident articulation in our handing on of them to new generations of Christian educators, and in our voicing them in a culture of education which is often in danger of losing these essential insights.

Naming the Mysteries: Some Responses from Thomas Aquinas

Some Insights on 'Intellect'—Summa Theologiae 1a. 79.4, 8 & 10; 2a2ae.8

Before giving some account of how Aquinas understands and describes teaching and learning, it is as well briefly (and so inadequately) to say something about the language of 'intellect'. *Intellectus* is a pervasive term in the *Summa*'s account of the person, and it is all too tempting simply to translate this as 'intellect'. However, in English 'intellect' and 'intellectual' tend to carry with them a rather abstracted, cerebral and even pejorative meanings (especially for the deeply pragmatic sensibilities of the English!); we are suspicious that 'the intellectual' concerns only an elite group, and a removal from what is most down to earth.

This is not how *intellectus* functions in Aquinas' thought—and it is, in part, for this reason that the (admittedly interpretative) translation of the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa Theologiae* generally translates *intellectus* as 'understanding'. For intellect in the Thomistic anthropology refers to that peculiarly human quality of the person to make meaning from sense and intelligible impressions. It is the intellect that is capable of *seeing things as they truly are*—a key concept for Aquinas. Such seeing of truth is not always, or even frequently, an immediate grasping of that reality, but rather describes as the ultimate agency in the person which enables understanding.

As such the intellect is a 'power of the soul' (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 79.4), whilst not, we should note, being its essence. The essence of our humanity doesn't depend on intellect, but intellect depends on our created humanity, our im-mattered soul. As the means by which human beings grasp the nature of things as they are, it is not to be confused with intelligence or reason. Reason and intelligence are not intellect themselves.

They can, however, be seen as movements belonging to the intellect—the means by which the intellect moves from not knowing to knowing a reality (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 79.8, 79.10). *Intellectus* is not in itself the struggles of cleverness, learning and so forth; but is more to do with a restful knowing of things, wisdom, an ability to look, gaze upon, and *see*. Elsewhere, in the question entitled 'The Gift of Understanding (*de dono intellectus*)', Aquinas describes *intellectus* like this:

> Understanding' (*intellectus*) implies a certain intimate knowing…intellective knowledge penetrates as far as the essence of a thing, its objective interest being … what a thing really is. (*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae 8.1)

These brief observations are included here largely to guard against certain misunderstandings of what is meant by Aquinas' insistence on the idea that human beings are 'intellectual'. Clearly, from this question of the *Summa Theologiae*, this is not a matter of saying human beings are all about their academic achievements, their cleverness, their abstraction from the material. Rather, to be intellectual—as, for Thomas Aquinas all human beings must be—is simply to participate in the world, using our senses and whatever reasoning faculties we have, in such a way that we catch glimpses of what it really is. People are creatures who seek to understand, albeit in limited ways, the way things really are. We are creatures who can know *that things are*, and wonder about this.

For this to be true means it is true for all people, even those who, in our own time, we might describe as 'intellectually impaired'. For Aquinas' anthropology those with learning disabilities are better described (if they must be described at all) as living with an impairment of intelligence or ability to reason; the intellectual function of *seeing what is* is of a different quality, and present, in some way, even if at rest, without the movements of intelligence and reason.[11]

So, all our students are intellectuals!—if we mean by that they are all looking to know, to see what is really there. We share in common with them that quality of being human which is seen in every 'aha!' moment, every 'light bulb' moment, that takes place—moments not exclusively (or even generally?) found in the formal classroom. It is this 'illumination of the intellect' which is foundational for Aquinas' development of a distinctive pedagogical approach. It is to this we now turn.

Aquinas on Teaching and Learning—Summa Theologiae 1a 117.1;
2a2ae 181.3; de Veritate Q. 11

Thomas Aquinas treats explicitly the question of teaching and learning at a number of points in the *Summa Theologiae*, as well as in *de Veritate* and *de Magistro*. One especially clear instance of this comes in Question 117 of *Summa Theologiae* 1a which asks in its first article: 'Can a man teach another man, causing him to know?'[12]

In the *Summa*, this question is asked in the wider context of explorations of how the world works, what makes things happen—agency, in other words. This question about education is the first to be considered under 'human activity'—that is things people do which effect a change.

It may surprise the modern reader that the question of whether a person can cause another to know—that is teach them something—is at all contentious; but the argument here makes clear just how strange a thing we are dealing with. Aquinas' first move is to name the ways in which a person *cannot* teach another, drawing both on scripture and a variety of philosophical arguments (the four points *Ad Primo*). So, he first quotes Matthew 23:8—a verse that has key importance in his treatment of teaching and learning in *de Veritate* Q. 11 and at the start of *de Magistro*.

> But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students…Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. (Matt 23:8,10)

His next three points against the idea of whether one person can cause another to know reveals something not only of his understanding of what knowing is, but also something of his anthropology. So, knowledge cannot simply be transmitted as if it were something like heat—a general property moveable from one person to another. Nor can a teacher really *act* on the intellect of another, causing it to see something, effecting change in any straightforward way. Whatever is going on between a teacher and a pupil it cannot be like other kinds of caused change; rather, as he says in the *Responsio*, 'it must be said that the one who teaches causes knowledge in the one who is taught in another way altogether' (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 117.1).

The way Aquinas attempts to articulate this mysterious event of teaching and learning is informative, not least of all for the analogies upon which he draws to illustrate his point. In terms of his Aristotelian account of the intellect, he can assert that the passive intellect of the human being

'is in a state of pure potentiality', and that what happens when a teacher provides that intellect with things to see and grasp is that a move is made from potentiality to actuality. This doesn't make ready sense to most contemporary minds; but the analogy used to illustrate it does—that of medicine and healing.

So, effects or change can come from purely external sources, like the house that is built by art alone, or through a combination of internal and external sources—like the sick person being restored to health by medicine and/or nature's power. In this last example, art imitates nature, as medicines work in ways learnt from nature's own healing powers. But this external agency of medicine is not the primary agent in the healing process, but rather simply aids the principal agent, natural healing (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 117.1).

In the same way learning involves both internal and external agency. This puts the teacher in a very particular relation to both the learner, and to the knowledge that is being shared and explored. The conclusion made at the end of the Responsio here is worth quoting:

> the teacher provides only external help, in the same way as the physician who heals. And just as the internal nature is the main cause of the healing process, so also the internal intellectual illumination is the main cause of the knowing process. Now both of these come from God...It is through this light that everything is made clear to us. (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 117.1)

And later:

> The teacher directly causes neither the illumination which makes things intelligible in the learner, nor the intelligible impressions, but he moves the learner by his teaching so that the latter forms intelligible concepts by the power of his own mind, when the signs of these concepts are put before him from outside. (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 117.1)

All this tells something about how Aquinas understands human intellect and its humanity and potentiality. It is on this understanding that the rather mysterious activity of teaching is founded. The same argument is made in rather more clearly Christian theological ways in *de Veritate* Q11, where the Matthean text referred to above becomes central. Here again, it is clear that it is not—and cannot be—the teacher who makes another know. Rather a person may be called teacher analogously, in so far as she

enables that illumination of intellect which is the act of the Holy Spirit alone—for there is only one teacher, that is the Lord.

This is an anthropology where the autonomy of the person is central (no teacher can cause me to know), and yet where the relation of persons is the proper and usual (though not always essential?) place of learning. Resonances with our contemporary school leaders' practices and understanding are clearly felt here. Aquinas offers into our own time a clearly articulated account of teaching and learning as a properly mysterious, inter-personal process which necessarily involves the activity of the illuminating Spirit. And, we should note, this is *not* about faith or religious knowing, but about *all* knowing. The human activity of teaching and learning—whether parentally in the home, or practically in the workshop, or scientifically in the laboratory, or academically in the lecture theatre—is necessarily of this self-transcending yet personal nature. And it always involves God.

The Faith-Full Intellect: Learning, Contemplation and Holy Living—*Summa Theologiae 2a2ae 188*

It is tempting to leave, for the purposes of this paper at least, our forays into Aquinas' pedagogy there; we already have a good deal to think about in relation to our own contemporary practice, as correspondences between Aquinas' pedagogy and the instincts described through the VfEL research become clear. However, I think it would be a particular disservice to Aquinas' account of intellect, teaching and learning if it were omitted that he sees in these mysterious processes of coming-to-know something profound: something of the person's movement Godward, into faith. The human intellect is, in its fundamental orientation, a faith-full intellect, orientated to the knowing of God, even as one unknown (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 12.13). Here, perhaps, Aquinas can lead those of us working in contemporary teaching and learning into a deeper and more confident place, in which our *vocation* as Christians can find enriching articulation in our work.

One way of illustrating this is through the account given in the *Summa Theologiae* to the apparently innocuous question: 'whether a religious institute should be founded for study?' (*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae 188.5).

In his own context, this question is part of a much longer reflection on the nature of religious life, a reflection informed by the sometimes-furious debates that ranged around the 'new' mendicant orders. In particular, the Order of Preachers had some work to do in justifying their involvement in

academic theology on their arrival on the university scene in Paris. Surely, it is proposed, study is inimical to religious life as it causes dissension improper to Christian community, and involves the student in 'Gentile' or pagan (perhaps, for our time, 'secular') studies alien to the Christian religion. Further, there is a tradition discernible in scripture that Christian virtue is not to be gained through human powers of knowing but through the powerful work of the Lord on us.[13] Study, it seems, is simply a worldly necessity for those enmeshed in the material concerns of life, and isn't, in itself, a Christian thing at all. There is here a distinctly counter-cultural account of Christian teaching and learning emerging.

It is Aquinas' thoughtful response to this that draws us into a deeper place, from which to enquire about the relation of thinking and believing which places pedagogy firmly within the Christian life. For in the *responsio* to the question St. Thomas argues that study builds up religious life in three key ways: by promoting contemplation; as a necessary work for preaching and the apostolates of conversion and teaching; and as a powerful help in the forming of persons in the virtues appropriate to religious life. Of particular importance, for our purposes, is the observation that study disposes us to contemplation through the 'illumination of the intellect' (*illuminando scilicet intellectum*), leading us to the consideration of divine things. Teaching and learning are a part of the way towards that mysterious 'knowing' (in a sense) of God, which is faith. Teaching and learning are orientated towards contemplation of the things of God—which is to say, of things as they most truly are. Whilst teaching and learning are seen as materially necessary for the carrying out of particular activities (preaching, teaching, apologetics), the pedagogical dynamic is fundamentally rooted in the movement towards knowing God, and shaping us along the way in all manner of virtues:

> it [study] helps to avoid concupiscence of the flesh … it turns the mind from lascivious thoughts and mortifies the flesh through the labour of study … it eliminates the desire for wealth … it teaches obedience. (*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae 188.5 *responsio*)

What we have before us in all this is a careful but firm argument—an argument reclaiming the work of the *intellectus*, the work of thinking and understanding, teaching and learning, for the life of Christian discipleship and living faith. For this work of thoughtfulness, Aquinas argues, when it is undertaken in Christian charity, admits of no harmful dissension, but

rather builds up, promoting harmony; as obedient to the truth (and so reflecting the characteristics of humility or *kenosis*), this Christian study, far from leading us into pagan or secular ways, draws us closer to the heart of the true, which is godliness (*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae 188.5 *ad 2, 3*). This question of the *Summa* helps to clarify the perennial Christian instinct towards education, teaching and learning as a thoroughly Christ-like vocation, for it demonstrates that teaching and learning, whatever its focus content or subject area, is a place of encounter with the ways in which God works within all human beings to draw them into deeper knowing of how things really are, and so, ultimately, towards that relationship with God which is faith.

Conclusion

This paper has been framed as an initial theological response to a practically felt need for a clearer account of 'Catholic pedagogy'. In particular, it involved my following a hunch that what I was encountering in the testimonies of a great many Catholic school leaders was an implicit anthropology, and a largely implicit sense of what they were dealing with in teaching and learning, that had more in common with what I know of the pre-modern theology of Thomas Aquinas, than with the prevailing modern and more materialist (instrumental) educational culture. The task now is to open up a conversation as to whether and how the inevitable gap between Aquinas and contemporary language and thought might be fruitfully bridged.

As a starting place for this conversation I want to end this chapter by making the claim that a renewal of pedagogy along the lines set out by Aquinas can enable us to give clearer articulation to those instincts we observed in contemporary Christian (Catholic) teaching practice. For as we have seen, Aquinas' account gives a particular and proper place to the *mysterious* in teaching and learning, as our coming to know is always caused by illumination of intellect which, whether natural or supernatural (*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae 188.5 *ad 2, 3*), is of God. Not only this but—like our contemporary practitioners—the *Summa* locates this mysterious process in an interpersonal relational context, in which both the interiority of the learner and their need for relation with the one named (analogously) 'teacher' are thoroughly implicated. This pedagogical relationship is characterised by humility and self-emptying before the other, and an enabling of their greater freedom: these are the traits of that practice of

love which is education. And Aquinas tells us more: this relational practice—a practice of love enacted by the Christian teacher/learner—is orientated to that deeply human end, communion in God.

What difference this makes in educational practice itself remains to be seen. It is only when practitioners themselves respond to what I have set out here that we will really be able to give embodied form of this thinking. But, by beginning with testimonies from practice, I have demonstrated that, in fact, much of this Thomistic pedagogical tradition is already being lived—in part, at least, and perhaps largely unconsciously—by many in Catholic school education. This encourages me to believe that Aquinas' understanding of teaching and learning, or something very like it, can contribute to the naming of those hidden graces already at work in Catholic education; and, in naming them, can bring these graces more clearly to light, to be celebrated, recognised, handed on and shared more widely.

Notes

1. The papers and reports referred to in what follows can be found at Theologyandactionresearch (2016).
2. The key text explaining this approach is Cameron et al. (2010). Other publications in the field are Sweeney (2010), Watkins (2012), Watkins and Cameron (2012), Watkins and Shepherd (2013), Watkins (2014) and Watkins (2015). See also Theologyandactionresearch (2016).
3. This tendency towards an instrumentalised view of education has been widely recognised, as has its tension with Christian traditions around teaching and learning. See McKinney and Sullivan (2013), esp. chaps. 13 and 14, and Whittle (2015), which draws attention to the notion of 'unsolvable mystery' as central to Catholic pedagogy. The position of church schools in relating to both church and wider society/state is thoughtfully explored in Sullivan (2011), pp.101–116, whilst Philip J. O'Connor offers a more personal reflection on the same questions in O'Connor (2015). Our research participants' account of this can be seen in Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service (2014b).
4. For example, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 356–7; 1694–5.
5. That sense of 'unsolvable mystery' identified in Whittle (2015).
6. Of particular help in understanding Aquinas' pedagogy are White (1958) and Mooney and Nowacki (2011).
7. This conviction that practices embody theologies is foundational to theological action research projects. See Cameron et al. (2010), pp.51–53.

8. It is notable that this resonates strongly with much contemporary academic writing in Catholic pedagogy: for example, McLaughlin (2008).

9. Again, the theology embodied by teachers here strongly reflects Catholic traditions around education. See Watkins 2013.

10. Vatican II, Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* 3: 'Truth, however, is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which men explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth. Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that men are to adhere to it.'

11. Aquinas' profound account of people with what we would call 'intellectual impairment' or 'learning disability' is a good remedy against any misunderstanding of his position concerning the 'intellectual' nature of *all* human beings. See Berkman (2013).

12. A similar question opens *de Magistro*, and is discussed in *de Veritate* Q. 11.

13. Aquinas references Psalm 70: 15–16, with a gloss from the *Interlinear* of Peter Lombard. Whilst this is not hugely convincing to the contemporary reader, it is an argument with which we are nonetheless familiar, and into which scripture is often drawn, albeit sometimes in rather naïve ways.

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Deeply Christian, Healthily Plural: A Vision for Schooling

David F. Ford

INTRODUCTION

I begin with three events that happened in the United Kingdom in a single week in summer 2016.

On 26th May, in the Methodist Central Hall in London, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former chief rabbi in this country, was presented with the Templeton Prize. In his moving and robust acceptance speech (Sacks 2016), he spoke about his fundamental commitment being what he had been taught as a Jew: 'To be true to our faith, and a blessing to others regardless of their faith'. It is, as I will explain, a Jewish version of my title, 'Deeply Christian, Healthily Plural'. I think that double thrust goes to the heart of what our complexly multi-religious and 'multi-secular' world needs in many spheres, and relevant to them all is the character of the education our children and their teachers receive.

On the afternoon before Rabbi Sacks received his prize, a short distance away in Lambeth Palace the launch took place of a new resource for religious education, called *Understanding Christianity: Text, Impact, Connections* (Church of England Education Office 2016b). I had played a minor role in its preparation as one of many consultants, and had been

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greatly impressed, both by the convergence of people, skills, institutions, and funders that had been brought together in order to produce the resource, and by the quality of what had resulted. The many schools where it had been trialled all agreed that it was far better than any of the other material available for teaching how to understand Christianity through religious education in schools. And I think the subtitle of the resource brings together the essentials for deep engagement with a living faith: first, *Text*—learning how to access deep, rich meaning through texts, above all scriptures, reading and rereading, savouring, reflecting, imagining, puzzling, questioning, discussing, arguing, and attending to the ways they have been understood down the centuries and around the world today; next, *Impact*—appreciating how these texts have, in many contexts, helped to shape the thought, traditions, worship, habits, ethics, politics and culture of the community both in the past and in the contemporary world; and third, *Connections*—the many relationships any community or tradition has with other communities and with many religions, cultures, spheres of life, areas of knowledge and understanding, and so on, and the conversations around key issues and across differences that result.

It struck me that this combination of interrelated elements corresponds to those that shaped the DNA of the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, what they called *ressourcement* (rereading and exploring the classic sources in scripture and tradition), *aggiornamento* (discerning the relevance of those sources, especially today), and *conversazione*—engagement across differences, whether within one church, or between churches, or between religions, or between the religious and the secular. It is a DNA that is found in what I judge to be some of the most impressive contemporary attempts to shape life and thought in religious and other traditions with deep roots in the past, as they seek to discern, in their engagements with modernity, what to welcome, what to reject, and what to work to transform. And I suggest that this DNA is crucial to education: we need people and communities who have learnt that sort of wise discernment.

Earlier that same week, in York, the Church of England House of Bishops discussed and warmly adopted a document called *Church of England Vision for Education* (Church of England Education Office 2016a). This was specifically occasioned by a new initiative, the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership, which was launched later in the year with James Townsend as its Director. Its purpose is to meet the challenges and take the opportunities offered by the present situation in schools in England, by supporting educational leaders (headteachers,

teachers, governors, funders, and others), in church and other schools, through networking, sharing understanding and good practice, training, advocacy, and conducting research. There is a window of opportunity that will probably last only a few years, and there can be no standing still: either the Church of England will renew and enhance its involvement in schooling or its role will diminish.

I am Chair of the group that produced the vision. It has been one of the most fascinating and encouraging things I have ever been part of in the Church or in society more widely. Indeed, one of the things that has impressed me most is that there are few areas where there is a more profound and enriching interplay between church and society in this country than in taking responsibility with others for the education of children in our schools. I had nothing to do with the conception of the Foundation, but I have come to think that it is an inspired response that should not only help the Church of England to seize the current opportunities, and to sustain and enhance its contribution year after year, but also enable it to collaborate better with other stakeholders in enhancing our whole educational system and contributing to a healthy and diverse civil society. A well-formed and well-funded organization, able to resource those dedicated to the education of our children, is something that the Church of England, inspired by the Gospel, is in a position to give to this country for its benefit. Hence the strap-line of the vision, 'Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good', which is another variation on Rabbi Sacks' maxim and on the title of this chapter.

In what follows I want to present a case for education that is both 'healthily plural' and 'deeply Christian'.

Healthily Plural Education

Why aim at healthily plural education?

The reality is that, whatever one thinks about it, our education in the United Kingdom is in fact plural at present, especially as regards types of school and their sponsors, the religious and other worldviews that inspire them, and the backgrounds and traditions from which the children in these schools come.

Some groups are determined to push education into becoming less plural. One way is through a 'one size fits all' state system, sometimes with a programmatically secularist[1] agenda—let's call this the French option—and sometimes (though far more rarely) with a religious agenda—let's call this the Saudi Arabian option.

Others want plural forms of education that I see as less healthy. Perhaps the main type of this is a free market model, in which diverse providers compete with each other, the criteria for success and competitive superiority are quite narrow (adjudicated by metrics that are often perverse incentives, stimulating educational practices whose success in their own terms is at the expense of all-round education), and the philosophy behind it is utilitarian—usually a single-minded prioritization of the importance of education for getting a job and serving the economy.

The simple answer to why we should aim at healthily plural education is that it is not wise to move in the direction of France, nor in that of Saudi Arabia, nor in that of schooling that only serves the economy. Our multi-religious, multi-secular society is likely to flourish neither through the imposition of secularist or religious conformity, nor through treating children only as contributors to the economy and relativizing all other educational values in line with that. These positions could be argued at length, but it is more relevant to have a positive vision of what healthily plural schooling looks like.

There are, I think, at least three core elements in a healthily plural education system. One is that it is *a plurality of multiple depths.* There are forms of plurality that discourage people and communities from being fully themselves in the public sphere—that say, for example, that religious and other beliefs are too controversial and disruptive if they are followed through in the shared space of education. Instead of such fear-driven neutralizing of education (which is also the pursuit of the impossible, since there is in fact no neutrality, and often this position is a covert form of imposing unacknowledged values and beliefs), it is healthier to encourage education to be inspired by what is richest, deepest, and most generous in each community and tradition (within certain limits, as I will argue).

Another core element is that it is *a plurality of visions for all-round education.* By this I mean education that is concerned with the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural as well as the academic. There are huge pressures to impoverish this vision of education that is about the whole child and the whole of society. None of our children should be given an education that misses out on the spiritual or the moral or the social or the cultural, and a healthy system makes sure that every operative vision embraces all of them.

The third core element is that, for all the plurality, there must be *some conception of the common good of society, together with the means of negotiating and adjudicating disputes about this.* There will always be deep and

long-term disagreements about education and the values and commitments that inspire it. They are not likely to be eliminated, but they must be negotiated, adjudicated, and worked out in the form of settlements that serve the flourishing of society. Our current educational ecosystem is the outcome of such negotiated settlements over a very long time. The process of negotiation and adjudication sets limits and standards for the diverse types of school, aiming at the health of the whole system and, above all, the flourishing of all children.

If those three elements—emphasizing multiple depths, multiple visions of all-round education, and ongoing negotiation of settlements oriented to the common good—ring true, then I think two conclusions follow.

The first is that our current plural educational ecology in the United Kingdom at its best actually embodies these three elements and is a considerable achievement. We do not need to move it in the direction of France or of Saudi Arabia or of a narrow focus on economic utility. We do not need revolutionary change, and we should not try to reinvent the system starting with a blank sheet. We should, in this matter, side with Edmund Burke, not with the French Revolution. We have an ecology that has been formed over centuries and is continuing to develop, and on the whole it works well and is open to continual improvement. Like any ecosystem it has many niches, and we have to be careful that those with short-term interests in it, whether political or economic or ideological, do not distort it by initiatives that focus on one niche and ignore the (often unintended) consequences for others.

Ecological disaster is one of the great realities of our age, and has much to teach us analogously in spheres beyond the environment. Especially in education, whose consequences last for generations, we must make sure that there is consultation and collaboration with those who have medium- to long-term interests. These include a range of intermediate bodies important for the flourishing of civil society, such as charitable educational foundations, scientific and scholarly associations, universities, hospitals, professional associations (in education, civil service, law, health, business, finance, industry, agriculture, sport, media, and so on), corporate bodies of many sorts, and religious communities. All of these have educational interests and commitments, and in order to flourish, need good quality education. Their diverse voices need to be attended to if we are to have a healthily plural educational ecology that serves the common good of our society.

The second, and closely related, conclusion is that depth, breadth and richness of vision, well-formed all-round education, and a negotiated common good happen only through communities and groups that have developed and tested them over considerable periods of time. They are not invented afresh in response to what happen to be immediate concerns of the day, though those of course need to be taken into account. They presuppose memory and history; traditions—religious, secular, and complexly mixed—that have tried to find wisdom in these matters; institutions and organizations that have been sustained decade after decade; formative practices (both communal and individual); and virtues. Rabbi Sacks in his Templeton speech made the connection between memory, virtues, and the future of our society:

> Memory is my story, the past that made me who I am, of whose legacy I am the guardian for the sake of generations yet to come. Without memory, there is no identity. And without identity, we are mere dust on the surface of infinity. Lacking memory we have forgotten one of the most important lessons to have emerged from the wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and the new birth of freedom that followed. Even to say it sounds antiquarian but it is this: *A free society is a moral achievement.* Without self-restraint, without the capacity to defer the gratification of instinct, and without the habits of heart and deed that we call virtues, we will eventually lose our freedom. (Sacks 2016)

The stakes are indeed that high in seeking to form healthily plural schooling.

Deeply Christian Education

What about deeply Christian education?

One of the formative experiences in my life over more than two decades has been the practice of Scriptural Reasoning, which began as joint study and conversation around Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures and has now spread to include other traditions too and is practised in many countries.[2] At its best, it encourages a fivefold multiple deepening: going deeper into the texts of one's own tradition; deeper into the texts of others; deeper into commitment to the common good of our world; deeper into the areas of both agreement and disagreement; and deeper into the distinctive sort of collegiality (often developing into friendship) that happens among those involved in the first four deepenings.

One clear conclusion to which I have come is that for this to work well one needs around the table people who know at least one tradition and its scriptures well. Multiple deepenings require particular deepenings, usually beginning with immersion in one. A useful analogy is with learning a language and its associated culture: it helps to have learnt at least one well in order to learn others. We do not usually learn six languages simultaneously, and the religious education equivalents of attempting to do so tend to end in something more like tourism than education, phrase books rather than literature, photo opportunities rather than meaningful discussion.

But I think we need to complement that linguistic and cultural analogy with others that do better justice to the practical impact of religions. Religion is also like driving. It is part of our public life, and has impact, with great benefits but also the potential for road rage, pollution, and crashes. We expect other road users to learn how to use the road, and we want them to know how to drive their particular vehicle responsibly and to respect others. I do not want people to have a vague general knowledge of how to drive a car and a lorry and a bus; I want them to know what it is to drive one well and have regard for others. And, by extension, when they are passengers on a bus it is important to have good reason to trust that the vehicle is in good repair and the driver is competent and also has due regard for others on the road.

The religious education resource *Understanding Christianity: Text, Impact, Connections*, that I referred to earlier, is about learning one religion really well, and this is also the best starting point for understanding other religions and beliefs. In the sphere of schooling as a whole, the principles of multiple depths, all-round education, and serving the common good mean that schools do not have to be all the same, but that particular schools should be deeply into at least one tradition, should let that tradition inspire an all-round education, and should live up to standards set by negotiation with the wider society for their education to serve the flourishing of children and the common good. The present educational ecology in the United Kingdom allows both for the sort of religious education represented by *Understanding Christianity* (and RE Today Services, who produced it, are now working on analogous resources on Hinduism and Islam) and for the sorts of school whose ethos can be inspired by specific religious and other traditions.

What might that mean for a Christian school? The answer may vary according to the particular Christian tradition, and I do not want to

homogenize the Christian approaches. So I will just report briefly on the approach taken by the Church of England group that produced the educational vision for the Church of England (Church of England Education Office 2016a).

The group included theologians, teachers, academic educational specialists, diocesan educational staff, a social anthropologist, and staff of the National Society, including the Chief Educational Officer of the Church of England. We consulted widely, had residential meetings, and discussed and argued intensively among ourselves. At the heart of the vision we produced is the conviction that a basic challenge for the Church of England is to combine constructively the two characteristics of being deeply Christian and serving the common good by being generously and healthily plural. I have already discussed being healthily plural. What about being deeply Christian?

Stimulated by a fine group of Church of England schools that have what it calls its 10:10 ethos, we took John 10:10 as a key text, where Jesus says that he has come that people may have life, and have it abundantly, in all its fullness. Life is a key theme in the Gospel of John, with Jesus performing signs—saving the day at the wedding in Cana by turning water into wine, healing, forgiving, feeding, raising the dead, and more—which demonstrate the Prologue's affirmation that 'in him was life, and the life was the light of all people' (John 1:4). Our schools can be seen as signs of this God-given life, and part of our mission is to offer such signs to pupils, parents, teachers, communities, and others.

The Prologue of John's Gospel sets a horizon within which to do this. It is all-inclusive: God and the whole of creation; and the Word, identified with Jesus Christ as both human and divine, through whom 'all things came into being'. Just as the term for Word, *logos*, both runs through the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures used by John and most in the church of the New Testament) and resonates widely with John's surrounding Hellenistic civilization, so an education conceived today within this horizon needs both to go deeply into scripture and also broadly into our civilization's history, culture, science, technology, politics, economics, philosophy, and religion.

John has in fact helped to inspire two millennia of such engagement. The past century has perhaps been the most fruitful of all, as Christianity has become fully global, its involvement in higher education has exploded, many new voices have contributed to its thought and articulation, and its engagement with the arts, humanities, and sciences has been unprecedented

in range and thoroughness. My own education in this has been partly through editing three successive editions of *The Modern Theologians. An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, the most recent with the Quaker theologian Rachel Muers (Ford and Muers 2005), which has meant trying to become literate in what has been happening during the past hundred years of Christian theology around the world.

It is of great importance for the intellectual integrity of what Christians contribute to education that it rings true with this body of thinking, which articulates intelligent faith that has engaged with the best in current knowledge and understanding, and has wrestled with the most challenging issues and situations in the contemporary world. The abundant life of the Gospel of John is inseparable from Jesus as the light of the world, and the Spirit that he breathes into his followers comes with a promise that they will be led into 'all the truth' (John 16:13). Entering into that promise is one of the most demanding conceivable callings, continually stretching us, not only intellectually, but also in imagination, prayer, and action. This truth is inseparable from the shaping of people in communities of learning and practice that are animated by questions that lead us deeper and deeper. In John Chap. 1 the first words of Jesus, as he gathers his initial community of learners (*mathétés*—disciple, literally means learner), are a question: 'What are you looking for?' (1:38 *ti zéteite;—What are you seeking, searching for? What do you desire?*). The education of desire is perhaps the most radical and transformative of all learning goals.

In our Theological Reference Group's vision for the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership, and for the Church of England's involvement in education more widely, as we consider the relation of Christian theology to educational thinking and practice we distil our vision of education for 'life in all its fullness' into four basic elements. Each is presented both educationally and theologically, and in the restricted space available now I will simply describe them briefly and make a few comments on them. The elements are not to be understood as distinct entities, but as niches that are interrelated and often co-inherent with one another in a rich educational 'ecology'.

One is *education for wisdom, knowledge, and skills.* Good schools foster confidence, delight, and discipline in seeking wisdom, knowledge, truth, understanding, know-how, and the skills needed to shape life well. They nurture academic habits and skills, emotional intelligence, and creativity across the whole range of school subjects, including areas such as music, drama and the arts, information and other technologies, sustainable development, sport,

and what one needs to understand and practise in order to be a good person, citizen, parent, employee, team or group member, or leader.

We have more to say about this than any of the other elements, but for now I just want to express puzzlement at how little the concept of wisdom figures in educational discussion, especially in this country. This is so despite wisdom being a central concern of the major religious and other traditions of education. We are making a bid to restore its leading position, seeing it as the complementary cognitive dimension of fullness of life. In the book of Proverbs, for example, wisdom is spoken of time and again in terms of life: she is a 'tree of life' (3:16), 'life for your soul' (3:22), 'she is your life' (4:13), 'the teaching of the wise is a fountain of life' (13:14), and personified Wisdom cries out, 'Whoever finds me finds life' (8:35). Wisdom, life, and God go together, and any Christian approach to education needs to embody this interrelation. And, because the wisdom of God is superabundant and inexhaustible, we are all invited continually to become wiser and wiser, not only in our educational understanding and practice but also in our faith. Our encompassing goal should be wiser education inspired by wiser faith. In a world where so much of both education and faith is impoverished, foolish, shallow, or even dangerous, this is a challenging mission.

A second element is *education for hope and aspiration*. Good schools open up horizons of hope and aspiration, and guide pupils into ways of fulfilling them. They also cope wisely with things and people going wrong. Bad experiences and behaviour, wrongdoing, and evil need not have the last word. There are resources for healing, repair, and renewal; repentance, forgiveness, truth, and reconciliation are possible; and meaning, trust, generosity, compassion, and hope are more fundamental than meaninglessness, suspicion, selfishness, hardheartedness, and despair.

This is the heading under which we decided to discuss worship in schools (it could also have been treated in relation to the other three elements), and that is the one topic I want to select for comment now. I began our discussions only vaguely in favour of collective worship in schools. I ended up more firmly in favour of it. In our vision, after discussing the Church of England's liturgical tradition, we make three points:

> first, that there is a strong educational case for experience of worship being part of school life, since its omission lessens the possibility of understanding

traditions to which worship is essential; second, there is a great deal of wise, imaginative practice in this area that deserves to be better known; and third, the new Foundation should host discussion, share good practice, and sponsor research in this area so that worship in our schools promotes theological and religious literacy and liberates participants to an imagining of a different order of justice, mercy and hope. (Church of England Education Office 2016a)

Among other considerations that weighed with me were: distinguishing between the collective worship of a school and the corporate worship of a church congregation, while appreciating the importance of the right of parents to withdraw their children from their school's collective worship; learning about reflective, invitational, and interrogative forms of worship in schools; and coming to see experience and understanding of worship as a significant part of the education of desire.

The third element is *education for community and living well together*. We are only persons with each other: our humanity is 'co-humanity', inextricably involved with others, utterly relational, both in our humanity and our shared life on a finite planet. The good life is lived 'with and for others in just institutions' (Ricoeur 1992, p.172). So education needs to have a core focus on relationships and commitments, participation in communities and institutions, and the qualities of character that enable people to flourish together. Each school is to be a convivial community that seeks to embody an ethos of living well together.

The one comment I would make on this is about the importance of the wider institutional and civil society setting. The Church of England has three main commitments that embrace the whole country. One is to local, regional, and national presence in parishes, dioceses, cathedrals, and central bodies, with a network of congregations and other organizations. Another is to chaplaincy in schools, universities, hospitals, workplaces, prisons, the armed forces, airports, and other settings. The third is to educational institutions, most of which are schools. Each of these three settings benefits from interaction and cooperation with the other two, and all are concerned with the quality of life together in this country. The Foundation for Educational Leadership needs to enable not only new synergies between the Church of England's three commitments but also a new level of collaboration with others beyond the Church of England. A diverse civil society such as ours requires a healthy plurality of providers

who converse and collaborate as much as possible together, are able to respond critically and constructively to government initiatives and other challenges, and seek to negotiate wise settlements.

The final element is *education for dignity and respect*. Human dignity, the ultimate worth of each person, is central to good education. The basic principle of respect for the value and preciousness of each person involves continual discernment, deliberation, and action, and schools are one of the main places where this can happen, and where the understanding and practices it requires can be learnt.

Here the point I want to underline is the special importance of recognizing in practice the equal worth of those with and without special educational needs and disabilities. I would even go further, and say that Christian wisdom is that those with disabilities should be made central to a school community. As in the rest of society, if the focus is on the most intelligent, the most gifted, the wealthiest, the most attractive, or the strongest, then most people feel marginalized; but if those with disabilities are especially honoured and befriended all the others can still have appropriate respect while also contributing to a community of love, gentleness, and compassion. I particularly have in mind the wisdom of Jean Vanier and the L'Arche communities, about which I have written elsewhere (Ford 2007, pp.352–379).

Conclusion

Fullness of life can of course include many other elements, and the document for the bishops concludes with a cadenza celebrating some others related to dignity and respect: blessing; creativity; joy, wonder and delight; reconciliation; and, finally, glory, the paragraph on which is my conclusion:

> Glory might be seen as the divine dignity, shared with us who can be transformed 'from glory to glory' (2 Corinthians 3:18). God's glory is an overflow of the divine life, holiness and love, to which the core response is awe, adoration, praise and thanks. These are also the deepest springs of honouring and respecting all those created in the image of God. The ultimate horizon for human dignity is the intensity of eternal life in communion with God, enjoyed with others in the loving, infinitely creative and attractive presence of the God of glory. (Church of England Education Office 2016a)

Notes

1. I agree with Rowan Williams' differentiation between the programmatically secular, that seeks to impose a secularist framework on all, and the procedurally secular, that is about minimal rules for equity and fairness in the public sphere as between communities and traditions of religion and belief (Williams 2006). The present UK situation is on the whole procedurally secular in ethos, though it is threatened in many spheres by more programmatically (and sometimes aggressively) secular approaches. The recent work of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, especially under the leadership of Baroness Onora O'Neill, has contributed considerably to renewing and reinforcing a procedurally secular ethos in sensible ways.

2. There is now a large literature on Scriptural Reasoning. Some of my own contributions to it are in: Ford and Pecknold (2006), Ford (2007), Ford (2011), Ford and Clemson (2013), and Ford (2014).

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Living Tradition and Learning Agency: Interpreting the 'Score' and Personal Rendition

John Sullivan

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2013 the co-edited book *Education in a Catholic Perspective* was published by Ashgate (McKinney and Sullivan 2013). In a chapter of that book, 'Individual and Institution' (Sullivan, 2013) pp.139–154), I explored some of the tensions that inevitably arise between the attempts of institutions to form their members and the needs of individuals who do not seem to fit easily into that formational process, bringing out the balancing acts required for the healthy flourishing of both the institution and all the individuals involved. Here I want to take further an implication of that chapter, one which was not explicitly treated there: namely that, in doing justice to the living tradition mediated by Catholic schools there is also the task of facilitating the development of the agency of pupils and students.

This task has three aspects. First, one needs to foster safe pedagogical spaces for learners (and teachers) who have doubts and difficulties with the faith tradition's official line. Second, teachers in Catholic schools and in the Catholic Church must respond to the reality that learners are

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assembling their religious identity and spiritual capital as *bricoleurs*—drawing upon the faith tradition but also from other aspects of their experience—and in ways that may be unorthodox, incomplete, idiosyncratic and not fully coherent. Third, it must be acknowledged that, though there is in some senses an objective 'package' or tradition to pass on and to receive (one that precedes and outlasts us as individuals), attention must also be given to personal appropriation, ownership, engagement and responses that are mediated by personal experience, gifts, needs, blind spots and challenges.

Put differently, Catholic education (and other forms of faith education) involves discipline, training and formation—but it must also provide unforced, free spaces for connections to be made by learners, so that ideas and practices presented to them by teachers can become internalized and embedded within the context of the complexity and unfolding nature of their lives, in ways that they control (even if inaccurately or inadequately in the eyes of teachers and church leaders), and in ways that allow for creativity in application. The dialectic between doing justice to the 'score' of the tradition and empowering personal rendition of it is central to the task of promoting real agency among learners—both in the Church and in the school. Responsible discipleship depends on real agency as much as is the case with ownership of learning in school. Teachers seeking to invite serious engagement with the faith tradition should be concerned to not only foster resemblances between members of the 'household of faith' (what they share in common) but they should also be open to, patient with and positive about the fragile emergence of the personal 'signature' of each student.

I have written elsewhere about the constitutive elements of Catholic education, about formation and about living tradition (Sullivan 2001, 2011). Here my focus is on the fostering of a learning space that supports the development of agency on the part of students in Catholic schools. I would hope that, despite the specificity of the main context I have in mind, there would be some degree of transferability—with regard to the relevance of the principles and issues raised—to other contexts for education in matters of faith, for Catholics, other Christians and people of other faiths. In the first section, I develop further my initial comments about learning and agency. In the second and third sections I draw upon two recent philosophers of education who have commented insightfully on different aspects of the issue being explored here, these being, respectively, Graham McDonough (from Canada) and Pádraig Hogan (from Ireland).

The fourth section outlines the principal risks and benefits one might expect to incur by giving salience to learning agency as advocated by McDonough, Hogan and others. Finally, in the fifth section I underline the importance, both for their educational and their religious development, of eliciting an original response from those we teach.

Learning and Agency

People engage in learning to cast light on their own circumstances, possibilities, needs and limitations and those of others, and in order to understand and better appreciate the wonder and complexity of the world. Teachers hope that, in promoting learning, they serve to activate, focus, train, direct, discipline and liberate the powers of students in service of a flourishing life and community and, for Christians, in service of God's Kingdom. Such learning is necessarily a shared engagement more than it is an individual achievement. It always has the hallmark of provisionality, since learning can never be more than precarious, finite, limited, fallible and incomplete. Despite much of the language of curriculum objectives and learning outcomes in educational literature, learning rarely leads to mastery, possession, finality, certainty or security.

The verbs that characterize the teacher's actions can sometimes seem to students to include some or all of the following: impose, force, control, possess, intrude, drive, capture, deliver to or transfer. In contrast, if learning agency is to be sought after, more appropriate verbs would be some or all of the following: receive, accept, include, invite, elicit attention, nurture, affirm, encourage, liberate, give space to, inspire, enthuse, stimulate, animate, hear into speech, provoke thought, accompany. These are verbs that bear upon and exemplify the intention of promoting active participation and ownership by learners of what they encounter in classrooms.

This is not to deny the need for structure, limits, rules, prescriptions and the holding of students to certain standards of reasoning and the presentation of their work. Nor it is to ignore the asymmetrical nature of the teacher's relationship to students. Nor is it to assume that the obstacle to the emergence of agency among students is necessarily the behaviour of heavy-handed teachers, for important inhibitors of the emergence of agency among learners can be other students. Furthermore, in suggesting that there should always be room for the questioning and critique of tradition, it is also important to ensure that the assumptions behind the questions and critique are themselves brought to light and made subject to scrutiny and testing.

As teachers seek to make the 'text'[1] speak to these students here and now, these students too have to speak from where they are. If learners are to be spoken to, addressed in such a way as to invite engagement and participation, then they also need to be heard. The teacher has to do justice both to the 'text' they are mandated to present and to the students within this context—an undertaking that requires learning spaces that are both structured and sensitive, taking into account the age, maturity, experience, situation, concerns and questions of learners. The French philosopher Louis Lavelle appositely and wisely offers three observations relevant for teachers and would-be spiritual guides here:

> Your desire to win me over to your point of view puts me on my guard, and stimulates opposition. … communion is possible the moment the idea of conquest has been abandoned. The greatest good that we can do for other men is not the gift of a treasure of our own, but the revelation of something which was theirs already. (Lavelle 1993, pp.163, 164, 167)

These insights get to the heart of many pedagogical encounters by being sensitive to the natural resistances of students to any attempt to take away their freedom, the positive space that opens up when the dignity and freedom of students is respected, and the self-effacing nature of teaching that focuses on the giftedness of learners. They are reflected in the work of Brazilian adult educator Paulo Freire who stressed so strongly the need to respect the agency of learners, rather than seeking to mould them into some pre-determined shape of who they should be. For Freire the educational goal is an active knower, not the mind as passive repository of information transmitted by authorities (Freire 1972). In one of his later works he claims that:

> true discipline does not exist in the muteness of those who have been silenced but in the stirrings of who have been challenged, in the doubt of those who have been prodded, and in the hopes of those who have been awakened. (1998, p.86)

And he goes on to explain how he envisages his task as a teacher: 'my role is essentially one of inciting the student to produce his or her own comprehension of the object [of our joint study], using the material I have offered' (1998, p.106).

One reason for my emphasis on learning agency is that I believe it can help students (and aspiring disciples more generally) in moving from second-hand faith to first-hand faith. Inevitably, in the journey of faith one begins with something handed down from others, some expressions and practices that witness to someone else's faith, long before there is any chance of coming to it of our own accord. This is part of the human condition. However, it is important to avoid suggesting that faith can be presented safely in a pre-fabricated version, conveyed on an assembly-line. Christian teachers, in church and in school, want people to hear God speak to them now. All their teaching and 'tools' are intended to facilitate a living, personal, present, spontaneous and direct relationship with God. By its nature this has to be unique and individual in character, even though it is also externally shaped and communally shared. Learners receive from others but then they have to re-authorize this faith as they internalize and appropriate or critique or modify it so that what they learn becomes their own. They must construe its significance for themselves. It must speak to their condition; it must address their context; it must make sense of their experience; it must answer their questions. In response to teaching and to the offer of formation, as they learn how Christian (or other religious) language is spoken, at some point in their language and living they need to incarnate this, to embed this in the particular circumstances of their life, to take it on as a second but natural language with all the freedom, idiosyncrasies, peculiar blend of rule-following and rule-breaking that accompanies fluency in any language.

While I may develop my own voice through imitation of and response to the voices of others, if each of us is to speak authentically this entails that we go beyond mere reiteration of their voices and that we create a new performance, guided by the grammar of the tradition, but not prevented by this from injecting something creative and fresh into the 'conversation'. Spiritual maturity is arrived at only in the light of acts of initiative and responsibility and not merely by following instructions. Such acts require space, choice, alternatives, freedom, even temptation. They involve experiment, struggle and mistakes. As we encounter unmapped territory (unfamiliar at least to us, if not to others), and if we are to develop our capacity for judgement, we need opportunities for rehearsal and we depend on the patience and trust of others, as well as affirmation, healing, support and healing.

Emphasizing the agency of the learner as crucial in education is not new. In a critical retrieval of the educational writing of twentieth-century French

philosopher Jacques Maritain, Luz Ibarra shows that he reiterated as central to Thomas Aquinas' view of teaching that the learner is the primary agent of the educational act (Ibarra 2013, p.98n), a view that was also held several centuries earlier by Augustine. Ibarra, in summarizing Maritain, says that teachers must prepare the human mind to think for itself, by appealing to the child's/adult's power of understanding (p.109). She laments that 'religious education has not made an appeal to the freedom of the individual' (p.165).

This judgement is echoed by a scholar who has conducted an ethnographic study of several Catholic secondary schools in the United Kingdom, Ann Casson. Through her close observations of what goes on in practice, she demonstrates that:

> Religious identity is not something that is solely transmitted, passively received, or handed down intact through the generations; young people play an active role in constructing their identity, whether religious, personal or national. (Casson 2013, p.49)

Deploying the term *bricolage*, borrowed from the sociologist of religion Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Casson indicates how young people are constructing their own religious identity, from the materials available to them, but not necessarily in ways expected (or desired) by their teachers or the Church (p.50). Casson's work is significant because it shows the folly of any policy for religious education in such schools which fails to take note of the kinds of ways students interpret what the school (and the Church) offers and which also fails to do justice to the plurality of views actually present in Catholicism. She claims that

> The Catholicism portrayed and encountered in RE lessons was 'artificially monolithic'; the RE curriculum did not for example include reference to Catholic groups supporting the ordination of women priests, or Catholic organisations which were supportive of divorcees or homosexual rights. (p.155)

This particular issue is taken up in the following section.

McDonough on Dissent

Canadian philosopher of education Graham McDonough has recently written a substantial, carefully argued and deeply significant book that confronts in a critical yet sympathetic manner a major weakness in the

theory of Catholic education: its too ready assumption of the appropriateness, both in terms of ethics and of efficacy, of a monolithic transmission model of Catholic faith and tradition (McDonough 2012). He argues that this assumption is unrealistic, in that it ignores the existence of diversity in beliefs and values among the Catholic faithful, a diversity amply demonstrated by Casson's research (referred to briefly in the previous section), that it is damaging, in that it imposes on some students and staff unreasonable demands and expectations and that it undermines the pedagogical relationship between teachers and students. Furthermore, he makes a very cogent argument that such an approach is corrosive of mature membership in the Church, stunts the growth of responsible participation as ecclesial members and fails to address the needs of those who question aspects of the tradition, either by pretending that such doubts do not exist or by treating those who harbour such doubts and difficulties as presenting threats to the faith from which school should be quarantined.

McDonough claims that students are presented with an

> apparent false choice between complete adherence to the prevailing Catholicism, complete abandonment of it, or, ... existence uneasily at odds with prevailing norms. ... If dissidents of all sorts perceive that the Church cannot receive disagreement, and that the institutions of Catholic education are unable to assist them academically in working out their disagreements ... many people ... simply resign themselves to abandoning Catholicism before they have an opportunity to work out their disagreements in greater depth. (McDonough 2012, pp.6, 10)

This is a false choice, since it is clear that a significant number of Catholics, including many who continue to attend church and receive the sacraments regularly, differ from official teaching on a wide range of issues. These include people who have taken the trouble to inform themselves properly about such church teaching, who differ from it, and do so with a clear conscience. The diversity cannot be attributed to bad faith, ignorance, inadequate formation or colonization by secular culture, even though these factors may also play a part in some cases. It is selling students short to imply that there is no middle way between total acceptance of 'the whole package' as handed down by authority and complete abandonment of it—and for two reasons. First, it flies in the face of ecclesial realities; in other words, it is simply untrue, in that many people do live somewhere in the spectrum between these alternatives. Second, it implies

that the tradition is fixed, has reached completion and has no need to, nor any capacity to, develop further. Short of the *eschaton*, such an implication would be a form of idolatry, in denial of the truth that the church is always in need of reform. Furthermore, by preventing the airing, sharing and discussion of doubts and difficulties in an educational (or ecclesial) setting, it would fail to model how faith can legitimately be questioned and critiqued because one cares about it, wants to be serious about it, needs to probe it, not least in order to develop a defence of it in the face of external criticisms; otherwise there is little chance that such faith could ever be owned responsibly, lived honestly or communicated effectively.

Given the prevailing failure in many Catholic schools to allow an appropriate pedagogical space for the exploration of doubts and difficulties with regard to faith, it is not surprising that religious education teachers in particular find themselves in a challenging situation. They have to negotiate between competing responsibilities: on the one hand, they are expected to maintain 'the norms of an authoritarian institution'; on the other hand, they are tasked with 'attending to the students' individual pedagogical needs' (McDonough 2012, p.14). McDonough sets out the problem clearly thus:

> If the school does its job of 'teaching' (as in 'presenting') what the Church directs but the students do not accept its validity, has the school done its job to meet the needs of these students? Likewise, if the school eschews any care for what the Church teaches and for expedient reasons of good relations with students and parents adapts and alters Catholicism to such a degree that it no longer accurately represents the Magisterium, is it doing its job to meet the needs of the Church? (pp.113–114)

One might ask here: what kind of picture is envisaged of the student as a member of the Church? Is it as a captive audience or as raw material for producing a faithful person? Or is it as an ecclesial citizen with his or her own critically functioning conscience? McDonough is right in diagnosing that 'One of the great challenges Catholic curricular theory faces is to present normative Church teaching in a way that respects the learner's religious freedom' (p.127), to which one might add, in such a manner as to take into account her essential agency in learning. Further on in the book, McDonough comments (p.178):

Independently of the *content* of students' opinions, the pedagogical imperative is developing students' skills in assembling, judging, and presenting rational evidence for the perspectives that they have developed.

In developing the challenge, he asks: 'How might a Catholic person challenge his or her Church without (being accused of) anti-Catholicism, apostasy, heresy, or de-Catholicizing the institution?' (p.123).

Unless this is possible, for students and for teachers, one runs the risk that an unfortunate impression is given that 'Church teaching is not a dialogue in which one might participate but a monologue to which one must assimilate' (p.195). On the contrary, as he points out:

Engaging with dissent in a way that develops a student's agency as a dissident within the Church is a way of reaching out to a fellow Catholic with the intent of helping them to re-imagine their place in the Church. (p.221)[2]

Hogan on Education and Learning

McDonough has identified a problematic area of weakness in the current theory of Catholic education. While he does not make this explicit, his argument depends on an understanding of education that envisages it as a substantive or *sui generis* activity, as opposed to a subordinate one, subordinate in the sense that its purpose is to meet the pre-set ends of some external body or community, for example, the church, the government, the political party or business and multinational companies. He hints at this in his comment that

other Catholic agencies such as hospitals, homeless shelters, and soup kitchens do quite well to work *from* a religious orientation of providing service to all in society, but without an expectation that the objects of their care are or will become Catholic persons, and without that fact being a threat to the institution's Catholic identity. (McDonough 2012, p.22)

While one should expect Catholic teaching and tradition to receive explicit, substantive, comprehensive and coherent treatment in a Catholic school, and the Church to be salient in its life and work, such salience should not override the principal role of the school as an *educational* community, one whose primary concern is to promote learning by students, however much it is in dialogue with its partners, the parents, the Church

and the wider community. The second philosopher of education I draw upon here, Pádraig Hogan, supplies an explicit examination of what McDonough leaves implicit (Hogan 1995, 2010). In doing so he provides support for McDonough and for prioritizing the agency of learners over the preservation of tradition, believing that not only would students benefit from such an emphasis, so too would the tradition.

Hogan's argument could be summarized in six steps. First, when education is considered as a form of custodianship, the preservation and passing on of a culture or tradition (whether religious, political, economic or social), schooling slips into being more concerned with the interests of what is being preserved and passed on than with the needs of those being educated. The students are being prepared and equipped to join, to maintain and to contribute to a pre-existing set of cultural, religious or other arrangements and patterns of behaviour. Hogan explains that 'Custodianship here means a schooling of mind and heart that was often as restrictive as it was enabling' (Hogan 2010, p.4). Such custodianship can be attempted by diverse bodies: 'Where ecclesiastical authorities lost control of schooling, that control passed not to schools themselves but to newly powerful secular interests, often of a utilitarian, or nationalist, or commercial tenor' (Hogan 2010, p.5).

Second, instead of seeing themselves as taking students into custody (obviously intended to be of benefit to them in this way), teachers should approach their work as a form of courtship, of wooing or eliciting and activating the sensibilities and capacities of students. This wooing of students is 'not so much of their affections, as of their best imaginative efforts' (Hogan 2010, pp.56–57). In this special form of courtship, teachers confront and engage the students' 'sensibilities … enthusiasms, aversions, inclinations, resistances, tolerances, prejudices, susceptibilities, credulities, etc' (Hogan 2010, p.57). Hogan now prefers the word 'heartwork' to 'courtship' but is still keen to retain the connotations of mutuality that are more evident in the term 'courtship'. I am not sure 'heartwork' is quite the right term here; it might be better simply to use the expression 'teachers invite students to engage with' whatever is the object of study.

Third, this does more justice than a transmission model of teaching to the essentially *joint* nature of teaching and learning, one where there is always interplay or mutual exchange between teachers and learners (and also between a tradition and its members). With regard to the transmission model, Hogan notes that 'Such commonplace usage casts teachers mainly in the active role of instructors and students mainly in the role of receivers' (p.58). In contrast, Hogan advocates an approach in which

> The student is seen not as material to be moulded to the teacher's design, nor as a mind to be furnished with a preferred body of teachings and outlooks. Rather, the student is acknowledged as a new participant in the venture of learning. (p.75)

Fourth, teachers should beware of adopting any proprietorial designs on their students; education is not about possessing learners but about liberating them in service of learning. As with other professions, education has a central purpose that is not compatible with proprietary aims. In social work, counselling, medicine and law, the primary purpose in each case, regardless of the personal hopes held by practitioners, is enabling people to cope with particular kinds of difficulties, self-understanding, health and justice, respectively. So too in education, Hogan (p.66) observes:

> I've put a foot wrong if my approach presumes some proprietorial claim on the minds and hearts of students … the explicit disavowal of such proprietorial claims is a 'must' for professional discipline in teaching.

Fifth, he finds helpful Alasdair MacIntyre's treatment of the centrality of traditions to the development of rationality, morality and practices (MacIntyre 1985, 1988, 1990), and he appreciates MacIntyre's recognition of such traditions as ongoing arguments about the goods at their heart (Hogan 2010, pp.112–113); but he also judges that MacIntyre's stance towards the role of tradition is too partisan and adversarial. In contrast he prefers Gadamer's emphasis on tradition as a conversation partner (Gadamer 1975), finding this does more justice to the mutual exchange at the heart of educational encounters (Hogan 2010, pp.121, 132). Gadamer refers to a 'fusion of horizons' made possible in an encounter with tradition: 'on the one hand, the horizon of understanding the individual brings with him or her to the encounter, and, on the other, the horizon of meaning that addresses the individual in this encounter (Hogan 2010, p.118). Hogan prefers the word 'frisson' to 'fusion' because, as he points out,

> what Gadamer has in mind is not a melting together in which all tensions are laid to rest, but an attentive to-and-fro between the learner and the differentness of that which addresses him or her. It is an interplay in which tensions are uncovered and brought to the fore rather than glossed or passed over. (Hogan 2010, p.118)

Such uncovering of tensions within the tradition can serve simultaneously to invite the agency of learners to participate in a shared journey of exploration and to contribute to the development (and perhaps also even the healing) of the tradition.

Finally, Hogan stresses that treating the sphere of education as having its own particular character and role, one that differs from the religious, political, economic and so forth, without necessarily being in conflict with them, gives priority to, and in practice is more enabling of, the development of agency in learners. It follows from this *sui generis* nature of education that 'religious traditions are to be encountered on different grounds in public educational settings than they are in homes, Sunday schools and other places of upbringing; or in churches, mosques, synagogues and other places of worship' (Hogan 2010, p.168). Such different grounds are intended, through their exploratory and interrogative modes of engagement, to complement and to illuminate, not to contradict or to reject, religious commitment.

Risks and Benefits of Promoting Agency

What are the risks that might be incurred by so stressing the importance of developing the agency of learners in the context of teaching about matters of faith, along the lines suggested by McDonough and Hogan, thus giving space to the expression of dissent and seeking to woo the emotional and intellectual sensibilities of students? These risks need to be considered and taken into account, if the teaching style one adopts is to be responsible, not least because those who prefer a more custodial approach to education (to use Hogan's term) may well be influenced by one or more of the following objections.

First, by appearing to privilege the learner over the tradition, the student might fall into the trap of picking and mixing from what is offered, develop a deficient or distorted interpretation of its 'score' and arrive at a version of it that lacks coherence and integrity. Second, and following on from the first risk, in adding to the plurality of versions of the 'score', there could be a reduced capacity among God's people to present the harmonious symphony of God's truth, which might now come across as cacophonous and confusing.

Third, giving priority to the agency of learners may lead to a situation where undue influence is exerted, consciously or unconsciously, by 'external' cultures and ideologies that are hostile to faith. Fourth, the 'court-

ship' approach may contribute to students having insufficient respect for authority (as understood by Church or school leaders).

Fifth, this might lead to an ensuing risk to the personal salvation of students if they fail to allow their nascent faith to be appropriately nourished, guided, deepened and illuminated by divine teaching, spiritual practices and a suitably disciplined moral life. Sixth, communion within the Church might be undermined because less is held in common by its members and therefore there is an erosion of the processes of bonding, binding and reinforcing of faith that can come about from the example of (and by being immersed in) a Church with clear identity, explicit boundaries and significant commonality of practice and experience. Seventh, it might be argued that by giving space to dissent, in the ways suggested by McDonough, and by following Hogan in treating educational activities as substantively *sui generis*—rather than as mere delivery methods for externally decided ends—teachers might reinforce in students a tendency to pride, egoism and undue reliance on self. They might thereby encourage in learners a reluctance to accept any teaching which they find uncomfortable, leading to an inappropriately selective and secular filtering out of Catholicism, where the demands of religious faith are muted, less intrusive or even obscured. In such a situation, teachers might find themselves colluding with students' desire to prevent important aspects of their lives from being addressed and converted.

While I would not give equal weight to each of these concerns, and despite my view that, even taken together, they should not count against the imperative, for the sake both of the Church's living tradition and of the individuals involved, of promoting agency among learners, neither do I think that they should be lightly dismissed. Teachers should be vigilant in their efforts to guard against these possible side effects of facilitating agency in learners.

To downplay agency in learners, however, might be to assume too readily that there are only gifts and treasures within the faith tradition and not to acknowledge that there are also distortions and damaging features, or, to use the terminology of philosopher of education Jane Roland Martin, to fail to distinguish the 'assets' from the 'liabilities' that reside in tradition (Martin 2011, pp.10, 128). This might deprive learners of growing in the capacity for discerning, along with others, which features of the tradition fall into which category.

What are the possible benefits from prioritizing agency, as recommended by McDonough, Hogan and others? While the seven potential

gains I comment on here cannot be guaranteed as outcomes, I believe that their promise far outweighs the various risks just outlined and that they are worth striving for with energy, expertise and enthusiasm.

First, prioritizing agency increases the chances that a mature conscience will be developed and actively deployed by learners. Compared with a reliance on a more passive reception by learners of the voice of authority, the greater degree of engagement, participation and contribution made by learners if their agency is invited, nurtured and affirmed, is likely to lead them to have a more vibrant and personal sense of ownership and responsibility for the moral values they live from. The exercise of conscience rests on a sound foundation, one that has been internalized and accepted as one's own, not merely handed down 'from above', received second-hand or borrowed from others. This was a point about which, as a Catholic, John Henry Newman in the nineteenth century was very sensitive—as is illustrated by his claim that, 'in religious inquiry, each of us can speak only for himself, and for himself he has a right to speak' (Newman 1979, p.300). Apart from his celebrated toast to conscience in the nineteenth century (Newman 1876, p.261), the overriding authority of conscience continues to be central to Catholic teaching, as is indicated in the quotation below from a theologian who later became a Church leader at the highest level:

> Over the Pope as expression of the binding claim of ecclesiastical authority, there stands one's own conscience which must be obeyed before all else, even if necessary against the requirement of ecclesiastical authority. This emphasis on the individual, whose conscience confronts him with a supreme and ultimate tribunal, and one which in the last resort is beyond the claim of external social groups, even the official Church, also establishes a principle in opposition to increasing totalitarianism. (Ratzinger 1967, p.134)

While conscience must be informed, needs to be guided by others and can be erroneous, it remains essential for the moral life and relies on acts of personal judgement and the exercise of responsibility for one's decisions and actions. Such a sense of judgement and mature responsibility cannot be arrived at without early and continuous opportunities to be agents in one's learning, in school, as well as in life generally. Teachers' appeals to agency in their students invite commitment on their part, whereas pressing for compliance is more likely to inhibit the development of conscience and of commitment.

A second likely benefit of promoting agency is that such agency reduces the frequency with which untapped potential lies dormant in learners. If one accepts Jane Roland Martin's argument that enhanced learning by individuals (prompted by their encounter with a culture or tradition) also contributes to the development of that tradition (Martin 2011, Chap. 1), then increasing students' agency and thereby activating their potential should feed into the tradition, bringing to the surface its untapped potential, and it should enhance the possibility that the tradition will be rejuvenated, reinterpreted, reconfigured, re-oriented and more creatively applied. In this way, the tradition will be able to draw more fully than it otherwise might on the constructive contribution of students in schools but also as they take their place in the world as adults.

Third, because side effects of promoting real agency might be expected to include greater participation, more confidence in taking the initiative, a deeper sense of ownership of learning, together with a more robust capacity to go on learning, students should be better equipped to cope flexibly and creatively with changing circumstances and unforeseen challenges. Where students remain members of the tradition, this capacity to adapt flexibly should benefit the tradition as well as the individual. The enhanced agency of learners enriches the human resources and gifts of imagination, initiative and creativity available for the Church's life and work.

Fourth, students who have been encouraged to become more actively engaged in and to exercise more initiative in and control over their learning are less likely to be at the mercy of the diverse range of hidden persuaders (and abusers) who might seek to enlist their loyalty or allegiance; they will be more ready to test for the veracity of the claims of others and to be vigilant as to their motives. Where educational spaces are ones that resist colonization and conquest, and where education is treated as a substantive *sui generis* activity instead of being subordinate to and derivative of externally driven aims (whether of church, government or other bodies), then educational encounters and conversations are likely to be both more positively received and more fruitful in outcomes.

Fifth, when teachers promote the agency of students they facilitate a more adept integration by students of faith, life and culture (a central goal of Catholic education), prompting learners to draw upon all of their experiences from home, friendships, school, church and the culture in which they find themselves.

Sixth, in drawing out and encouraging the articulation of the perspectives, questions, criticisms, concerns, gifts, capacities and initiatives of

young people, and through inviting greater participation by them in their learning two simultaneous gains may be achieved: one is an atmosphere of greater honesty about the very real differences among believers as to how faith is understood and lived out; and the other is a more accurate reflection of the glorious diversity of God's people, for example, with regard to worship, expressions of faith and in ways of living.

Finally, one might claim that, for each individual, revelation, whatever the external prompt, source, medium or trigger for receiving this might be—bible, church teaching, private prayer, liturgy, spiritual practices, a life of loving service—takes place within, and has to relate to, the experience of each person. Thus, promoting the agency of learners enhances their capacity for real, rather than notional, apprehension and reception of revelation, for the emergence of faith that is first-hand, one's own, instead of a borrowed, second-hand faith. Christian faith tells us that God is present to us, regardless of whether we, as teachers and learners, advert to that presence. It also tells us that no one, including the Church, can claim to monopolize, direct or control God's action in the world (Moog 2012, p.70). A failure to give sufficient priority to the development of agency in learners, if motivated by a desire to ensure that the tradition is conveyed in a comprehensive and orthodox manner, runs the danger that it might preserve sacred (but dead) relics instead of promoting the risk-laden life that draws on a living legacy.

Original Response

To bring this chapter to a conclusion, a few brief comments on originality, responsible ownership and the correlative links between obedience and freedom are in order because they bring out key features of the nature of the learning agency that has been argued for as an educational priority. With regard to originality, discipleship (understood in its broadest sense, not just with regard to Christ) entails a complex interaction between imitation and originality, of docility and creativity. Just as Christ saves me in a unique way (in relation to my unique combination of needs, strengths, sins, gifts, blind spots, situation), so my response must also be unique and particular, with my own input providing some element of originality—making something of what I have been given, doing something special and creative with my inheritance (see, for example, Jesus' parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30; Luke 19:12–27).

Teaching Christian faith, whether in church or in school, is always with a view to inviting those being addressed to transcend passive acceptance by responding with an element of originality, allowing transformation in themselves but also in the tradition.[3] 'The saint has always been an original, never an imitation', says moral theologian James Keenan (Keenan 1995, p.713), a comment echoed by moral philosopher Jennifer Herdt, who claims, of exemplars of Christian faith, that 'All are understood as having imitated Christ, but they are nevertheless a far cry from carbon copies of one another' (Herdt 2008, p.8).

In a recent article, two commentators reflect on originality as a crucial element in the response that both the church and the school should be looking for and they comment on how this relates to imitation. I quote them extensively to illustrate this point.

> The saints are all originals; they became virtuous and morally excellent in their own ways, and so too must all moral agents become virtuous and morally excellent in their own ways. They must become authentically, virtuously, and morally themselves, not simply clones of Augustine or Thérèse or Maria Goretti. … To become authentic and authentically virtuous, children must develop into *their* authenticity, *their* virtue and *their* adulthood. … They can be shaped by imitating past models but finished only by a fresh articulation. The dynamic of virtues begins with imitation of role models but concludes with authentic morality through personal decision and responsibility. (Lawler and Salzman 2013, pp.442–473, 449–450)

As for responsible ownership of one's learning, Peter Abelard taught in the twelfth century that by doubting we are brought to enquiry and by enquiry to truth (Abelard 1976, prologue). It is not sufficient for teachers to convey to students what they believe is the truth; students have to be helped to engage with the material in such a way that the outcome of the engagement is a cognitive position that they own for themselves, even if, by some criteria, that position is 'wrong' in some respects. I do not want to set up as stark alternatives what might be labelled as 'look it up Catholicism' and 'think for yourself Catholicism', since neither of these on its own can be satisfactory as a solution for individual believers, nor can they be so for the Church (Lacey 2011, p.4). In referring to problems in instructing the modern conscience, Michael Lacey (p.7) contrasts an important difference between secular and ecclesial approaches:

In the secular world … the shared aim of teacher and pupils alike is for the teacher to pass along some degree of mastery and step aside. … One graduates and comes to share with teachers the status of adulthood and its responsibilities. In the ecclesial setting [however] … it seems one does not really grow up and move on to independence, but as part of God's plan is expected to remain forever in a state of tutelage.

Conclusion

The argument of this chapter has been that education should aim for agency on the part of learners, holding in view a long-term hope that they will move from initial dependence to a mature inter-dependence, owning who they are becoming and taking responsibility for their commitments. If this view of education is accepted, then tutelage can at best be a temporary state, or, to use Hogan's term, any temptation to exercise a proprietary role over students must be resisted not only by teachers themselves but also by students as they get older.

One way that tutelage and its associated custodial role can be recognized is when teachers, in the school and in the church, 'present answers to questions that have not arisen in students' minds yet at the same time fail to face the questions they do raise'. The Czech priest, philosopher and psychotherapist Tomáš Halík suggests that 'answers without questions are like trees without roots' (Halík 2009, p.7). He says:

Insofar as we preserve our *originality* imprinted and stored by God—and we do not become a copy of others: a *forgery*—each of us will proclaim through our unmistakable uniqueness something new and truthful about God and His inexhaustible mystery. (p.48)

Then, drawing upon theologian Joseph Moignt, Halík proclaims (p.50) that 'the interval between losing the "God of the fathers" and finding *the faith of the sons* (no longer an "inherited religion" but a free response to the way the Spirit blows today) is not to be feared' because, in a generously inclusive approach to the plurality of ways that people come to find God, one might speak of these as 'different keys to opening the same room with many doors; maybe we will tend to use the one that is closer to our style of thinking and vocabulary'. (Halík 2012, pp.84–85).

Finally, it is important to hold onto the integral relationship between, on the one hand, the obedience that is part of formation in the ways of thinking, living and belonging to a tradition, formation that preserves the

continuity of that tradition across time, and, on the other hand, the freedom that is both the sought-after goal of both education and discipleship and at the same time an essential condition for the development of mature judgement, commitment and responsibility. The key feature of obedience is deep listening (with one's whole self) to the other; this requires self-giving. To give oneself, one must have a self to offer. The best form of authority is given freely, authorized by those who accept it in a free act; and for this they must have agency. Obedience and freedom are correlative states, not contradictory ones. For

> Just as great works of art evidence simultaneously a creativity (freedom) and a lawful orderliness (obedience to some harmonizing idea), so also the Christian's life is both a submission to God's 'idea' for his or her life (thus obedient) and also a creative embodiment of the Spirit's prompting (and thus free). (Steck 2007, p.158)

Furthermore,

> To interpret is not to change [God's] Word, but it is to 'play' it with all one's person, like a musical score. This musical score is the same for everyone, and it must be played faithfully, but each must play it with what he or she is, and make it a wholly personal rendition. When, through the intimate relationship with God in our heart, we come to know God's 'score,' we can play it in our lives. (Linnig 2011, p.161)

In all of this there is no sharp separation between the workings of nature and those of grace. As St Bernard of Clairvaux put it:

> What was begun by grace alone, is completed by grace and free choice together, in such a way that they contribute to each new achievement not singly but jointly; not by turns, but simultaneously. It is not as if grace did one half of the work and free choice the other; but each does the whole work, according to its own peculiar contribution. Grace does the whole work, and so does free choice—with this one qualification: that whereas the whole is done *in* free choice, so is the whole done *of* grace. (Bernard 1988, p.106)

Parents and teachers would do well to remember the lines of Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet*:

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of to-morrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.
(Gibran 1984, pp.20, 23)

NOTES

1. 'Text' here includes any body of knowledge, set of skills, connected set of practices or living tradition that the educational institution seeks to invite students to engage with.

2. Compare David Lose's reference to Ricoeur on distanciation as a necessary step towards appropriation: 'Philosopher Paul Ricoeur … describes the process of participation and distanciation that leads to genuine appropriation. … Ricoeur proposes that one needs both an immersion into the existential import of the topic (participation) as well as the critical space in which to question, wonder about, even reject the conclusions offered (distanciation) in order genuinely to actualize and internalize the truths offered (appropriation)' (Lose, 2008, 24).

3. Hogan (2010, p.67) claims that, if his heartwork perspective is adopted, this entails 'a major shift of emphasis from an order of compliance to an order of originality'. Maritain (1943, p.36) prayed, 'let Divine Love Who calls each being by his own name mould you and make of you a person, a true original, not a copy'.

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Formation and Christian Education in England

Trevor Cooling

INTRODUCTION

The language of formation is not much used in discussions of education in England, except within Catholic schools. That is probably because it raises the spectre of indoctrination, which is still one of the cardinal sins for a teacher. To admit to engaging in formation as a Christian teacher would be likely to attract the charge of confessionalism, which is widely regarded as professionally illegitimate (e.g. Alberts 2007). Many years ago, the influential philosopher of education Professor Paul Hirst (1974, 1981) described Christian formation as 'primitive' in contrast to the 'sophisticated' approach to education based on rational principles alone that he advocated. Although few today would recognise Hirst's name, many teachers live under the panoptic jurisdiction of his distinction. They experience the influential gut-feeling that education ought to be based on a neutral consensus that is common to all human beings on account of their shared rationality and values. It is this, they feel, that should be engaged in by teachers in state-funded schools and not formation based on the controversial and ideological beliefs of religious or other particularistic belief communities. Education, it is assumed, should be a neutral, secular space

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where people of different beliefs participate together in consensus-based learning, not a tribal, sectarian space where controversial beliefs are normative in a process of religious formation.[1]

However, in an influential position paper Charles Clarke, a former Labour Secretary of State for Education, and Professor Linda Woodhead, a sociologist of religion at Lancaster University, (Clarke and Woodhead 2015) broke rank and used the term 'formation' as a way of trying to cut through the Gordian knot that bedevils discussions of the nature and purpose of religious education in schools. Their goal appeared to be to find a way of embracing the aspiration of the increasing number of faith school providers[2] to offer an education shaped by a religious ethos, but without condoning a form of religious influence that would be illegitimate in the state-funded schools of a plural democracy like England. The threat posed by religious radicalisation and the need for schools to combat that was, no doubt, never far from their minds in their grappling with this issue.

In discussing the purpose of religious education, Clarke and Woodhead identified three possible models: instruction, formation and education (2015, pp.32–35). They suggested that instruction disavows both critical questioning and the consideration of alternative views and is, therefore, what the critics would describe as indoctrination. It is not, they asserted, an appropriate activity for schools. However, in their view it is an appropriate religious activity outside schools since 'trying to embed young people within a particular religious or non-religious tradition' is legitimate in a 'society which upholds freedom of religion or belief' (p.33).

Formation, they argued, may have similar goals to instruction in that it entails some form of induction into a religious way of life, but, most importantly, contrasts with it (a) by giving 'room for agency, questioning and criticism by pupils' and (b) because it 'does not ignore distort or caricature other forms of religion or belief' (p. 34). This legitimates it as an appropriate activity for state-funded schools. They did, however, think it was important that schools made clear to prospective parents the nature of the formation offered with some precision (e.g. not just Christian but *evangelical* Christian). This clearly means they expect the school leadership to give detailed consideration to the nature of the ethos. Significantly, Clarke and Woodhead go further and suggest that all schools, not just schools with a religious character, should be required to articulate the nature of the formation that they offer saying; 'it would also be desirable if non-faith (sic) schools were equally clear and self-conscious about the sort of formation they offer (e.g. liberal humanist, secular egalitarian etc.)'

(p.34). This statement implies recognition that all schools are inescapably involved in formation and is important because, if correct, it means that no school is neutral since all are involved in distinctive formation of some kind. The challenges of managing distinctiveness of ethos are not, therefore, unique to schools with a religious character, a point often argued by religious commentators but not before, in my experience, quite so explicitly acknowledged by secular discussants.

Clarke and Woodhead's third model is education, which they describe as being 'critical, outward looking and dialogical' and an approach which 'recognises diversity'. It is envisaged as preparing young people for life 'in a multi-faith society and a diverse but connected world' (p.34). This is their preferred approach, which they believe enjoys 'understanding and support' in the population at large and should take place in all schools. Unfortunately, this proposal leaves the Gordian knot uncut because it is a return to the binary choice between sophisticated secular education and primitive religious formation (albeit less primitive than instruction). Furthermore, the distinction between formation and education collapses in the one sentence mentioned above where Clarke and Woodhead acknowledge (apparently) that all schools (be they religious or not) are inevitably formational institutions. If this is true, it does not then make any sense to propose a third model called education, which seems to imply that a non-formational approach that escapes the requirement to be clear about its ethos is a possibility.

The Clarke/Woodhead overall conclusion appears to be that, in state-funded schools, religious instruction should be prohibited, religious formation could be tolerated, although perhaps reluctantly as a price of religious freedom, but religious *education* should be encouraged or perhaps even required. In other words, it is the ideal. In the end, it seems that Clarke and Woodhead have embraced the primitive/sophisticated divide that still regards formation as problematic in contrast to education, although, for political reasons, they feel that formation has to be permitted. In this chapter, I will offer a more enthusiastic embracing of their concept of formation.

The key distinction, if any is to be made, is, I suggest, between instruction and educational formation, with the former being inappropriate and the latter being what all schools, be they religious or not, should offer. I will also argue that formation, and not instruction, should be the desired goal for religious nurturing activity outside of education. What then distinguishes instruction and educational formation is, following Clarke and

Woodhead, first that pupil agency, questioning and criticism is encouraged, second that other belief positions are not ignored, distorted or caricatured, and third that pupils are equipped for contributing positively as citizens to a society where diversity of religion and belief prevails. In this chapter, I will explore an approach to Christian educational formation that shares these aspirations. However, I shall not restrict my comments purely to the classroom subject of religious education, as Clarke and Woodhead do, but will address learning across the whole curriculum and the role of Christian formation in that.

In contrast with the Clarke and Woodhead approach,

(1) I will challenge the apparent assumption that somehow religious activity is necessarily in conflict with the responsibility of state-funded education to promote pupil agency, openness to diversity and the common good;

(2) I will give up the notion that there is a sophisticated, consensus or neutral position derived from shared human values and rationality that can transcend the differences that exist between the different religious and non-religious communities present in modern Britain and is the desired or even required approach for state-funded education;

(3) I will offer an epistemological diagnosis of the challenge and outline an alternative prescription that might offer a solution.

FORMATION AS PERCEIVED IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

In my introduction, I suggested that teachers in England operated under the panoptic jurisdiction of the primitive/sophisticated binary. I will now illustrate this from a research project which I led that involved a year's in-depth work with 14 secondary school teachers representing a range of subject expertise from three church schools in England.[3] The research was designed to explore how the teachers interpreted the challenge to teach in a way that promoted Christian character formation through their everyday classroom work.[4] The researchers worked with the teachers for an academic year, observing them teach, holding focus group discussions with their students, reading the logs that the teachers kept and interviewing them on several occasions. The result was 14 rich case studies of teachers'

joys and struggles in their classrooms (Cooling et al. 2016). In the research, we observed many fine examples of what we judged to be teachers reshaping their classroom approach in creative and successful ways in response to the challenge. However, we also unearthed a fundamental issue (Cooling et al. 2016, pp.87–97).

The issue was encapsulated by Dawn, a maths teacher who described what she was being asked to do in the project as 'weird', using the word to introduce a lesson to her class that she had designed to fulfil what she understood to be the aim of the project, whilst also commenting to them that what they were about to do was 'not proper maths'. Further on in the lesson, she told the students that she preferred 'just teaching you maths'. She displayed a palpable sense of discomfort at the idea of introducing Christian ethos into mathematics. In her final interview, she described her experience as 'shoe-horning' and 'strong-arming' God into the mathematics lesson in a way that is 'not natural', violating what she regarded as her core professional responsibility, namely teaching mathematics. Fitting Christian ethos 'with something as abstract as linear equations' did not seem possible or justifiable to Dawn.

This reaction was nothing to do with antipathy on her part to the idea of Christian ethos permeating school life as Dawn was the senior teacher responsible for this aspect in her school. Indeed, she was very positive about the Christian pastoral and liturgical life of the school and advocated, for example, that all lessons should begin or end with prayer. Her hesitations were, it appeared, down to a sense that the integrity of mathematics was being violated by seeking to teach it as part of a programme of Christian formation.

This sense of weirdness was also expressed by Charlotte, a geography teacher. In her case this did not appear to derive from concern about violating the integrity of her subject; rather for her there was an issue of professional *pedagogical* integrity. The heart of the matter seemed to be that normally she would lead what she described as 'completely open conversation that takes whatever course it takes' but in being asked to teach in a distinctively Christian way she felt constrained by an obligation 'to direct the conversation' and felt uncomfortable that she was to her mind 'pushing Christian values'. Apparently lurking beneath her discomfort was a sense that she was required to indoctrinate Christian values in a search for conformity rather than teaching to promote autonomy, which she regarded as her professional commitment.

Another dimension to this sense of weirdness relates to the perception that some of the teachers appeared to believe that Christian formation requires *telling* students Christian truths in all subjects of the curriculum. This felt over the top for most of our teachers; almost *too* Christian amounting to, so to speak, levering in a Christian sermonette on sin and salvation between algebra and trigonometry. On the other hand, we also unearthed a concern in the teachers' minds that their teaching might not actually be 'Christian enough'. As physics teacher Paul pondered, 'How explicitly Christian does the lesson have to be to qualify as not tokenistic?' adding that '… there's a sense in which anything that doesn't see people becoming Christians isn't fulfilling the ultimate mission'. Not to do this is 'wishy-washy'.

My conclusion from studying the research data was that a significant reason for these teachers' difficulties with being asked to engage in Christian formation was that they assumed that Christian faith ought to be dealt with in an instructional mode for the lessons to be *properly* Christian. By this, I mean that the teachers perceived the required process to be all about telling Christian truths to pupils with a view to persuading those pupils to accept the truths. Anything less was, to quote Paul, 'tokenistic' and 'wishy-washy'. However, the teachers were deeply uncomfortable about operating within this instructional paradigm, because they regarded it as poor teaching and unethical to behave in this way in a classroom. It neither honoured the significance and integrity of their subject nor did it respect the pupils' rights to freedom of belief or recognise the diversity of viewpoints amongst the pupils, their families and in the wider world. They therefore identified strongly with the Clarke/Woodhead concerns about instruction. But for some reason they felt they were being disloyal to the Christian faith if they did not put an emphasis on the instructional goal of persuading pupils to accept Christian truths. They seemed to feel that they had to attempt to control the development of the pupils' thinking in an inappropriate way if they were going to honour the school's aspiration to engage in Christian formation in their classrooms.

The Assumption of Positivism

Unfortunately, our research did not go as far as to investigate why the teachers apparently assumed that instruction was the required model when 'embedding' pupils within a religious ethos. However, Clark and Woodhead seem to share this assumption saying that 'Religious instruction

should be principally the responsibility of religious communities and families' (Clarke and Woodhead 2015, p.33). Is the implication of this statement that religious formation, with its emphasis on pupil agency and acknowledgement of diversity, is not then something that religious communities would be expected to embrace? Is there something in common here with our teachers—namely the implicit expectation that loyal Christian teachers will adopt an instructional approach? Is there a suggestion here that embracing a formational approach entails a degree of compromise of the Christian faith? As Paul the physics teacher asked in his log, is anything less than the attempt to persuade pupils to accept the truth of Christian beliefs perceived as tokenistic, wishy-washy and not fulfilling the ultimate Christian mission? It appears that some of our teachers may have held these implicit assumptions.

This first emerged as an issue for me when I was studying for my PhD (Cooling 1994). As an undergraduate, I was inspired by the writings of Francis Schaeffer, an immensely influential Christian apologist who, in the second half of the twentieth century, challenged the modernist assault on biblical Christianity. He was one of the pioneers of the now influential movement that stresses the importance of Christian scholarship. I owe a great personal debt to his work. However, in returning to his writing as a doctoral student of Christian education a decade later, I was troubled by his approach to learning. The task for Christian educators seemed to be, metaphorically, to get the non-believer with their back against the wall so they had no option but to convert or despair. He called this 'loving confrontation'. Diversity was not to be acknowledged; pupil agency seemed to be little valued. Learning was achieved when students were persuaded to accept Christian truth. Different interpretations were to be resisted, not accommodated. To learn well was to accept true doctrine.

A recent letter published in *IDEA*, the bi-monthly magazine of the English Evangelical Alliance, provides a clue to the origins of this approach. The correspondent wrote:

> If God is as revealed in the Bible and the Bible is the Word of God, then the Bible is by implication inerrant. God is the God of truth and cannot lie, so He is not going to give us as His revealed word something that is untrue. (Campbell 2016)

The assumption behind this assertion appears to be that the correspondent's interpretation of what any passage in the Bible means can be

assumed to be exactly what God intended; indeed, that it is not an interpretation because the Bible always has a plain meaning. In other words, the Bible gives us direct access to God's intentions.

What I suggest is manifested here is what I shall call a positivist approach to Christian faith. Positivism is not, to my mind, a belief system like atheism or Judaism. Rather it is a mindset, a way of holding beliefs that can be manifested by atheists and religious believers alike. It is a particular approach that people take to the knowledge that they believe they have gained in their life. Positivism is usually associated with a scientific approach to knowledge. This values the concept of objectivity and aspires to the notion that true knowledge applies universally irrespective of the vagaries of belief. The role of education then is to pass on the uncontroversial knowledge that is the accumulation of objective academic enquiry over time. Evidence and argument lead decisively to truth. Positivism assumes that education can confidently induct pupils into the universal, established truths that are the reliable products of rational thought and its methods. It assumes consensus. Paul Hirst is an influential exemplar of the approach.

Given this description, it does not seem to make much sense to suggest that there is a Christian version of positivism. But that is exactly my hypothesis. I suggest it shares scientific positivism's confidence in inducting others into secured truths and its unwillingness to engage with alternative viewpoints. In his concern to challenge the seeming assault by scientific positivism, Schaeffer adopted the positivist paradigm in relation to his Christian faith. As God's infallible revelation, the Bible is the source of assured, true knowledge (Schaeffer 1968). Non-believers can be persuaded of its truth and believers are obliged to seek to so persuade them. The way to combat scientific positivism is, it is often assumed, with Christian positivism.

In their discussion of attitudes to the Bible and their impact on approaches to teaching and learning, Christopher Rowlands and Jonathan Roberts (2008) capture the implications of this model in their description of teaching and learning as 'baton exchange'. This consists of the expert biblical exegete discerning the fixed meanings of the text, the theologian systematising them and then the preacher and teacher applying them to life situations in modern contexts with the learner absorbing the resulting sound teaching as the final step in a linear, transmission model of learning (pp.35–36). Here learning is perceived as top-down transmission resulting, when successful, in the acceptance of authorised, authoritative meanings by the learner.

My hypothesis is that the effect of this positivist paradigm is to push people towards assuming that apologetics, the theological discipline of arguing for the faith with the intention of persuading others, is the main purpose of Christian education. The nature of apologetics is summarised in this quotation, where a leading centre in the discipline describes its function as follows:

> The Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics exists to equip Christians to defend the Christian faith against such attack, on both a popular and an academic level, offering a counter-claim to modern-day secularism. (Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics 2017)

I am not seeking to dismiss apologetics as a legitimate Christian academic discipline; far from it. It is an extremely important discipline for theological defence in the public square. Rather I wish to make two suggestions in relation to discussions of education. First, that apologetics, when combined with an acceptance of a positivist paradigm as the appropriate response to secular positivism, easily leads to the assumption that Christian education should follow an instructional model. Second, that the evidence we have from our research suggests that teachers feel that to be a faithful Christian teacher, one's approach to education should be that of the positivist apologist. Anything less is perceived as disloyal as it lacks confidence in the assured truths that come from God's word. Although our teachers did not explicitly articulate this positivist, apologetic approach, they did seem to assume that the instructional pedagogy that follows from it was required in a genuinely Christian approach to formation. It also seems that Clarke and Woodhead may have shared this assumption. However, our teachers found this pedagogical model to be weird and were uncomfortable with what they thought they were being asked to do in their Christian ethos schools. Clarke and Woodhead too epitomised the widespread unease with this instructional model.

An Alternative to Positivism

However, this assumption that to be faithfully Christian in education one has to adopt a positivist paradigm alongside apologetics as the framing theological discipline is simply not true. There are many scholars who share Schaeffer's conservative commitment to the Bible as the source of God's truth, but who do not take this positivist line to learning.[5] Loosely

they can be described as interpretivist in orientation, meaning that one of the key features of their work is that they recognise that living under the authority of the Bible inescapably entails the fallible activity of human interpretation. For them, God certainly speaks through scripture, but they acknowledge that often humans do not listen so well. The appropriate response is then, according to interpretivists, not to treat my interpretations as being of the same status as God's word, as tends to happen if people are operating under the influence of a positivist paradigm.

Anthony Thiselton (2009) is one among many influential scholars in the field of biblical interpretation. His concept of *responsible hermeneutics*, I suggest, offers a way forward. Thiselton maintains that the distinction between what he calls exegesis and hermeneutics is that in hermeneutics one asks 'exactly what are we doing when we read, understand and apply texts?' (p.4) whereas there is a tendency to assume that exegesis is a science that enables one to unearth the objective meaning of a text. Exegesis reflects, then, a positivist mindset. In contrast, he argues that every reader approaches the text with a 'pre-understanding', which he describes as 'an initial and provisional stage in the journey towards understanding something more fully' (p.12). No one, then, reads a text in the positivist way. There is always a subjective process of constructing meaning, which draws on one's worldview, reflects one's cultural situatedness and often serves one's own interests. The existence of pre-understanding is simply a fact of life, namely that we all interpret from somewhere; he argues that this is not inherently threatening to the enterprise of discovering truth, but, importantly for our topic, it does have to be taken into account. Responsible hermeneutics is then the activity of seeking meaning in biblical texts that lead to greater understanding of God's truth, whilst taking account of the fallibility of the human interpreter in doing this.

The implication of using responsible hermeneutics as a model of learning can be appreciated through New Testament theologian N. T. Wright's widely cited analogy where he compares living under the authority of the biblical text with the task of completing a newly discovered but unfinished Shakespeare play (Wright 1992, pp.139–143).[6] Wright asks us to imagine how experienced Shakespearean actors would go about this task. He suggests two significant insights. First, they would seek to be faithful to the thrust of the narrative of the unfinished play and to Shakespeare's wider corpus of writing, which acts as an authority. Their suggested completion of the play must be 'justifiably Shakespearean', a concept, which acts as a constraint on the actors' creativity and honours the authority of the

originating author. Second, they would need to be creative in writing the new text and this creativity would inevitably reflect their own situated, contextual setting and personal interests. Wright argues that Christians seeking to live their lives under the authority of Scripture face a similar task to these Shakespearean actors. The analogy affirms the conservative acceptance of the Bible as authoritative and truth-revealing, but without embracing the positivist mindset by recognising the human creativity entailed in interpreting and living under the authority of a text or tradition. It provides an invigorating metaphor of Christian formation.

This change in perspective from positivist apologetics to interpretivist hermeneutics has huge implications for how we conceive of Christian formation. Firstly, it affirms pupil agency since hermeneutics recognises the important role of learners and their context in constructing the meaning of the texts. Secondly, it demands recognition of diversity because the role of pre-understanding means that diversity of interpretation rather than consensus is to be expected. A number of commentators (e.g. Briggs 2010; Vanhoozer 1998) therefore argue that epistemic humility becomes a key virtue for successful hermeneutics, given the recognition of the influence of pre-understanding on our interpretive conclusions. In turn, this leads to a more hospitable response to the ideas of others (Bretherton 2010). Instead then of the oppositional, proclaiming, response to difference that follows from positivist apologetics, interpretivist hermeneutics motivates a listening, curious, critical and enquiring response. Christian formation in schools then that is modelled on interpretivist hermeneutics will not result in the baton passing, instructional models that do not honour pupil agency and are overly defensive in the face of difference and which Clarke and Woodhead argue are not appropriate in state-funded schools. Furthermore, if Thiselton, N. T. Wright and other hermeneutical scholars are correct, neither is such an instructional approach an appropriate *religious* activity, be that in home or church. Rather the Clarke/Woodhead formative approach seems to be the model for both school and faith community contexts. If that is true, it makes no sense to create the tripartite distinction between instruction, formation and education. Rather it should be recognised that there is a choice only between instruction, based on a positivist paradigm, and formation, based on an interpretivist paradigm. The latter, I suggest, is what both schools and faith communities should seek after, in ways that are appropriate in each of their contexts. The aim should be to produce wise interpreters. We should, however, abandon the notion that something called education, which has no formative agenda, is attainable

The outcomes of this shift in paradigm can be briefly illustrated from the story of one of the teachers in the research project. Angela taught GCSE Religious Education (Cooling et al. 2016, pp.77–80).[7] One of the modules was on social issues around the end of life. In the research, she focused on teaching a topic on assisted suicide. The usual question format in the exam is for students to be asked to give three arguments for and three against assisted suicide. Angela's past practice had been to teach her students to construct these arguments with the assumption that the Christian view was against assisted suicide and that a secular view was supportive of it. The three Christian arguments were supported by biblical texts.

In the course of the project, Angela started to reflect on the perception that her students were gaining of Christian ethics through this approach. She didn't like the conclusion she came to, namely that Christian ethics is primarily concerned with winning arguments by 'machine-gunning' one's opponents with Bible proof texts. This approach seemed to induct pupils into positivist oppositionalism. Inspired by the work of theologian Luke Bretherton (2010) on the biblical portrayal of ethical differences, she decided to take an entirely different pedagogical approach. She took Bretherton's key argument that the Bible's primary response to ethical dispute was to seek to offer Christian hospitality to one's opponent and asked how this biblical insight might shape the way she taught this contentious topic. Instead of having students develop 'three arguments for, three arguments against', she sought out video material from individuals who had first-hand experience of these very challenging decisions and set students the task of explaining each of their points of view. The rule was 'listen before you argue'. In that way, she hoped that students would take away the idea that Christian ethics is not primarily about winning arguments by quoting biblical proof texts, but is rather about showing hospitality to those we dispute with by employing interpretive hermeneutics in an attempt to reach a God-honouring conclusion. Only then did she allow them to undertake the 'three arguments for, three arguments against' exercise required by the exam.

Angela's change of heart on her pedagogy exemplifies a shift from learning framed by positivist, apologetic Christianity to learning framed by interpretivist, hermeneutical Christianity. Both approaches seek to teach in a way that honours the authority of the Bible in the Christian life. However,

the positivist way uses it as a source of 'true-truths ammunition' for proving others wrong with the intention that the students should agree with the presumed Christian line. In contrast, the interpretivist approach recognises the different ways in which scriptural teaching can be interpreted on a contentious issue and prioritises a biblical approach to how we behave in the midst of ethical disputes. Above all, the interpretivist pedagogy does not seek to control the students' conclusions, whilst still acknowledging that the Bible is an authoritative source of God's truth. However, it does frame their learning experience within a biblical approach as to what it means to learn well in Christian ethics. This transition enabled Angela to honour the diversity of viewpoints in the wider world and changed the focus of her lesson from persuading students to accept Christian truths to enabling students to think for themselves in using the Bible. Furthermore, it offered her a way of being distinctively Christian in her teaching through reframing her pedagogy rather than, to use Dawn's phrase, through levering in Christian content. Her reflection on what had happened was that it had been painful because it 'made me question what I'm teaching and why I'm teaching', but that the experience meant that she had 'just changed my whole mind-set on everything I do'.

The case study of Angela's experience illustrates three characteristics of the impact on pedagogy of a change of paradigm from positivist apologetics to interpretivist hermeneutics where the role of pre-understanding as the starting point for the interpretive process that leads to the development of knowledge is embraced:

(1) Bringing this into conscious reflection enabled Angela to reflect on how the GCSE course structure resulted in her framing her teaching in a way that led students to imagine that Christian ethics was primarily about winning arguments and to reframe that so that they no longer thought that, in an ethical dispute, being Christian was primarily about being right but rather about loving your opponent.

(2) An emphasis on critical questioning and students working out the significance of ideas for themselves, replaced the previous emphasis on pupils repeating pre-rehearsed stereotypical responses to complex questions.

(3) The importance of hearing other voices became central to the personal and academic development that was the desired outcome.

Conclusion

In embracing the notion of formation, Clarke and Woodhead took a significant and welcome step towards moving beyond the influential binary thinking that distinguishes sophisticated, secular education from primitive, religiously confessional education. In this chapter, I have built on their idea by arguing that all education should be thought of as formative. The key distinction then is between instructional approaches that are built on positivist apologetic paradigms and formational approaches that are built on interpretivist hermeneutical paradigms. The latter facilitate pupil agency, wise interpretation and helpful responses to diversity. As Woodhead and Clarke point out, such an approach applies in all educational contexts, including non-religious community schools (and not just to schools with a religious character) and the religious activities of home and church that seek to embed young people within a religious ethos.

Notes

1. I do not intend to address the issue of neutrality in detail here, but only wish to note its widespread influence. For a detailed discussion, see Cooling (2010).
2. This is the popular term for schools and academies that are sponsored by religious communities, but is often rejected by them as, for example, by the Church of England. The reason for this rejection is that faith schools are often assumed to be solely for members of that religious community, whereas the majority actually recruit students from a range of religious and non-religious backgrounds. The technically correct, although cumbersome, term is schools of a religious character.
3. Church schools in England are state-funded schools founded by Christian churches. The schools we studied were either Church of England or Catholic.
4. It utilised an approach called *What If Learning*. See www.whatiflearning. co.uk.

5. Examples of writers who have helped me greatly are Alister McGrath, Anthony Thiselton, Kevin Vanhoozer, Tom Wright and Christopher Wright.
6. Note my description here is truncated and thereby misses many of the nuances of Wright's original and the subsequent discussion of it. In Wright's approach, the authority of the text does not then primarily reside in individual propositions, but in the overall narrative or storyline.
7. GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) is the 16+ public examination in England.

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Theological Education and Professional Practice

Ros Stuart-Buttle

Introduction

There is a long-held axiom that Christian education forms, informs and transforms. As part of a book dedicated to exploring relationships between faith, formation and education, this chapter asks specifically about adult theological education in relation to professional practice in church schools. In the UK, it is not uncommon for teachers and school leaders to be appointed to church schools on the basis of having some previous theological background or else on grounds that this will be undertaken in order to enable a contribution to the religious ethos and character of the school. In such situations, the professional role and context is often a starting place, prompt or invitation for an encounter with Christian faith and theology. But the professional environment poses a starting point for approaching theology that is different from that which presupposes primary motivations emanating from strong personal faith conviction or a desire for formal study in order to enter church ministry. For the educator who views or experiences an engagement with Christian faith first and foremost as a required aspect of their professional role in a church school, then how might this influence their reception of or encounter with

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131

theological formation, particularly if this is what they are being asked to undertake by school or diocese?

This chapter asks what sort of interrelationship can exist between adult theological education and professional practice. It then presents the professional teacher as theological learner and enquires about the significance this holds for theological and faith formation. From here, Humphrey's (2008) concept of the faith closet is introduced and reasons given for why this might hold resonance for those in professional practice in church schools. This is then contrasted with a vision of adult theological education that seeks a hermeneutical-dialogical encounter with Christian worldview in a participatory ontology that breaks open the relevance of Christian theological claims, with ramifications that affect not just professional performance but every aspect of human life.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

The first challenge concerns how to define theological education as this undertaking can be approached in many ways (Astley et al. 1996). This is not a new debate. If we talk about theological education then we imply some understanding, content and process of theology and this, in itself, is complex. Which theological concepts, theories, skills or practices are to be advocated or adopted? What understanding of revelation is held? What link is to be made between God's activity, the human dimension of living and the contemporary experience of education? Do we hold a fixed view of theology understood as the content of revelation passed on from one generation to the next? Or do we see this as improbable or even impossible in a postmodern pluralistic and secularised world where, unless theology engages with everyday faith and experience, it risks being 'a monumental irrelevance to the business of living' (Wright 2002, p.xii).

Even if we accept a definition, such as that offered by Rowan Williams, of theology as ' a language used by a specific group of people to make sense of their world' (cited in Breyfoyfogle 1995, p.313) then we still need to ask what sort of theological education is relevant to enable today's professionals to make sense of their world. Here we might respond by suggesting different types of pedagogy that can be deployed (deductive/ didactic or inductive/experiential/constructivist approaches), or specify a particular curriculum to be taught (systematic or doctrinal or biblical or practical approaches), or determine a suitable academic level (basic religious literacy or a theology degree) or state what we understand to be the

core aims and purpose of doing theology (to acquire knowledge of doctrine and church teaching or to enable people to live faith-filled lives). The possibilities are many.

We also need to determine how theological education sits within an understanding of human formation. If formation is viewed holistically in terms of growth, development, a coming-into-being of the human person, then this stands against any reductionist tendencies that view education as being concerned with that which rationally informs and measures information and performance as quantifiable outputs. Indeed, long-held understandings of Christian education hold for a rich vision of the formation of the human person in body, mind and spirit and it is this vision for education that frames this chapter. Education that seeks to form and then transform suggests growth and change in the individual and the community. It is ontological and not just concerned with epistemology. It implies a deepening and enlarging of one's ability to make meaning in a complex multifaceted world and live this out in daily practice (O'Brien 2001).

So how can theology relate to professional development and practice? What relationship can exist between the two? Professional education can look to theology and vice versa but this is far from asserting they are one and the same thing as there are different purposes and outcomes at stake in each discipline. Professional development has its own normative structures, not generally founded in religion. As Vos (2011) states, to be a good professional teacher (or doctor or journalist etc.) does not imply that one has to be a good Christian. Yet it would be equally misleading to suggest a separation between theological and professional endeavours. Christian theology and anthropology hold a particular vision that sets human activity in the context of a mysterious and transformative story of divine grace (Endean 2016). So how can this relate to professional work or calling?

Scholars concur that theology has become increasingly narrowed down to an academic concept or system of doctrines and become its own object and scholarly enterprise. Farley (1996) refers to this as a fragmentation or professionalisation of theology. Historically this was seen in the organisation of theology as the preserve of the clergy schools and seminaries and then more recently in the universities, which meant that theology has more or less become removed from the ordinary lay person's experience of faith. This sort of theology tends more to academic discipline or intellectual enquiry than to practical discernment for Christian witness and living. But an older sense of theology as 'faith seeking understanding' allows a

recovery of theology, not as a cluster of disciplines or academic knowledge but as part of an ordered understanding and practical knowledge of the Christian tradition and ways of existing in the world and living in relationship with God. This makes theology not so much the ability to handle abstract propositions and doctrines of Christian faith or a 'grappling with conceptual puzzles' (Simmonds 2016, p.140) as the development of wisdom and spiritual character in the human person and the community. Theologian Karl Rahner spoke of theology as that which

> allow[s] ourselves to be challenged as whole persons with all we are, with mind and heart, with the whole weight and seriousness of existence in our times, with all the experience of our lives. (Rahner quoted in Simmonds, p.141)

This is echoed by Weeks and Grace (2007) who emphasise that theology should seek to connect the mystery of God to contemporary concrete human experience and identify with the priorities and preoccupations of the cultural context. This contextual theology moves away from danger of abstraction and idealisation to hold relevance for speaking with those 'on the ground' and enabling professionals to connect and apply theological thinking with resonance for both public performance and personal identity. It is theology involved with the needs of a contemporary world and those who live and work in it.

But does professional education want or need theology? When we look at the increasingly professional contexts of today we identify further challenges. In modern educational theory and its associated fields of the social sciences, Christian theology is marginalised. There is an assumed public culture of secularism that views Christianity as no more than a faded symbol of a departed heritage (Wright 2002). A predominantly secular professional worldview operates on its own terms and subordinates the role of faith and religion to its own norms (Chaplin 2011). For many people in an age of religious and non-religious pluralism, religion is best left to the private domain. A misconception that it has little or no part to play in the professional venture means that what is often advocated instead is a perceived neutrality or suspension of religious belief and action, seen as necessary in order to conform to the supposed norms of professional practice. We might term this 'professionalism without religion' (Holthaus 2011). But the term 'profession' itself carries religious roots. Martin Luther joined the German *beruf* (profession) with *berufung* (calling or vocation) to affirm that all work is service for God and neighbour (ibid.).

Commentators have spoken of a crisis of meaning and transmission of faith in the currents of fast-changing political, socio-cultural and educational contemporary forces. Where does this leave room for dialogue between Christian tradition and professional practice? How can professional values, ethos, practices and culture relate to theological thinking and what happens if and when these two worlds clash? Or to phrase the question in another way, which world will provide the foundational or dominant macrotheory (Heywood 1992)? Does theology risk being marginalised in modern understandings of knowledge and professional performance? Are matters of faith and theology only to be viewed as matters of personal opinion or belief and best kept apart from professional activity in a compartmentalisation strategy (Chaplin 2011)? Or can each draw upon the other in reciprocal exchange and integration to give meaning to those taking on professional roles in church schools?

There is an established literature on the need for professional development in church schools (Traviss 2000; Grace 2002; Robinson 2002; Buijs 2005; Stuart-Buttle 2017). The difficulty of assuring a critical mass of qualified professionals who are familiar with and supportive of the social, theological, institutional and educational aspirations of the Christian tradition is all too apparent. Indeed, one of the biggest challenges for church schools and educational institutions is to implement professional strategies and models in a knowledge-based economy and market-driven educational system while at the same time maintaining a Christian ethos and identity anchored in the universal teaching and mission of the church. The question is how to relate the Christian narrative with meaning and relevance for the contemporary professional and educational context in ways that uphold and promote the distinctive character of the church school.

PROFESSIONAL TEACHER AS THEOLOGICAL LEARNER

What about teacher professionals who come to theological engagement primarily via their professional situation or prompting? It is increasingly recognised that many teachers in church schools possess limited theological frameworks and knowledge of Christian doctrine. As Roebben (2016) points out, this relates not just to the content or grammar of faith but also to a lived experience of religion. This has been identified as an aspect of professional formation needing highest priority as teachers, who may themselves be lacking or limited in religious knowledge, identity and experience, are themselves are called to educate their pupils in knowledge and

understanding of Christian faith and contribute to the particular religious character of their school. Other chapters in this book also indicate how teachers, like many in today's pluralist society, are bricoleurs who assemble or negotiate their own religious identities and commitments (see Sullivan and Rymarz chapters in this book).

Teachers in church schools are not immune from viewing Christian theology as largely incomprehensible or as an irrelevant anachronism to personal worldview or professional praxis. Too often theology is seen as what the church teaches and judged as authoritarian, constrictive or simply out of touch with everyday living. It can be felt to be too sectarian, too insular and sometimes too indoctrinatory (Roebben 2016). There can be a lack of confidence or reluctance to engage with theological worldviews or church teaching that differs from secular theories and practices of education or from what personal life experience has brought. Of course, many teachers in church schools do recognise, accept and fulfil their role and responsibility. They negotiate the significance and function of being faithful to the faith tradition in an educational system where a specific religious identity is promoted alongside a commitment to contemporary praxis and professional standards. This is clear from biographical-narrative accounts of teachers in Christian contexts as witnessed in my own experience in delivering theological education for training and serving teachers across church schools. But the discernment to identify where dominant professional norms concur with and deviate from Christian theological perspectives does not always sit easily or without cost. The challenges and tensions for individuals and institutions who find themselves asked to identify, maintain and promote the integrity of Christian tradition in a wider civic society and educational–cultural outlook that no longer assumes acceptance of Christian faith, identity or practice should not be overlooked.

What might this mean in terms of professional development for teachers and school leaders in matters of Christian faith and theology? It sometimes happens that professional or ecclesial expectations encourage or prompt a passive reception or acquisition of theological language and concepts. Cooling, in his chapter in this book, has already spoken about theological education assuming instructional paradigms where baton exchange is seen as the means to hand on church teachings and the Christian tradition. This limits personal agency and religious meaning-making. Another risk is that of forcing a premature or tentative identification with faith, produced for or expected by a fixed orthodoxy from school or diocese, rather than being sincerely reflective of or emanating from one's own religious identity and

life experience. This exposes theological education to seeking a cognitive reproduction of facts without inner appropriation, a repeater of known meanings (Hager and Hodkinson 2009). It risks the professional context becoming an institutional mechanism to ensure domination or control of religious belief and identity by equipping teachers in church schools to talk the right talk in performing their professional role in school. Theology used in this way becomes utilitarian or else platitudinous, that which is needed to fulfil the professional resumé only. At worst, it becomes artificial and detached from personal–professional meaning, identity and experience.

The lives of teachers are complex and challenging (Stern 2006). Roebben (2016, p.113) states that 'every teacher is different in his own way of dealing with professionalism'. Samarji and Hooley (2015, p.1) point out that

> Professional development and growth require a thorough conversation between our internal beliefs, perceptions and attitudes (ontology) and our behaviours, acquired knowledge, experience and practices (epistemology).

Watson and Ashton (1995) suggest that any attempt to suppress one's own values and convictions has a highly constraining effect on one's professional integrity. Jochemson and Hegeman (2011) make clear that while professionals follow broad regulative principles and practices that govern their practice, they are also directed by personal biographies—motivations, beliefs and convictions—to carry out their role. This suggests that the effects of personal disposition, conviction and life experience must be brought into the open and addressed in any form of professional development. It also invites adult theological education to take serious account of this as well.

The Faith Closet

After conducting wide-scale research, Humphrey (2008) concluded that many professionals in the field of social work construct a closet in which to conceal their religious faith in a predominantly secular world. The faith closet metaphor deserves attention. According to Humphrey, a closet in the literal sense is a small back-room in which people can have private conversations or a secret place known only to the householder. It has become a popular metaphor in everyday life when referring to skeletons in

the closet, and it has been appropriated by some when they disclose a particular lifestyle or identity as coming out of the closet. Closets are also constructed to safeguard something which is significant to the self under conditions where it may be unsafe or there may be fear or reluctance to share with others.

Humphrey's research saw that even professionals with a long-standing personal spirituality or religious faith, and who were adamant that this lay at the foundation of their being, were far less clear about its implications for professional practice. They felt required to demonstrate conformity to professional and organisational norms which they saw as independent of faith, with a result that personal belief was hidden away in the private realm on account of the secularity of the professional world that allowed few opportunities to reflect on the potential for faith in their practice. This resonates with the thinking of social theorist Giddens (1987) who in turn drew upon Goffman's theories (Goffman 1959) to distinguish between the public and private zones we each inhabit. The front stage is where public identity and performance takes place, meaning that professional activities generally live up to expected social norms and standards. The back stage is where the interior self resides, hidden away from public performance and it is the gap between the two where dissonance often occurs. For Giddens, the essence of being professional is negotiating the threshold or barrier between front stage performance and back stage self. He suggests that professionals suspend and modify their roles as they interact with others, presenting a public or a private face to particular individuals and groups according to different contexts and situations. This may or may not concur with their front and back stage selves.

What relevance does the closet metaphor carry for the theological formation of teachers in church schools? Firstly, there is some merit in applying the closet metaphor more generally to the place and value of Christian faith in a post-Christian and post-secular society. When Taylor (2007) presents his various meanings of secularity, he outlines the retreat of religion from public life into the private realm alongside a decline in religious practice and changing patterns of belief, where the Christian God is just one outdated option among many. This loss or narrowing of Christian belief and practice is echoed by others. Boeve (2017) speaks of the traces of Christian faith that remain in our collective and individual religious identity formation, but points out that this is no longer the commonly accepted background that grants people meaning or authority. Meanwhile Simpson (2016, p.2) writes of the Christian perspective which finds itself

'struggling for plausibility' and is met with difficulty, dissonance and the 'strangeness of believing in the present' as opposed to what was once the case (Simpson 2016, p.2).

The closet metaphor holds further resonance when considering how theological education can fail to meet the needs of a reflexive religious competency that is surely needed in a contemporary context and public forum that surrounds church schools. The context is that of 'de-traditionalisation, pluralisation and individualisation', on the one hand, and 'subliminal forms of identity construction through the market, media and peer group' on the other hand (Boeve, 201, p. 64). This failure happens when adult theological formation encourages knowledge for its own sake; when it requires theological information or reiteration but does not give the skills or resources to explain or give an account beyond this; when it is assumed to automatically generate practice of faith and then blamed when this doesn't happen; when it presents church teachings as dogmatic, unyielding and largely incomprehensible; when it portrays religious faith and identity as having prime importance for school ethos and mission statements but marginalised in the staffroom or vilified in wider society and media culture; when professional behaviour and values are deemed to hold precedence over and above a theological worldview or faith stance. Indeed, such things challenge the role of faith and theology in professional practice and risk it being relegated to the metaphorical closet or back room.

The faith closet metaphor is furthermore helpful in enabling us to be sensitive to the dynamics and defences operating at the personal-professional interface where the relationship between (non)faith and professional identity can be problematic for teachers in church schools. While the professional context is different from that of social workers in Humphrey's research, there may still be a sense that faith among teachers in church schools is a subjective construct of beliefs and meanings that bears little relation to the tasks a professional educator is supposed to perform (Jochemson and Hegeman 2011) and so is best kept in the closet. As De Muynck (2011) suggests, each teacher possesses a unique mix of convictions and constructed worldviews as a result of past experiences, training and exposure to professional dilemmas. This holds significance when considering how theological education is perceived in professional settings.

The closet metaphor is also pertinent in the light of the fact that recent church literature across denominational settings calls for teachers and

leaders not to hide but rather to model and witness Christian faith and tradition in their school contexts. *The Way Ahead* report (Archbishops' Council 2001) states that Christian faith is desirable for a church school leader; this is emphasised in *The Church School of the Future* report (Church of England Archbishops' Council Education Division 2012). National Society guidance documentation supports this, stating that professionals in a Church of England school are expected to 'develop, sustain and reflect the Christian ethos of the school' Archbishops' Council 2009 p.1). Catholic documents on education also place a clear focus on the role of the teacher and mandate their preparation in both professional and religious knowledge. *Gravissimum Educationis* (Vatican II 1965, p.8) foresaw that the Catholic school depends upon teachers 'almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programmes' and called for them to be

> very carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualifications and also with a pedagogical skill that is in keeping with the findings of the contemporary world.

Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education 1982) took this further, recognising the professional status, activity, preparation and formation of lay teachers in Catholic schools and stating forcefully that the teacher is not just a professional who transmits knowledge of an academic subject but one whose personal faith and vocation inspires and characterises their role (p.37–38). More recent Catholic literature has further emphasised how role-modelling in faith carries implications for how staff members are expected to serve Christian education in their classroom teaching and endorse the principles and mission statement of their school (see, for example, *Department of Catholic Education and Formation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales* 2012, p.5). This does not sit well with the idea of faith and theology being kept in the closet, either shut away from professional performance or else taken out and worn occasionally like a best set of clothes when the occasion demands.

ADULT THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AS HERMENEUTICAL DIALOGICAL AND PARTICIPATORY ENCOUNTER

The idea of adult theological education as a sacred space for hermeneutical, dialogical and participatory encounter stands in contrast to the metaphorical faith closet. What follows in this section both draws on Roebben's

(2016) concept of narthical learning and relates to my own experience in adult theological formation with teachers in church schools over the past fifteen years. Roebben offers the metaphor of the narthex as 'both a pedagogical and theological place of confrontation' (p.36). This is not a place or method for the hidden curriculum of catechesis or confessional religious persuasion; neither is it a barrier or threshold through which one must pass in order to learn the teachings of the church. Rather it is both space and pedagogy for participatory encounter and critical openness, for 'the pedagogical handing over of new insights for the developing narrative identity of the student' (p.38).

Many teacher professionals acknowledge a need to secure their own knowledge and understanding in foundational theological language, concepts and key teachings of scripture, creeds, sacraments, ecclesiology, liturgy and spiritual practices. For some teachers, this may involve a first or initial encounter with Christian thinking; for others, it means a more adult or critical re-engagement with faith or church teaching encountered in childhood or earlier life. Having a foundational framework that makes sense of core concepts and teachings of Christian theology from biblical, liturgical, ethical and spiritual dimensions is important. But this in itself will be insufficient to enable teacher-professionals to negotiate the cross currents of contemporary cultural, ecclesial and educational landscapes, either for themselves or their pupils. The need for cognitive theological knowledge about the nature of Christian revelation must be balanced by affective, dialogical and hermeneutical dimensions that invite a search for meaning and participatory engagement that connects with past experience and professional performance and identity. This needs to be done with respect and regard for personal dignity, (non)faith perceptions and worldview, and with acknowledgement of the wider socio-cultural context. There must be freedom and opportunity to identify and explain one's own beliefs and incoherencies, as well as to listen and receive in dialogue with others, to question and critique Christian thinking, and to integrate how this might apply or function in professional work and concrete life situations.

Professional education theories point to the importance of forming strong identification with others to allow shared reflection on experience to shape one's practice and offer opportunities to connect personal meaning and professional performance. The theoretical framework for dialogical and reflective practice to support adult learning and professional development has long been recognised (Freire 1972; Knowles

1980; Schön 1983; Mezirow 1991). Professional theological education must likewise invite hermeneutical dialogue, within oneself and with others, in both content and pedagogy. Here we might be reminded that authentic dialogue does not invade and does not manipulate (Richard 1996). It is not exclusivist but open to intercommunication and exchange. Paul Ricoeur speaks of the hermeneutic of retrieval that invites a deeper engagement with the past narrative of tradition while Thomas Ogletree speaks of a hermeneutic of hospitality that exhibits a readiness to welcome the unfamiliar into our own awareness and be changed as a result (see Richard 1996). These twin ingredients of retrieval and hospitality can help to open up theological topics for lay professionals, especially when religious background or receptivity cannot be assumed. This sort of theological formation offers an invitation to engage with the core teachings and values of Christian tradition in order to be able to locate and consider them for personal meaning-making in the ordinariness of life and for translation into professional role and classroom practice.

Adult theological education is not about seeking to transmit superficial theological knowledge, which risks only generating 'big heads' but 'narrow hearts' (Budiselić 2013, p.148). Instead, it invites what was previously espoused as personal worldview or professional activity to be re-aligned in a process of active reception, reflection and dialogical response that carries significance for professional praxis and corresponding practical and theological understanding. According to Killen and de Beer (1994), genuine theology is always the fruit of a dynamic process of critical reflection between experience and Christian tradition. When this happens, there is possibility of new theological correlation and changed perspectives that translate with significance for both personal development and professional performance in the church school context. Instead of sitting in the metaphorical closet, adult theological education for those in church schools can invite a meaningful, authentic and life-giving encounter in the mystery of God's ways and the joys and complexities of human existence. This is what Simpson (2016, pp.366–367) outlines as 'participatory ontology'. It is a theological vision that sees that God is related to everything. It means that we can invite others and seek ourselves to understand and articulate our professional lives theologically.

Conclusion

Reasons for the present situation of many teacher professionals in church schools lacking theological grounding are varied and complex. They can be attributed to socio-historical and sociological accounts of the decline of religion in Western Europe or to the failings of religious education over recent years. They can also be attributed to the eminence of secularised education theories and pedagogies in training and professional development alongside the rise of professional performance indicators and outcomes in a market-driven society and knowledge-based educational system. However, the need for theological formation for those teaching in and leading church schools remains a clear priority for today.

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Reflections on Practice

Journeys of Faith: Personal Stories, 'Multi-logue' Narrative and Faith Formation in Schools

Andy Wolfe

INTRODUCTION

Published in Summer 2016, the Church of England's Vision for Education *Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good* (Church of England Education Office 2016) offers a rich theological and pedagogical vision for education for all. It provides school leaders with a compelling and accessible framework for thinking about teaching, leadership, learning and formation centred around four areas: Wisdom, Knowledge and Skills; Hope and Aspiration; Community and Living Well Together; Dignity and Respect. It contributes incisive theological reflections around the deeply Christian understanding and origins of those central concepts.

It is a highly aspirational and inclusive document, with much to say to school leaders in church schools of course, but equally pertinent to those working in community school contexts. In taking this deeper approach, it offers a refreshing and empowering alternative to some of the more instrumentalist, competitive and reductionist meta-narratives that can threaten to pervade contemporary educational discourse. Welcomed by school

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leaders, governors, diocesan teams and other educational leadership bodies, it is now beginning to be outworked across the UK as leaders make the crucial step of translating this dynamic vision into the lived reality of corridors and classrooms.

The vision's richness and depth offers inspiration to see each child more holistically: relentlessly ambitious for their academic excellence, but yet equally aspirational for a wider and deeper sense of personal formation, character development and human flourishing. For within this broad and holistic vision for the young people in our care, great value may be placed not simply on their academic performance outcomes, but moreover on their social, moral, cultural and faith development.

It is within this context that this chapter sits—firmly rooted in a deeply Christian understanding of education and formation, and concerned with exploring the dynamic ways that young people's faith forms and develops through their interactions with, for and against, the culture in which they find themselves.

It would be challenging to discuss the notion of faith development in schools without beginning with a consideration of significant impact of James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*, published in 1981 (Fowler 1981). This pioneering work built on the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson and Lawrence Kohlberg offers a highly articulate and well-grounded stage-based model of faith formation. While Fowler's influence in this discourse has been huge, a growing momentum of challenge has developed, largely surrounding the linear or sequential nature of the stages outlined. Such fundamental questioning of the underlying assumptions upon which the model stands demands something of a paradigm shift in contemporary thinking.

This chapter aims to evaluate the contribution that these contemporary voices have made to conceptualisations of faith formation. By reflecting on these post-modern developments, with particular reference to the impact of social media, we will consider the farming of the notion of 'journeys of faith', and explore the implications that this may have for school leaders, in relation to provision and self-evaluation. This ethnographic study builds on the sociological conception of para-social relationships (which, although not unique to social media, have grown exponentially in impact since the prevalence of such connections), to posit a new framework for this multi-layered conversation of relational identity formation. The permanent yet transient interaction of multiple social stories, locates teenagers within a 'multi-logue' (a multi-layered conversation that is many-to-many) of 24-7

interaction, characterised by constant narrative shaping and relentless identity formation. As school leaders enrich their understanding of these sociological ideas, they can improve their provision of the support, experience and celebration of narrative that can provide the setting for faith to develop in a refreshingly and reassuringly non-linear manner.

We are thus concerned with examining the impact of stories on young people's faith development, their identity forming less predictably in response to multiple intertwined external narratives. Stories can encourage and equip, they can confuse and challenge, they can even undermine and wound, but they fundamentally compel us, engage us and as we read and interact, they shape and define us. However, the identity formation of young people is negotiated not through single stories progressing in a linear manner, nor even in a dialogue—a conversation between two stories, but rather a constantly growing and changing multi-logue of experience.

Evaluation of Faith Development Discourse

In order to understand the rationale and motivation for discussing faith formation using the metaphor of a narrative or journey, or indeed the justification of the term 'multi-logue' in relation to the identity development of young people, it is important to begin by considering a range of established models of conceptualising faith formation.

Indeed, it is perhaps important to begin with the word 'faith' itself, which although used frequently in church or school contexts, is a surprisingly difficult word to define. We therefore begin with a consideration of the impact of Fowler's *Stages of Faith* (Fowler 1981), firstly noting his encouragement not to reduce our conceptions of faith to simple creedal statements or doctrinal positions, and drawing a line between the notion of faith and adherence to a religious tradition. Furthermore, he builds on the linguistic analysis of Wilfrid Cantwell Smith, to show the dangers of an overly modernist approach to the words 'faith' and 'belief', preferring instead to offer a more dynamic and creative definition of faith, namely, 'On what, or whom, do you set your heart? … what hope animates you and gives shape to your life, and how do you move into it?' (Fowler 1981, p.14). Fowler goes on to stress a holistic approach, explaining that 'Faith is an orientation of the total person, giving a goal to one's hopes and strivings' (p.14).

Jeff Astley's creative notion of altering the grammar of faith, moving the word from a noun 'faith' to a verb 'to faith', builds on this and underlines the essentially *active* nature of faith (Astley 1991). He stresses the sense of movement, and the dynamic nature of narrative in suggesting the present continuous tense of 'faithing'. The semiotic implications of this change can lead to a more active approach empowering leaders to reject a static compartmentalised notion of faith formation, favouring rather the more animated and individualised sense of a journey that teenagers are undertaking, wherein they find themselves constantly adapting and reshaping to the narratives with which they are colliding.

Fowler builds his case by drawing persuasively on the seminal developmental research of Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg. While there are some important nuances which separate the detail of their arguments, each of these three thinkers conclude in a similar way—namely that human development is stage-based, dynamic and responsive to the stimulus provided by the world in which one is acting. Their analysis of both structural–developmental and psychoanalytic positions spans from infancy to maturity, and offers useful insights into stages of growth which are most applicable to our focus on children and adolescents. Piaget (1932) sees children of a primary age as developing their concrete operational thinking, and starting to create and reinforce their own personal conceptions of the world. Erikson (1959) builds on this, suggesting that children of this age are developing the propensity to *turn outward*, within the tension of what he calls *industry* and *inferiority*. This in turn highlights a child's inherent and fundamental desire to take part in activity, tempered by a growing sense of failure, competition and self-comparison. There are of course obvious echoes here with the lived experience of a young person dwelling within a social media context—consistently aware of the need and desire to participant (and to 'look active/involved'), yet wrestling with fears of saying or doing the wrong thing.

Piaget (1932) in turn conceives adolescents as developing for the first time the ability to reflect on the course of their life, as they remember and articulate a meaningful reading of the past combining with a dynamic vision of the future. They are dwelling in a world which consistently encourages them to consider their future in relation to their present reality—for example, the teacher who implores their students to work hard for examinations because of the opportunities (in the future) these present achievements will unlock. We might consider the varying and contracting window during which this future-motivated action begins, as adolescence

appears to start at a progressively younger age. Indeed Erikson (1959) calls this *identity formation*, highlighting the experience of role confusion, as the adolescent seeks to negotiate and interact authentically with their surrounding narrative relationships. He suggests that:

> where social conditions and favourable personal relationships support young persons in building a firm enough sense of identity to feel ready to commit themselves … in loyalty to religious of other ideological visions and communities, we may expect the emergence in them of the ego strength or virtue we call *fidelity*. (Erikson, p.77)

Thus, in the context of our present study, the narrative journey of faith is inherently personal, often nuanced with multiple idiosyncrasies.

Although Fowler's stage-based model extends across the whole of life, we are most concerned in this chapter with what his model designates as 'mythic-literal faith' (stage 2—childhood) and 'synthetic-conventional faith' (stage 3—adolescence). Although recognising the inadequacies of any over-generalisation, we can identify the first of these with primary school age, where children are able to create meaning in a progressively more orderly framework. Indeed, his thesis supports strongly our emphasis on narrative, stating that, 'The great gift to consciousness that emerges in this stage is the ability to narratize one's experience' (1981, p.136). The impact and importance of narrative increases significantly in relation to faith formation, establishing itself as 'the major way of giving unity and value to experience' (p.149). Within this framework, stories give coherence to experience, and meaning is located and carried by them. The telling and re-telling of stories reinforces children's conceptualisations, and gives weight and authenticity to abstract concepts and ideas. This stage provides the foundations upon which the adolescent interaction with narrative, or indeed multiple narrative, the multi-logue, increases and grows.

The synthetic-conventional stage views teenagers as developing in their need to reflect on the trends or commonalities that emerge within a range of stories. For those growing up without any conception of a world not inherently socially negotiated online, this is enhanced even by bespoke language associated with the form, for example 'trending' where a particular idea or direction of conversation is exalted higher than others based on the volume of response and participation. This quantitative (rather than qualitative) ranking and promotion convinces the teenager that importance lies with that which is discussed most frequently, and may have a

critical impact on identity formation, not least in relation to the relatively short lifespan of what appears at first to be of the utmost importance. Teenagers can draw conclusions that lead to more principled and long-lasting reflections on personal identity. These reflections are literal and metaphorical, and Fowler uses the notion of a mirror being key to identity formation and relationships, even faith in God, where an adolescent conception of God needs to be one which is to a great extent 'self-validating': 'the adolescent's religious hunger is for a God who knows, accepts, and confirms the self deeply' (1981, p.153). Narrative and more pertinently the interplay between multiple stories appears to continue to be a crucial factor in the development of the teenager's identity: 'I *am* my relationships; I *am* my roles' (1981, p.66).

As we have seen, there are huge merits in Fowler's approach but, although its scale and scope have dominated the discourse for many years, the model is not beyond critique. David Heywood suggests that it may be 'a paradigm nearing the end of its useful life' (Heywood 2008, p.270) in highlighting the overly linear nature of a stage-based model, the lack of engagement with post-modern thinking, and indeed problems raised with the empirical research base and gender bias of the research.[1] Indeed, further to this, there can be an issue with the notion of 'rushing people through the stages' (Astley 1991, p.40). Whatever one's position on stage-based models may be, such a pressurising to move through the stages undermines the nature of the model itself while exaggerating the impact of asymmetric power relationships (between e.g. teachers and children, parents and children etc.) which can cloud genuine personal faith development in children. Whereas a linear model of faith development may have a natural attraction because of our contemporary insistence on measurable outcomes, the reality of narrative development is usually more complex, frequently less linear, and ultimately all the more interesting for it.

Furthermore, while a stage-based model may implicitly lead us towards consideration of an individual's development, the reality of story is that very few operate in isolation, with journeys of faith inherently intertwining in this notion of the multi-logue. Indeed, Astley highlights that the development of faith is usually shared within a group or community context, and thus rarely an isolated or individualised experience (Astley 1991). The impact of the re-telling of such stories (and the reaction of the community indeed to such stories) through social media has the effect of validating their authority. Small scale or miniature personal narrative (status updates,

photographs and videos), and their social validation (likes, comments and shares) by peers (however significant in normative relational terms) are all critical to the social validation of the narrative and thus the construction (or destruction) of the facet of identity. If schools are to become communities in which faith development can thrive (Erikson's notion of *fidelity* in the context of mutually interacting narrative journeys), they must become rooted in the interplay of narrative, allowing teenagers the space to develop their own identity, at their own pace and in their own way. While faith formation will become more autonomous later in life, for teenagers, the meaning-making is heteronomous (other-dependent) as these socially defined and inter-dependent narratives weave their way forward together.

Finally, we can learn much from Ivy Beckwith's examination of faith development in young people which helps to contextualise the key issues facing 'millennials' within a post-modern culture. She underlines the rejection of a universal meta-narrative, suggesting that our students in our schools do not necessarily come with the same fundamental assumptions about how truth is constructed and negotiated. In recognizing that 'one's beliefs and stories are local' (Beckwith 2004, p.23), she highlights the greater priority given to the lived-experience of individuals. These are young people who are comfortable living in the moment, and who frequently 'want to experience something before they learn about it' (p.31). This is very much in line with the notion of the multi-logue which is essentially a constant experience. Whereas in previous generations, the impact of a film or event might well be limited to its length or location, there are no such boundaries with social media—the experience continues, reinforcing or dismantling itself through the trail of comments and reactions. Most critically, this interaction of stories and experiences therefore leads to a socially negotiated epistemology for teenagers.

The centrality and interactivity of story shows that faith development may not be as causally sequential or individualised as stage-based might have suggested. These kinds of narrative are not grounded in a classic 'beginning-middle-end' notion of story-telling, but are frequently chaotic, unpredictable, intertwined and without resolution, suggesting a kind of dominance of the 'first person' over the 'third person'. Furthermore, in reading and interacting with such stories, they become dynamic not static, provoking the reader to react and engage with their own story—comparing, evaluating and re-shaping accordingly. It is to the creation, interpretation and re-creation of these socially located stories that we now turn.

The Social Media Multi-logue of Identity Formation

David Heywood helpfully suggests the value of drawing on 'reference group theory' in terms of bettering our understanding of the way that faith develops (Heywood 2008). Although he does not centre his proposal on any particular age group, the notion that young people generate their stories together in what he calls overlapping reference groups (schools, family, leisure, social media etc.) is a compelling development, and supportive of the argument to use narrative as a way into articulating faith development in young people. He explains that participation in such reference groups firstly leads to a sense of loyalty to the group, and secondly to the progress of identity formation and maintenance. Anyone working in a school context will be able to observe the relational negotiation and maintenance of identity on a daily basis. It takes place in the classroom, the playground, on the school bus, but perhaps and most importantly for this current generation, through the constantly re-imaging world of social media.

Our current students do not know a world where life is not negotiated at least in part through the twisting, turning, transient multi-logue of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. In these worlds, meaning is relentlessly significant yet trivial, permanent yet gone in a moment, utterly individualised yet inherently interactive. It cannot be tracked, predicted or controlled, and yet our students are interpreting this world, frequently seeing it as just as important as their 'real-life' interactions with one another. They are natives to this way of creating meaning and of intertwining narrative, where short epithets summarise life-changing feeling and comment streams uplift and encourage as quickly as they cut down and betray. This is a world where the drama of the story is fast-paced, unpredictable but intensely valuable. It is the world that our current students are taught about values, narrative and play their own part in creating a community that is constantly changing and adapting to itself and its needs. From this point of view, it is not surprising that a stage-based model of faith development may be on rocky ground and the linear predictability of a faith journey may be challenged. This highlights the value of story and interplay—the dance of multi-layered narratives. It gives further sociological reasoning for schools to invest in the telling and celebrating of stories, particularly in creating the conditions by which others can interact. Although there is no simple structural model resultant from this, a deep appreciation of this

element of post-modern expression further informs and enriches our understanding of the way that young people create meaning and develop their faith, literally again, their 'faithing'—a dynamic, unleashed, spontaneous and energised process for all involved.

To build on Heywood's notion of reference groups further, social media provides a complex and untangleable web of reference groups, constantly shifting in importance and value, but nonetheless locating identity formation socially. It also provides a fascinating opportunity for its users to create multiple identities and interact with varying degrees of authenticity. It would be naïve to suggest that, before this technological development, young people's identity formation did not locate itself socially, within relationships and peer groups, through all their insecurities and unanswered questions. In acting and developing within this sense of social agency, young people have consistently been shaped by and chosen to shape themselves counter to those around them, as well as in relation to wider cultural forces present. This has also been present in relation to faith formation; perhaps a key additional force here emerging would be the position and role of family within this. However, the movement towards this notion of a multi-logue posits the young person within a sociological framework in which through consistent (and expected) definition and re-definition of themselves, their interactions are on an exponentially vast scale compared to those of their parents' generation. As natives to this way of thinking, this multi-tiered approach is their normative experience of relationship building. This is not an add-on, or an interesting sideshow, to real relationships enacted in the flesh, but it is central; indeed, they have never known a world where this was not the case. Although worthy of deeper reflection and study in their own right, a number of key aspects to this interaction emerge in relation to faith formation:

Firstly, in considering the scale of social interaction, there is no doubt that the majority of social media users have access to a far greater number of people in this sphere than they might expect to relate with in the usual course of life. It would be typical for a young person to have many hundreds, if not into the thousands, of 'friends' through social media—a far greater number than any could realistically suggest were 'actual friends' with regular interaction. The exponential scale therefore of the interweaving narrative is almost too complex to conceive, the unending access to further connections and relationships acting as a genuine culture shift. Identity and faith formation is thus subject to a massively broader scale and scope of (digital) relationships, through public interactions with this

wider network of their status updates. Although not all of these digital relationships may occupy a position of deep significance or permanence, nevertheless the scale and scope of public interaction means that identity formation can be seen as less private, and exponentially amplified in its interactions and re-definitions. There is a greater sense of access to anyone within reason, alongside a tacit understanding of permission to interact (to influence and to be influenced by) on a wider scale.

Secondly, in considering the logistics of the social interaction, young people are adept at selecting the most appropriate platform for the kind of interaction that they require. One might reflect on the prioritisation of the visual image (and associated comments and reflections) offered by Instagram, the enforced shortening of updates to limited characters on Twitter, and the high-risk transience of posting on Snapchat, with its deep significant disappearing from view. In other social interactions, we might choose different media or methodology dependent on our desires for a particular piece of communication, but in allowing this collection of platforms to interact and mingle together, this multi-logue is constantly reshaping and adapting, operating inherently with a range of people through a range of platforms simultaneously.

This leads thirdly to an examination of temporal considerations in relation to the permanence and/or transience of communication. One of the great challenges and opportunities of the multi-logue is its placement with time; on one level, the pace of communication is such that even the most profound of communications is rapidly replaced within a feed, yet even the most trivial statement is permanent and searchable. More traditional verbal communication has the power to stick with us, for positive and negative reasons, but it is almost impossible to replay with faithfulness to the original utterance. The social media multi-logue provides a permanent record of what was said (or to be more precise, what was typed) from one to another (or more usually, from one to the multitude), and thus may be seen on one hand to have the potential to exert longer term influence, yet be gone in a moment. This again prompts us to question the stage-based faith development model, in favour of something altogether more twisting and turning.

Fourthly, from a linguistic perspective, the prioritisation of the written in this communication has significant semiotic implications for those involved. The signifier and the signified are that much more permanent and re-traceable in this written form, leading to an altogether weightier significance to the communication as a result. Although the initial inference

of the notion of multi-logue conjures up a picture of a multiplicity of verbal conversations, it is inherently negotiated through written text, supported and uplifted by picture and video content in addition.

Finally, the nomenclature of relationships through social media may offer some insight into faith development for young people in schools. Whether one is amassing (or losing) 'friends' on Facebook, or 'followers' on Twitter, the underlying meaning-making implications of these words is of great significance in relation to identity development. In considering the notion of 'friends', it is fascinating to reflect on the fact that while the mean average number of Facebook friends for all age groups is around 350, for those aged 12–17 it is 521, and those aged 18–24, it is 649 (Statista 2014). It is fascinating to reflect on the comparative ease of acquiring and maintaining this kind of number of 'friends' versus the reality of the number of actual friends a given young person may be in contact with. Equally, the implication of Twitter's equivalent—'follower'—has obvious connotations when one considers the notion of Christian discipleship. In both cases, the naming of these relationships gives them an elevated status, and thus to some extent increases the potential scope, scale and power of influence in young people's identity development.

Implications for Faith Formation in Schools

Having evaluated stage-based approaches to faith formation in the light of more contemporary discourse and deeper examination of the reality of the communication eco-system in which young people in schools are forming their identity, a number of helpful reflections have been outlined in relation to the way that young people's identity (and thus their faith) may develop. Through this deepening understanding of these social interactions, school leaders can become better equipped to provide the support, guidance and celebration of narrative as way into thinking about faith formation, setting this within the context of the multi-logue of faith formation.

A number of potential implications emerge for school leaders[2]—firstly for those engaged in school chaplaincy work, and the leadership of collective acts of worship,[3] tutor programmes, and indeed the facilitation and exploration of prayer and worship more broadly. Given the kind of identity formation outlined, there may be key reflections around the nature of collective worship in relation to its didactic or experiential qualities. Planning of such occasions, whether regular or infrequent, would do well to reflect

this context by avoiding simple knowledge transfer, and rather to facilitate opportunities for young people to explore together through experiences of seeing anew within the context of worship. This potential approach is extensively outlined by Alison Brown in very helpful Grove publication on collective worship (Brown 2016). Equally, for wider chaplaincy work, there are implications for the way that relationships form, for the way that students' narrative journeys are celebrated and prioritised, over against the simple delivery of programmes and courses.

In broadening this to wider pastoral care concerns across a whole school context, leaders can adopt a greater expectation and acceptance of the transience of identity formation. School leaders will be increasingly aware of new categories of self-definition, most particularly around gender of sexuality among teenagers, and given the outlined notion of the multi-logue, pastoral leaders should give great weight to the impact that non-linear relationships can have on students' development, and indeed the deep significance of social media interactions and their long-term consequences for identity and relationship formation. This opens up consideration of the twisting and turning development of more sinister and dangerous aspects to identity formation in this regard, including bullying, social exclusion and wider safeguarding concerns. Indeed, for leaders working in this crucial area of school life, particularly in relation to the spiralling issues of mental health in schools, it will be critical to reflect on the nature of these interactions and their centrality to young people's formation. Pastoral leaders need deep empathy, while recognising the deep challenges of not being native themselves to this way of thinking and developing. Their students do not know any different; the leaders need to embrace any opportunity to deepen their understanding and appreciation of this lived reality.

Finally, we opened this chapter setting our considerations of faith formation within the wider Vision for Education published by the Church of England—*Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good* (Church of England Education Office 2016). There is no imperative or justification for proselytization of students within this Vision, and such activity stands well beyond the remit of church schools. However, the refreshing and empowering focus on the four areas of Wisdom, Knowledge and Skills, Hope and Aspiration, Community and Living Well Together, and Dignity and Respect, provides a great impetus for school leaders seeking a broader and more ambitious approach to education than that offered by more instrumentalist and reductionist educational ideologies. The work of

diocesan teams and national movements such as the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership have continued to empower school leaders to adopt this kind of broader vision, for example through the insightful '*Fruit of the Spirit*' report into character education published in 2015 (Church of England Education Office 2015).

Conclusion

Having explored the nature of faith itself and the relevance of traditional models of faith development, we have uncovered some significant questions for any church school to pose itself in the quest to take this element of its identity seriously. Furthermore, the importance of narrative as a vehicle for investigating, celebrating and encouraging faith development in young people has shown a need to engage more deeply in the meaning-making processes common to students in our care. This concept of the multi-logue is offered in the context of the faith development discourse, building on Fowler and the stage-approach, and taking into account the pivotal insights proposed by Beckwith and Heywood among others. Ultimately, this meaning-making appears to be less about knowledge transfer (in the religious or moral instruction sense that can at times characterise much of our 'Christian content' in schools), and more about facilitating student-centred narrative journeys where, to some extent, the adults may need to become fellow travellers as opposed to all-knowing tour guides.

Notes

1. The growing chorus of dissenting voices is drawn from a variety of disciplines, and is most succinctly drawn together by David Heywood in his highly critical paper, *Faith Development Theory: A Case for Paradigm Change* (Heywood 2008). This paper mixes together the nuanced thinking of Astley, Streib and Reich and is further built upon by psychologist Dr Adrian Coyle in his 2011 paper, *Critical Responses to Faith Development Theory: A Useful Agenda for Change?* (Coyle 2011). Neither paper addresses the context of church school education explicitly, but both provide a rich academic response to the dominance of Fowler.
2. A range of further ideas for school leaders, alongside a deeper ethnographic study of the 'ONESTORY' project at The Nottingham Emmanuel School, is unpacked in Wolfe (2016).

3. An Act of Worship refers to the usually daily opportunity offered for collective worship within a school community. This may occur in a variety of forms, involving students and staff, and may include for example teaching, sung worship, prayers and other activities.

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A Sense of Belonging: Spiritual Development in Christian-Ethos Secondary Schools

Ann Casson

INTRODUCTION

Faith schools 'seek to keep alive and renew the culture of the sacred in a profane and secular world' (Grace 2002, p.5), which is a controversial and problematic role. Yet little is known about the contribution of faith schools to the spiritual development of pupils in their care.

This chapter draws on the findings of the Ten Leading Schools (TLS) research project (Canterbury 2017) which investigated the ways in which Christian-ethos secondary schools in England and Wales contribute to students' spiritual development. A framework, with four categories—self, community, knowledge and God—developed from the research, aids an exploration of young people's understanding of what it means to develop spiritually in Christian-ethos schools. The second half of the chapter highlights one of these categories—a sense of community—and explores its connection to the spiritual development of young people in one Church of England school. The chapter concludes with a brief consideration of the implications of the TLS research project for a critical understanding of the process of spiritual development in faith schools.

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What Is Meant by 'Spiritual Development'?

Spiritual development is a vague term open to a variety of interpretations (Davies 1998, p.123; Francis and Robbins 2005, p.29). Meehan points out that the terms 'spiritual development' and 'developing spirituality' are often confused both in academic literature and in schools. The latter term is primarily relevant in the context of faith; the former is 'educational in intent, relevant for all' (Meehan 2002, p.291). Indeed, it is a legal requirement of all UK schools that they attend to the spiritual development of their pupils. This is defined by The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) as follows:

> Pupils' spiritual development is shown by their ability: to be reflective about their own beliefs, religious or otherwise, that inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people's faiths, feelings and values; sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them; use of imagination and creativity in their learning willingness to reflect on their experiences. (Ofsted 2016, p.35)

Ofsted's secular non-religious understanding of spiritual development reflects the emphasis of much of the research in this field on spiritual development in terms of health and mental well-being and/or the development of the child (Birkinshaw 2015). This chapter considers spiritual development in an educational setting, as relevant for all, but views it through a Christian lens.

It makes the assumption that spiritual development is an essential element of being human. It has its roots in the Christian belief that all are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26), and that the role of education is to enable all to reach their God-given potential and live life in all its fullness (John 10:10). This includes enabling and encouraging all young people to develop or deepen an awareness of the spiritual dimension of life.

Schools with a Christian Foundation

The focus in this chapter is on spiritual development in schools with a Christian foundation, with the example considered being a Church of England secondary school. The Church of England is the largest provider of schools and academies in England, with 4700 schools educating 1 million pupils (Church of England 2016). The terms 'faith school' and 'church school' are often used interchangeably in academic literature and

in the media; and 'faith school' is often employed to mean a school with pupils of one particular faith. This interpretation of 'faith school' is not generally applicable to Church of England schools, where it cannot be assumed that all the students share the faith of the Christian foundation. Many of the school leaders in the TLS research project preferred the term 'church school' to that of 'faith school'.

Since the nineteenth century, the Church of England has been involved in the education of young people, and their schools traditionally have held in balance a 'domestic' function of education of children from Christian homes, and a 'general' function of service to all in the community (Francis 1993, p.54). This century, the Church of England has focussed on ensuring that 'all Church schools must be distinctively and recognisably Christian' (Church Schools Review Group 2001, p.14). More recently the Church of England has developed 'a model of education that is both thoroughly Christian in its foundation and highly attractive to most others in education because of the quality of its outcomes for children and young people' (Church of England Education Office 2016, p.1). *The Church of England's Vision for Education: deeply Christian, serving the Common Good* emphasises the Christian roots of education and sets out a vision for education based on the basic elements of wisdom, hope, community, and dignity and respect.

The Ten Leading Schools Project

The research findings that underpin the discussion in this chapter are drawn from the TLS project, which investigated the ways that ten secondary schools with a Christian foundation, in England and Wales, influence the spiritual development of pupils. The project was an initiative set up by the National Institute for Christian Education Research (NICER) at Canterbury Christ Church University, working in association with Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) at the University of Warwick. The research employed both quantitative (WRERU) and qualitative methods (NICER).

The ten participating Christian secondary schools[1] were selected through an application process, and all share a commitment to making a positive contribution to the spiritual development of their students. The strength of this project has been to listen to the views of staff and students on what they perceive to influence their spiritual development in the context of their school. When the responses were examined through the lens

of a professional researcher, common themes emerged that illuminated the influences on young people's spiritual development in these schools and in the wider context of Christian education.

The data generated by the TLS research project highlighted the rich diversity of approaches within these ten secondary schools, influenced by factors such as location, student population and the spiritual leadership. The findings revealed a wide variety of features that contribute to positive spiritual development, such as models of chaplaincy; character education; collective worship; a sense of community (Christian and inclusive); the creative arts; a 'Christian' curriculum; the school environment; extra-curricular activities; pastoral care; prayer, Religious Education (RE); teachers as role models; and Christian vision, values and virtues.[2]

Four Categories of Student Response

One outcome of the TLS research has been the development of a framework that emerged from the students' responses, which provides an aid to the exploration of young people's understanding of spiritual development. The student focus groups in all ten schools thoroughly enjoyed discussing this issue, actively seeking to articulate and explain their understanding of spiritual development. Their responses provide an interesting insight into young people's awareness of what it means to be spiritual. They fall into four distinct categories:

(a) The development of self: 'what you should be, what else you could be and how you need to respond to the world';

(b) A sense of community: a connection with other people, 'the person's own sense of who they are in their connection to each other, and in being there for others';

(c) A quest for meaning: a deepening of knowledge and understanding, being able to articulate an informed reasoned opinion on matters of faith and religion; and

(d) A relationship with God: this is often spoken of in terms of getting closer to God and/or making a connection with God.

These categories of responses are inter-related although, at different times, one or another of them may be prioritised by individuals and schools. These categories resonate with the four categories identified by Hay and Nye: child-God, child-people, child-world and child-self (Hay

and Nye 2006). Deakin Crick and Jelfs (2011, p.199) highlighted the Scottish Churches Council's definition that includes developing a sensitivity to self, others, non-human creation and God. Of interest is the one obvious difference between these frameworks for studying spiritual development and the categories that emerged from the TLS students. In these students' responses, there was a lack of reference to the 'child-world' or natural world perspective. Instead the TLS students emphasised the sense of seeking meaning, deepening knowledge and understanding the 'weaving the threads of meaning and spiritual questing' (Hyde 2008, p.4).

The development of self, a deepening of an awareness of self, what you are and what you can become, was identified as a key factor in Hay and Nye's research. The Christian-ethos schools in the TLS research project sought to prioritise this aspect of spiritual development with a focus on: raising students' aspirations; ensuring that pastoral care in school was about removing the barriers to living life to the full; embedding character education in all aspects of school life; and providing time and space for reflection in the school day.

An over-emphasis on this aspect could raise a concern that spiritual development may be seen as being only about the individual, encouraging growth 'in which the inner me takes precedence' (Thatcher 1991, cited in Davies 2007, p.311). A necessary counter-balance to this is the Christian belief that one's own spiritual development 'cannot be separated from that of other people or from the flourishing of families, groups, communities, institutions, nations, and the whole of creation, so that hope and aspiration are social as well as individual' (Church of England Education Office 2016, p.15). The focus of the second half of this chapter will be to explore further the interconnection between spiritual development and the sense of community but, before we consider this in detail, a brief consideration of the two other categories highlighted by the students in the TLS research.

In the ten Christian-ethos secondary schools, the development of self was underpinned with an understanding of the importance of quest for meaning, Young people are searching 'for authentic ways of being in the world' (Hyde 2008, p.162). For many young people, spiritual development was about gaining a greater knowledge and understanding to enable them to develop an informed opinion about the spiritual dimension of life and develop 'their' spiritual identity. In the TLS research, students drew attention to Collective Worship[3] and RE lessons, as these were seen to provide the time and space for students to question, discuss and form

opinions around the big questions of life, or complex theological concepts. However, it is interesting to note that, in the minds of some staff, there was a perception of a conflict between a teaching and learning focus on academic excellence and a focus on the spiritual development of the individual. However, many RE teachers in these Christian ethos schools argued that they were inextricably linked. The leadership in all ten schools had taken a comprehensive approach to spiritual development, embedding it within the curriculum, thereby addressing a concern that, within many Church of England schools, spiritual development is more often related to religious practices than 'a consistent and generic approach to spiritual development within teaching and learning' (Deakin Crick and Jelfs 2011, p. 198).

The final category in this framework is that understood elsewhere as an awareness of a transcendent other. It is an awareness of a sense of awe and wonder, but within the context of these Christian-ethos schools it was most usually identified as an awareness of a connection to God. For many students in the schools in the research, a key aspect of spiritual development was the choice of whether or not to develop a relationship with God. Worship time in school and the presence of a prayerful culture were key influences in this regard.

WORSHIP IN A SAFE SANCTUARY

The value of the framework and the complexity of the issue of spiritual development is perhaps best demonstrated by consideration of a concrete example. It leads to further exploration of the connection between a sense of community and spiritual development. This example draws on data generated by the qualitative research in a large comprehensive Church of England school in England. Observations and interviews[4] were undertaken in three-week-long visits to the school in 2014–2016.

A snapshot view of one morning worship offers an insight into the influences on the spiritual development of students in this school. In this school, morning worship took place each day in a student's form class, or in a year group assembly or for a small number of students in a section of the school where small group interventions took place. (Interventions provided additional support with, for example, English as an additional language, extra literacy and numeracy, critical thinking, speech and language and social skills.) This space for these small intervention classes, was a 'safe sanctuary': the SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator)

explained that a core group of 'anxious' learners came in every morning 'for safety, security, and peace of mind'. In fact, it was the SENCo who first drew my attention to the practice of morning worship with these learners because for him it summed up what this Church of England school was all about.

On the day of the research visit, the teaching assistant was supporting a small group of year 10 students with extra English. It was a mixed group including Christians, students of other faiths and from non-religious backgrounds. The majority were 'regulars'; they had been meeting together in this place since year 7. The worship was led by a student Ed (pseudonym), using resources prepared by the chaplain. It followed a set format: welcome, engage, respond and reflect. Ed had prepared discussion points and interpreted his role as making sure that all took part and listened 'respectfully'. Following the worship, the students spent the next 20 minutes developing English literacy skills using words and concepts inspired by the morning's theme.

For Ed, who attended Christian worship at the weekend with his grandmother, morning worship in school is important. He said

> It is about having an out of and in school connection to God obviously, for others who don't believe in God or Christianity, they still get some sort of message out of it, because it still projects out goodness into them.

For the students, this morning worship was 'basically private', with a group of their peers whom they knew well and trusted, where they had an opportunity to explore a 'connection to God'. One student explained that the security of being in a safe place meant there was 'more faith … between each other'. It was a moment in the day when they could develop the spiritual awareness, develop a realisation that, as one student explained, 'God sort of is there to help you along with your learning'.

> [Worship] brings you close to God in the morning so that you know that God is throughout …He's with you throughout the whole day, and that if you're stuck in any work you know that you can just pray and God will be there to help you. (Student)

The staff explained that because 'our learners sometimes aren't as articulate [as other students, and] don't have the social skills, … the small group [worship] really allows them to have a voice'. The routine of regular

morning reinforced a sense of togetherness and provided a space to question and time to reflect. This style of worship was common throughout the school; many students identified it as an important contributor to their spiritual development; it was where they talked about spiritual matters. The centrality of reflection in worship time was deliberately planned. The School Principal said that there was time for 'periods of real reflection [time] to develop those deeper feelings, how God might be speaking to you, that's thrown out as a very open challenge with a variety of responses'.

Morning worship within intervention classes was deliberately decided upon by the school leadership stemming from a focus on establishing an inclusive Christian ethos. Morning worship time was prioritised and protected throughout the school so, in all morning intervention classes, worship was incorporated and, where possible, the worship theme was employed to deliver the intervention. For these students who may not find their voice elsewhere, within this small group worship they had established a worshipping community.

A Sense of Belonging

Looking at this short example through the lens of the researcher, a theme that had emerged in other interviews and observations in this Church of England secondary school came into focus: a sense of belonging to a Christian community, where you could worship together, share faith and develop spiritual awareness.

> This place gives you a sense of belonging. This place is a community; I take it for granted until I talk about it actually. This place is an absolute community that I'm very lucky to be in and a lot of people's professional lives will never feel that. (Staff member)

The TLS research in this school showed that it is often the less visible, the less quantifiable, that students and staff identify as positively supporting their spiritual development. It is the sense of belonging expressed in such things as the 'hello' in the corridor, the Principal 'knowing your name', the hospitality in the kindness of the catering staff both when you were suffering and when you were celebrating, the space and time for quiet reflection, the prayers shared with others daily, the conversations at break or lunchtime with friends when you could talk about your faith and continue discussions started in morning worship.

It's in the way that people look after each other and care for each other, it's in the way that this school has done things for its community, … the moral encouragement, and the decisions that we make. The way that we behave and the way we treat other people. (Student)

A sense of community can be based on subjective feelings, sentiments and traditions, which bind people together (Driscoll 1995, p.219). Nevertheless, a desire to feel part of a community has its roots in the human need for a 'sense of belongingness' (Osterman 2000, p.6).

How does this sense of community contribute to spiritual development? Two key ways could be identified in the example from this Church of England secondary school: the relationships of openness and trust that support and encourage spiritual development, and a sense of belonging to a community that shares one's beliefs and values.

A sense of belonging to a community that shared one's values and beliefs is important. Staff and students stressed that this Church of England school is a Christian community; it is a school community with 'a connection to God' (student) where 'spirituality is everywhere' (staff). A school community that believes itself 'quite different…because we're very inclusive, God's at the heart of our community' (Principal). From its beginning the school had prioritised:

laying those firm foundations [of a Christian community] … knowing that if you get that right everything else is going to follow, but you've got to get that right, [and] protect it fiercely. (Principal)

Deliberate decisions were taken by the school leadership to ensure that the community was intrinsically Christian, sustained by Christian values and practices. For example, daily morning worship was prioritised and protected as highlighted in the earlier example. Another approach taken was to actively support a culture of hospitality within the professional community of the school. A sense of a welcoming inclusive community was strengthened by 'seemingly small things' such as encouraging all staff to come together once a week for tea and cakes at break. For staff to model the virtue of hospitality, inclusivity and nurture of each other influences attitudes within the student community. This emphasises that the school community is not simply the student cohort, but all staff and students are part of one community, learning and spiritually developing together.

The school was not a community of Christians. Indeed, the senior leadership team had deliberately taken decisions to establish admissions criteria, which ensure a 'mix of family backgrounds' including students from all faiths and non-religious backgrounds, identifying this as highly beneficial to a Christian school community that seeks to be inclusive.

> There needs to be a core of Christian families, you have to, in order to make the whole thing work … but you definitely don't have to draw from exclusively Christian families. (Principal)

These school admissions criteria inevitably influence the nature of the school community. It provides both the challenge and the opportunity to create a positive environment which is both 'very inclusive' and 'intrinsically Christian' in which all can develop spiritually. A senior leader characterised the sense of community as a sense of togetherness in a school community. He described it as a community where 'all individuals being completely different to each other have the commonality of sharing this one place where we can all get along, which results in a togetherness'. This concept of 'togetherness' encompasses a sense of inclusion, it emphasises diversity, and stresses that individuality is not 'merely' tolerated, but celebrated.

Meeting with students of faith and non-religious backgrounds emphasised this sense of togetherness, and highlighted the diversity of faith beliefs among young people. There was the young Hindu student who appreciated the stillness of Anglican daily worship as reassuring of God's presence in his school day, the young Jewish student who 'basically knows more about Christianity than Judaism' because she has always been to a Christian school, and the many 'Christian atheists', who self-identified as 'non-religious', but held together an eclectic mix of Christian beliefs and practices. This diversity of beliefs and practices demonstrated that there is no simple answer to the question often raised as to what extent non-Christians have a sense of belonging to a church school. For many students and staff interviewed, a sense of belonging to the school community was not tied to their understanding of their spiritual identity.

Within this school, sustaining a sense of belonging to a Christian community contributed to a climate where relationships of openness and trust could develop. Spiritual development is relational; Hay and Nye (2006, p.111) speak of 'relational consciousness'. It is about developing positive

relationships with others and being supported by others to develop spiritually. It is an understanding of these relationships as Martin Buber's I-Thou, characterised by a depth of encounter and engagement, rather than I-It relationships (Hay 1998, p.15).

One consequence of the development of open, trusting relationships within a school community is the openness to faith conversations.

> There are … opportunities to talk to people about Christ and they're quite open to it. Often having a school friend who shows you what its really like to be a Christian … helps a lot … Outside the classroom, sometimes a break and lunch … it sounds really boring, but we start talking about faith. (Student)

An openness to talking about faith with one's peers was mentioned by many students. A Hindu student maintained that he could express his faith openly 'because my friends are actually listening and find it interesting to find out about different cultures and the different festivals and things'. Talking about faith was viewed as important for spiritual development, it was seen as essential to have 'people you can talk to and share… [in a place where] we can say what we think, and explore those ideas' (staff member). Staff said that they themselves were 'open to talk about religion [this] encourages students to think about what they believe themselves' (staff member). It is in these conversations about faith, in the classroom or outside, that students explored, questioned, challenged and reflected on the spiritual dimension to life.

The students described a school community where talking about faith was the accepted norm, and where believing in God was 'the norm'. Bert Roebben (2009) speaks of the development of a narthical learning space within RE. For Roebben, this narthical learning space, drawing on the concept of a church narthex,[5] is not a stepping stone into the Christian faith, but it offers a space 'to look at [life] from a completely different perspective' and invites the learner into 'productive otherness' (2009, p.17). It is a safe space to encounter, explore and reflect on the spiritual dimension of life. The establishment of a sense of belonging to a Christian community, characterised by relationships of openness and trust, meant that the whole school could be functioning as a narthical learning space, a positive environment in which spiritual development of all may flourish.

Reflecting on Research Findings

This example demonstrated how a sense of belonging to an inclusive Christian school community makes a positive contribution to students' spiritual development. It is of value to consider further the implications of these findings. The strength of a sense of community and the Christian-ethos of the school echoes previous research findings (Bryk et al. 1993; Revell 2008).

> The value of community and the ethos of the school as a community was an ideal that teachers repeatedly emphasized. In the private schools, spirituality was firmly linked with the idea of religious community. … the principals and teachers at the schools we visited believed that their schools were examples of the spirituality characterized by their particular religion. (Revell 2008, p.110)

However, it must be recognised that the Christian ethos of these schools is created by an interaction of all participants, all members of the school community. This is a rejection of the traditional view of ethos that it was something imposed from on high, something determined by those in authority and transmitted to all participants (Donnelly 1999). A key strength of the TLS research project was giving a voice to the students within these schools. These young people are active agents, they make an essential contribution to the nature of the ethos. This shows that the Christian ethos of a school cannot be imposed: it is dependent on the contribution of all members of the school community.

However, this research has also drawn attention to the value of nurturing a sense of community and making explicit to all the Christian nature of that community. Within schools, spiritual development 'requires strategies that create the space and time, embodied knowing and relationships which are crucial to this endeavour' (Deakin Crick and Jelfs 2011, p.200).

The TLS research findings have highlighted the influence of a sense of community on spiritual development. A sense of belonging to a community which shares one's values enables students to weave 'the threads of meaning' (Hyde 2008, p.4). Such a community is a place where 'young people can encounter the guidance and scaffolding of experience, opportunities for silence, stillness and reflection' (Deakin Crick and Jelfs 2011, p.200).

To view this example through the lens of social capital, it could be seen that these Christian-ethos schools were generating strong 'bonding

capital' (Putnam 2000) within the context of a Christian community. The strength of this bonding capital enables the growth of spiritual capital, defined by Gerald Grace (2002, p.236) as 'resources of faith and values derived from commitment to a religious tradition'.[6] This resource of spiritual capital provides a rich environment in which young people can develop spiritually.

There are many implications of these findings from the TLS research project for faith schools that wish to prioritise spiritual development. Key implications to emerge from this exploration include the importance of having confidence in being a faith community, in this case a Christian community, by making explicit the Christian nature of the community in the school vision, in the rules and rhythm of life, in daily practices and in spiritual leadership. Another implication is the importance of realising that spiritual development is not a by-product of the school ethos, it does not 'just happen', but needs to be nurtured by prioritising strategies that support it, such as protecting time for daily worship and making deliberate decisions to enhance a sense of community within school. The research findings have also demonstrated the value of listening to the voice of young people, and recognising them as active agents in their spiritual development. The value of this cannot be underestimated.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an insight into the findings of the TLS research project. It has provided a glimpse into the experience of morning worship with a small group of students, and explored why a sense of belonging may encourage spiritual development by creating a safe space where faith conversations happen and meaningful worship could occur.

It has highlighted the potential influence on students' spiritual development of sustaining a strong sense of belonging, and the benefit of developing a school community recognised as Christian and inclusive, where students and staff perceive that spiritual development can develop and flourish.

There is an obvious need for further research in this area. The TLS research project was limited to ten Christian-ethos secondary schools. Further research is needed to explore the value of the framework developed from the TLS research, and to investigate the ways in which a wider variety of schools contribute to pupils' spiritual development.

NOTES

1. The schools were asked to provide evidence that they were a 'leading' school in the area of spiritual development. Applications were scrutinised by the TLS steering group and ten schools were selected from across England and Wales. Eight of the schools are Church of England schools, one is joint Anglican-Catholic and the other an Oasis academy. Oasis Community Learning has 47 academies in England. Their vision is to provide exceptional education at the heart of the community, 'where everyone is included, making a contribution and reaching their God-given potential' (http://www.oasiscommunitylearning.org/Vision-and-Values [accessed 5 April 2017]).

2. The stories of the ten Christian-ethos secondary schools are being published in Casson et al. (2017).

3. In England, collective worship is a statutory requirement of all schools, church and community. In a Church of England school, it should reflect the Anglican tradition. The format, time and content vary; the term includes year or house group assemblies, and worship in form class groups.

4. In total 34 interviews were carried out, involving 36 students and 16 staff. The staff interviews were mostly individual and the students were interviewed in a focus group. Some were interviewed more than once.

5. A narthex is the exterior porch of a church.

6. A more detailed definition is available in his later work (Grace 2016, p.48–49).

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Religious Education: Where to from Here? Reflections on the Trajectory of Australian Catholic School Religious Education 1965–2017

Graham Rossiter

INTRODUCTION

The only purpose of Australian Catholic schools is to fulfil the Catholic church's mission. They should increase young people's engagement with the church to become regular attenders at Sunday mass. (Key ideas from the homily of a current Australian Catholic archbishop)

My concern has not been with [Religious Education] curriculum issues, but more with faith formation programs, seeking to know 'what works'. (In a letter from a bishop on the Australian Catholic Bishops' Education Committee)

This chapter proposes that much can be learned about the potential future of a meaningful and relevant Religious Education (RE) in both school and various other contexts (not just in this country) by critically evaluating the trajectory taken in a specific context—classroom RE in Australian Catholic schools 1965–2017.

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Rather than reprise or summarise work already been done in interpreting the historical development of Australian Catholic RE (see, e.g., Buchanan 2005; Ryan 2013; Rossiter 1981, 1999; Rummery 1975; Lovat 2009), the focus will be on how two particular aspects have changed, and on some implications for the future. The two areas of change are

1. How religion teachers managed their dual commitments to the church and to the personal development of their students.
2. Change in the key words used to explain the normative purposes of RE.

How Religion Teachers Understood and Managed Their Dual Commitments to the Church and to the Personal Development of Their Students

The history referred to above showed that in the 1960s, as a result of significant socio-cultural change, educational change and changes in the Catholic church in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, there was a period of uncertainty and some confusion in Catholic school RE. The old ways of the green catechism, Bible history and apologetics were no longer felt to be relevant, but it was not clear just which new direction should be taken. But one thing was quite evident: religion teachers worked hard trying to make RE more relevant and meaningful for students. To this day, commitment to promoting the personal development of young people and to trying to continually improve the relevance of RE has never been lacking in Catholic school religion teachers.

In the 1960s, the RE teachers were almost all members of religious orders. They had committed their lives to the service of the church, so no one could question their commitment to its welfare or to the promotion of its mission. Nevertheless, these same teachers never saw RE as an exclusively ecclesiastical activity. They hoped that they could educate students well in the Catholic faith tradition and hopefully too, this might leave them favourably disposed towards a long-term engagement with the church; but these hopes were held in creative tension with efforts to help young people make sense of life, and to negotiate the perils of adolescence in what was becoming a more complex and challenging culture. These dual commitments were so strong, so embedded and held in creative tension that they were often taken for granted and not articulated as they

have been here. In my experience of that period, I never met a religion teacher who thought that getting the students to Sunday mass was the central aim of RE—even though there were some teachers, parents and vocal groups like Catholics Concerned for the Faith who felt that faulty RE was responsible for declining mass attendance. Religion teachers thought that good RE would benefit young people whether or not they chose to be regular church goers.

At this same time, following new government funding arrangements for private schools and the gradual development of diocesan Catholic Education Offices, there was not a strong exercise of church control over the religion curricula in Catholic schools. There were Catholic doctrinal syllabuses, but the religious order schools were in effect free to develop their own religion curricula. This was also a vogue period for SBCD—School Based Curriculum Development—and this was often the only sort of religion curriculum in operation.

So both schools and religion teachers had freedom to experiment. With this freedom and given the period of rapid change, there was much trial and error in RE. Also the religion teachers in the 1960s and 1970s often had little in the way of professional learning in scripture and theology.

One significant development at this time was the Communitarian retreat. It was introduced in 1964 by South Australian religion teachers trying something different from traditional practice, which might help address the spiritual and religious needs of young people. This marked an important turning point in the conduct of school retreats. Within a few years, what began as an innovation by a small group of religious educators eventually became the norm for retreats for Catholic secondary schools across the country. This was a substantial, 'grass roots' educational innovation (Rossiter 2016). This 'practitioner leadership', together with effective support by the authorities in the religious orders was crucial for the nationwide spread of the new style retreats. The success story of retreats as well as helpful experimental approaches in the classroom were possible because of the freedom and independence that religious order schools and religion teachers were able to exercise. As could have been expected, there was also a down side to this freedom where there was evidence of some unprofessional and naïve practices by individual teachers.

A crucial lesson to be learned from this history is that healthy Catholic school RE needs to retain a creative tension between ecclesiastical concerns and teachers' views about the spiritual/moral needs of pupils. Where there is no creative tension, and where ecclesiastical purposes predominate, RE

could more readily be perceived as if it were just 'telling students about Catholicism'. There has long been a tendency for ecclesiastical interests in RE to be concerned with promoting engagement with the church and regular mass attendance; from the teachers and students' points of view, this focus appears somewhat unrealistic and not so relevant to young people's lives. Naturally, ecclesiastical expectations of RE will be conservative. In the sense of conserving and handing on the religious tradition, these are valuable, justified purposes. But if this perspective is so prominent to the extent of eclipsing other more personal development and educational purposes, then RE runs the risk of being perceived increasingly as irrelevant.

By the 1990s, a general consensus emerged about what might be best described as a 'subject-oriented' approach in RE. This meant that religion was treated as a core learning area in the school curriculum, aspiring to be as challenging as any other learning area, with content and pedagogy that did not suffer by comparison with what was being done in other subjects. This included all the protocols and procedures of the established academic subjects/learning areas—with a normative curriculum, objectives, performance indicators, varied student-centred pedagogies and appropriate assessment and reporting. In many Catholic secondary schools, RE in Years 11–12 consisted of a state board-determined course in *Religion Studies* (or *Studies of Religion*) which had the same academic status as subjects that counted towards tertiary entrance scores.

For many religion teachers, subject-oriented RE was about educating pupils religiously and spiritually—it was an educational exploration of religion and not necessarily a religious experience as such. There still remains, however, some variation in the estimates of teachers about how devotional and religious the activity should be. This ambiguity is also related to language problems in RE to be discussed later.

At the same time RE was acquiring more academic status and respectability in the school curriculum, it was being affected by an increasing tendency to regard it as more an ecclesiastical activity than an educational one. I believe that this tendency runs counter to the core academic character of RE. Also, the more centralised and fixed the religion curriculum, the less freedom there was for adapting RE to meet contemporary needs.

My conclusion from this is that there is an urgent need to restore the creative tension between educational and ecclesiastical concerns. This is needed above all not only to promote the relevance of RE as an academic subject for students but also to promote research, creativity and innovation in RE.

It is pertinent to note that the academic study and research related to RE at tertiary level (in Catholic and other institutions) is a crucial reference point for maintaining a creative tension between educational and ecclesiastical concerns. Tertiary RE has usually always had academic freedom giving it the independence needed to explore and appraise insights from education and the social sciences, as well as from theology and religious studies.

The Language for Australian Catholic School Religious Education

In education, different constructs develop over time to articulate new theories for enhancing teaching and learning. But in almost all areas (e.g., Mathematics education, English), the basic name for the endeavour remained the same. But in Catholic RE, a variety of names emerged to describe the process. All of these words were ecclesiastical and their meanings reflected more a church perspective on enhancing the religious life and practice of students than a view of what it meant to *educate* them religiously.

Within the discourse of Catholic schooling, the ever-increasing use of ecclesiastical words has tended to eclipse, and create ambiguity about, the fundamental term *religious education*. The frequent use of phrases like faith development, faith formation, Catholic identity, catechesis, new evangelisation, mission and ministry to encompass (or even replace) RE tends to makes unrealistic presumptions that what happens to pupils psychologically during religion lessons will change their faith and religious practice. And what gets neglected is a realistic understanding of what it means to *educate* them spiritually and morally. This latter purpose is one that RE can actually achieve quite well, but efforts to enhance pupils' religious knowledge do not automatically generate personal faith. Also, a successful, meaningful, and relevant RE cannot adequately be appraised in terms of traditional religiosity performance indicators like Sunday mass attendance.

Through different metaphors and perspectives, the ecclesiastical terms noted above can nuance the understanding of RE from the church's point of view. But there is also a downside—too many normative constructs can constrain thinking and can stifle freedom and creativity, as well as create confusion about fundamental purposes. This echoes the issue in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty Four* (first published in 1949) where

authorities controlled people's thinking by deciding on the keywords to be used and then defining their meanings. The problems for RE posed by ecclesiastical language were identified as early as 1970 by Gabriel Moran in the article *Catechetics RIP* (1970). They are even more prominent today. Religion teachers readily recognise the problems when they are discussed in postgraduate RE programmes, and the ambiguity both they and their parents see in the ecclesiastical terms is evident in research findings (e.g., Finn 2011). But this is an issue yet to be widely acknowledged and addressed in Australian Catholic schooling.

Below are some reflections following a language analysis of normative Catholic documents since the Second Vatican Council that have had a bearing on the discourse of RE. (The analysis data is available on this site http://203.10.46.163/grrossiter/RE/Index.html.)

It is important initially to note that the succession of Roman documents dating from the Second Vatican Council have been more generally concerned with the church's broad Ministry of Catechesis and the Ministry of the Word. RE across age groups, and more specifically RE in schools, is only parts of the wide scope of those documents. But they have often been read by educators as if everything applied to the school context. By contrast, the documents from the Congregation for Catholic Education—especially *The Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education 1977) and *The Religious Dimension of Education in Catholic Schools* (Congregation for Catholic Education 1988)—were more focused on the Catholic school and RE. Percentages are of the total numbers of words in a document that can refer to RE.

The Vatican II 1965 document *Gravissimum Educationis* (Declaration on Christian Education: Gravissimum Educationis 1965) focused mainly on the word *education* (66%). This emphasis was both expansive and ecumenical in scope. It was naturally open to dialogue with other Christian denominations where 'Christian education' was prominent. This also articulated with the wider, international discourse of education, showing how education within a particular religious tradition and 'educating one's faith' could make a valuable contribution to people's spiritual and moral development, as well as to civic education.

In 1970, the Italian and Australian bishops in a sense 'jumped the gun' in publishing their post Vatican II directories, *The Renewal of the Education of Faith* (Australian Episcopal Conference 1970) before the Roman *General Catechetical Directory* (Congregation for the Clergy 1971) was issued by the Congregation for the Clergy in 1971. The idea of educating

people's faith was carried through from the Vatican document, while catechesis (23%) became more prominent—it was used only once in the Vatican II document.

A sharp decline in the use of the word 'education' was evident in the Roman *General Catechetical Dictionary* (1971). From roughly 70% prominence in the Vatican II document, education was virtually replaced by a 70% usage of 'catechesis' and 'faith'. This naturally inhibited ecumenical links with those outside Catholicism who used the words education and Christian education. From then on, the discussion of RE from a normative Roman Catholic perspective tended to become 'in-house' and not as open to the wider educational discourse because it was more or less locked in to a set of ecclesiastical constructs that had little currency outside the Catholic church. This also meant that the RE endeavour was understood and talked about more as if it were an ecclesiastical activity. The more ecclesiastical, and correspondingly the less educational, it was perceived to be, RE became increasingly insecure in the Catholic school curriculum. If it was not regarded primarily as education, in all likelihood this would eventually have negative consequences in terms of the perceptions of teachers, students and parents.

As might have been expected, the Roman Congregation for Catholic Education's 1988 document *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988), as also its earlier document *The Catholic School* (1977), gave special attention to the word education—consistent with the emphasis in the Vatican II document. These documents helped raise the status of RE in the Catholic school curriculum, noting that it was distinct from catechesis. From the church perspective, both catechesis and RE were needed, and RE was 'at home' in the school.

The Roman document *The General Directory of Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy 1997) was a 1997 rewrite of the 1971 *General Catechetical Directory*. It too was concerned with the church's ministry of the Word and not just education in Catholic schools. The word frequencies for both documents were similar.

While not as prominent as the other ecclesiastical constructs, the words mission, ministry and witness were used in all six documents. They showed a church mission perspective on activities. Religion/religious was common through the documents—used 200 times in the *General Directory of Catechesis* and 10 times in *Declaration on Christian Education: Gravissimum Educationis.* Theology/theological was less common—21 and 18 times in *The Renewal of the education of Faith* and the *General*

Catechetical Directory, and not at all in the *General Directory of Catechesis* and the Australian NSW bishops' document *Catholic Schools at the Crossroads* (Bishops of NSW and the ACT 2007)—it was used twice in *Declaration on Christian Education: Gravissimum Educationis.*

The Australian document (Bishops of NSW and the ACT 2007) used education four times more frequently than catechesis. In addition, it is the first of the documents to use the specific words 'faith formation' and 'Catholic identity'. While forming/formation, develop/development and identity (to a lesser extent) were used in the earlier documents, the precise words 'Catholic identity' appeared only once (in the 1997 Roman document), and 'faith formation' not at all. Somewhat surprisingly, the term 'faith development' does not appear in any of the six documents; it did, however, come to have great prominence in Australian Catholic RE circles after the publication of John Westerhoff's *Will our Children have Faith?* (1976) and James Fowler's *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning* (1981) (see also Crawford and Rossiter 2006, Ch.18).

What is a feature of the 2007 *Crossroads* document (Bishops of NSW and the ACT 2007), which contrasts with the focus on education in the Vatican II document, is the way that RE was treated primarily as an ecclesiastical process. Coupled with this assumption was a concern that, despite the high level of resources invested in Catholic schools, they were not successful in inclining young Catholics to become regular church goers. Because of low church participation rates amongst Australian Catholic youth, it was considered that there must be a crisis of Catholic identity in Catholic schools. New evangelisation and strengthening Catholic identity were proposed as principal strategies for 'reigniting' young people's spirituality and improving their engagement with the Church. Increased Sunday mass attendance was listed as a performance indicator for Catholic schools. This author contests these views, considering that there is no crisis of identity in Australian Catholic schools, and that there are no causal links between Catholic schooling/RE and the ultimate mass attendance rates of Catholic school graduates. RE is about educating young people religiously in their own tradition as well as helping them find a more meaningful view of life in a complex and confusing culture. This is primarily an educational task and not an ecclesiastical one; and Catholic schools are capable of doing this well. But no matter what the quality of school RE, this cannot make the church more meaningful and attractive to young people—only the church itself can do this. While there is evidence of a

widespread crisis in the Catholic church, this cannot be said of Catholic schools in Australia, which are thriving (Rossiter 2010a, 2013). This chapter is ultimately about helping to make Catholic school RE more meaningful and relevant for pupils. Making the church more relevant is of great concern for Catholics, but it has a different and extensive agenda to be addressed, and school RE has little if anything to do with that.

The Language of 'Faith Formation'

In 1987, one priest Diocesan Director of Catholic schools said, 'What we need is faith formation and not religious education'. Then and subsequently I found that those who used the term rarely if ever defined what they meant. It appeared to be used with the connotation that somehow faith formation was more important and influential than RE—as if the intention to *form* faith made the activity more effective in changing the quality of the individual's personal relationship with God. Education was apparently considered inferior to formation. No indication was given about how an observer could look at activities and clearly see why one was faith formation and others were 'merely' RE. Also apparent in the connotation was its focus on recruitment to regular mass attendance; this seemed to be the criterion of faith formation that 'works'. I consider that this language trend devalues RE and distracts from giving attention to what it means to educate young people religiously.

Faith formation has etymological roots in the use of the words 'houses of formation' in first half twentieth century religious order practice in Australia (and elsewhere). Formation was like a 'religious Marine boot camp'. The emphases were conformity, 'marching in formation', uniformity, obedience, being moulded and changed personally according to a desired model. Faith formation tends to become something of an oxymoron when this connotation is associated with a comprehensive view of Christian faith as a committed personal relationship with God, and as a gift from God freely accepted.

On the other hand, 'education' today tends to connote being informed, critical thinking and personal autonomy. It may be that fear of such potential could foster a negative view of RE and a more positive valuation of faith formation because it seemed to better serve ecclesiastical purposes.

Faith formation tends to be used more with reference to voluntary religious ministry programmes than with reference to formal RE. But its

increasing prominence in schools is now eclipsing RE and this will in turn devalue its place in the school curriculum and its status as a challenging academic subject.

A division between 'educational' and 'faith formation/faith development' aspects of the school's overall RE can make a useful distinction but it uses the wrong language to do so. It makes long-term outcomes, or more accurately 'hopes', take the place of the main process word. It gives an impression that the educational engagement with religion in the classroom does not contribute to the development of the individual's personal faith—and this is not the case. The classroom study of religion can make a vital contribution to the understanding and deepening of the individual's faith. This would be the one aspect of the overall development of an individual's faith that is most in tune with what schools do best—educate.

The points made above are also pertinent to interpreting problems with the use of the other ecclesiastical terms such as faith development and Catholic identity, as discussed elsewhere (Crawford and Rossiter 2016; Rossiter 2013). What surprises me in the new focus on Catholic identity is an absence of substantial ideas about what it means to *educate young people in identity*—this is a topic that is in my opinion a crucial one for RE.

A corollary to the problems considered above is the emergence of new religious leadership positions in Catholic schools. Originally there was the Religious Education Coordinator (REC) or Assistant Principal Religious Education (APRE). Now there is a variety of positions with names like Director of Catholic Identity, Dean of Mission, Coordinator of Mission and Catholic Identity, Director of Evangelisation, Faith Development Coordinator. Anecdotal evidence suggests that apart from changing the language patterns, this development has had no appreciable impact on the quality of RE and pastoral care in Catholic schools. This is an issue that merits investigation through research. It must be noted that these comments are about language and new leadership roles and not about any evaluation of the Enhancing Catholic Schools Identity Project that has been conducted in Catholic schools across the country, and especially in Victoria.

One postgraduate student told me that over a few years, across two to three schools, her leadership position changed from REC to Dean of Mission, then to Director of Faith and Mission and finally to Director of Catholic Identity. She noted: 'It would be difficult to find large discrepancies between these role descriptions…There needs to be a lot more thought put into decisions made related to the titles of Positions

of Leadership in the area of Religious Education'. The current preoccupation with the construct Catholic identity seems to have influenced some schools that have changed the name of the college to include the word Catholic.

The same problems with ecclesiastical language for school RE have affected the academic discipline of RE in Catholic tertiary institutions. Where it has become more ecclesiastical, and less academic and research oriented, it is weakened as an academic discipline. And this in turn has negative repercussions within school RE. RE at tertiary level should be a 'lighthouse' for academic freedom and independence both for its scholars as well as for the educators who engage with scholarship in their professional development studies.

Recommendations

In the light of discussions with Catholic school religion teachers in postgraduate programmes over the years, I know that these conclusions and recommendations will be acknowledged as important and in need of further consideration and debate. I also know that not all will agree with the interpretation and some will find the conclusions challenging because they do not sit comfortably with the status quo or because they conflict with the views of authorities. My confidence in the views expressed here is based on practitioners' judgement that they are *realistic*, and as such they could be tested by research.

It appears to me that the biggest problem facing RE in Australian Catholic schools today is the perception that it is essentially an *ecclesiastical* rather than an *educational* activity. It needs to be thought of, talked about, appraised and developed more as *education* and not judged in terms of how it promotes pupils' church practice. This would hopefully restore the creative tension between the ecclesiastical and educational concerns that operated just after Vatican II—this does not mean returning to the same practice of those times. I consider that this will be the best trajectory for the students and also for the church.

My comments and recommendations are organised under three headings.

(1) *Building up the critical dimension in the RE curriculum: Trying to address the needs of contemporary young people to help them chart a constructive path through the maze of contemporary culture.*

The complexities and ambiguities of culture today both promote human well-being as well as causing harm, leaving casualties in their wake. RE is well placed in the Catholic school curriculum to help young people look critically at the shaping influence of culture on people's beliefs and values. Also it can study the importance of religions in contemporary discourse and world affairs. It is no longer adequate or relevant to spend practically all the RE curriculum time studying Catholicism. Adding elements of a critical approach, especially from Year 9 onwards, dealing with a selection of contemporary life issues (personal, social, political, environmental etc.) can help young people 'interrogate' their cultural conditioning to discern both the healthy and unhealthy influences. A student-centred, research-oriented pedagogy can empower the students to develop critical skills in studying important issues in an academic way. Such an approach helps resource their basic human spirituality and can help them better negotiate the complexities of contemporary life and find a more meaningful and satisfying pathway—whether they are formally religious or not. This approach needs more prominence in the secondary RE curriculum, complementing the important need for young people to study their own religious tradition in an academic way—together with some reference to other religious traditions (Rossiter 2010b).

(2) *Taking into account the religious disposition of the students and their perceptions of RE.*

Religious educators need a good understanding of contemporary youth spirituality as a starting point for seeing how RE might enhance spirituality. In addition, the relatively secular spirituality of most students in Catholic schools needs to be acknowledged and addressed in other than a 'deficit' way (Rossiter 2011). It helps to note recent statistics.

Data from the National Catholic Education Commission (2012) and from the National Church Life Surveys (Dixon et al. 2013) show that in 2012, there were 734 thousand students in 1706 Australian Catholic schools. Seventy-one per cent (522,000) were Catholic and 29% (212,000) were not Catholic. Of the Catholic students, the surveys suggest that by the time they reach their twenties less than 7% will be regular church goers, that is 37,000. This means that overall just under 700 of the 734 thousand pupils will not be Sunday mass attenders. While there was an overall increase in the total number of Catholic students by 1000 over the

years 2006–2012, in the same period the numbers of non-Catholic students increased by 46,000.

In the light of this data, there is an apparent discontinuity between the assumptions within Catholic school RE (as if all students are or should be regular mass attenders) and the classroom reality. Catholic RE documentation showed little or no acknowledgement that most Catholic students are not (or will not be) churchgoing. If many of the pupils are not going to reference their personal spirituality to regular church attendance, then this makes it more relevant to attend to the proposal above that increased attention to a critical approach is needed to help resource their spirituality. Whether students have a religious or a secular spirituality, the crucial thing for Catholic schools is whether they are *well educated spiritually and religiously.*

In tune with the general indifference to religion in secularised Western countries, most of the pupils in Catholic schools do not care much for RE. They do not see it as a subject that 'counts', and while not antagonistic, they do not engage in RE in the same way they do in subjects like English, Mathematics and Science (Crawford and Rossiter 2006). There are no formulae that can change such perceptions significantly, but anything that increases the academic status, as well as perceived relevance, will help.

I think that the inward-looking focus of asserting Catholic identity in RE exacerbates the problem; it is like 'RE through a *selfie*', where the constant reference to Catholic identity skews the perceptions. The emphasis should be more outward-looking—simply on developing the *education* dimension to RE. Having a rationale for RE in words that explain how it helps *educate* young people is more likely to win the approval and moral support of students and parents, as well as teachers, than does a rationale that appears to be just about replicating Catholicism.

Some may not want to acknowledge the reality here, but the more the word Catholic is used the more the activity is perceived as irrelevant. This is a principal reason why I think that the current emphasis on Catholic identity is counterproductive—it is not the label that RE really needs. For example, there appears to be further decline in the academic status of Catholic school RE as evident in the perceptions of *Catholic Studies* in some NSW secondary schools. It is a Board-endorsed study but does not 'count' for tertiary entrance scores like regular subjects including *Studies of Religion*. *Catholic Studies* is often chosen by students (when religion is compulsory but there are options) who want the least interference in their

secular studies. It may be taught with the understanding that there are no assignments or homework with a short open book exam at the end of the year, while the teachers may feel that they can do anything to keep the students reasonably occupied whether the syllabus is covered or not.

(3) *Simplifying the language of RE and exercising leadership in Australian education*

I consider that the confusing ecclesiastical terms noted above need to be phased out and only used where their meanings are clearly defined. In practice, they tend to carry ill-defined and unrealistic assumptions about religious starting points, goals and processes and this adds unwanted ambiguity and complications to the discussion. It would be more fruitful to redirect the discourse towards how best to educate young people theologically, in scripture, in personal identity development, and in critical interpretation and evaluation of the shaping influence of culture. In the long run, I think this change of focus would also be more successful in disposing students towards the ecclesiastical hopes for Catholic schooling.

This change in focus and language is not only more meaningful and relevant for Catholics, it makes the RE discourse more accessible to the Australian and international educational communities; it also readily articulates with educational and psychological research. Otherwise, the discourse remains narrowly and idiosyncratically Catholic. This change is also important because Australian Catholic schools are in effect semi-state schools funded by state and federal governments; they are therefore accountable to the civic community and need to show how they are contributing to the common good (Bryk et al. 1993; Conroy 1999). Such a rationale is better suited to justifying continued state funding.

Conclusion

Educating young people spiritually and religiously from within a base of their own religious tradition makes a valuable contribution to the education of young Australians. This exercises a leadership role in Australian education showing that a well-rounded schooling needs a subject area that deals directly with the spiritual and moral dimensions to life. As the school system that maintains the largest commitment to RE in terms of teachers, curriculum and teacher professional development, Catholic schools can demonstrate how a commitment to this dimension of education might take shape.

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'We Need to Keep the Door Open': A Framework for Better Understanding the Formation of Younger Teachers in Catholic Schools

Richard Rymarz

Introduction

The quality of education in Australian Catholic schools is dependent on teachers. The formation of teachers is, therefore, a primary consideration in maintaining religiously affiliated schools. Two recent developments have added a particular urgency to this simple observation. Firstly, changing demographics indicate that many teachers—described as Baby Boomers (or those born in the period immediately after WWII)—have begun to leave the profession in very large numbers (Rymarz and Belmonte 2014). Secondly, emerging social contexts place new demands on teachers. A better understanding, therefore, of younger teachers is especially important as they are the ones who will be facing these challenges in the classroom.

There are many ways that religious commitment in contemporary culture can be conceptualized (Singleton 2014). Some clarity is necessary, therefore, in order to establish a framework for discussion. A detailed examination and definition, however, of terms such as religion and

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197

spirituality are beyond the scope of this chapter. What will be explored here is the concept of negotiated religion as a template for better understanding younger teachers working in Catholic schools.

Religion is often seen as being distinguished by key markers such as participation in community rituals, close adherence to official teaching and strong religious salience in participants' worldview. As a consequence of these factors, those who are highly religious derive strong affective satisfaction from their beliefs and practices. People in this category tend to describe religion as a very important part of their lives and that they cannot ever see themselves as not being an active part of the religious community (Bouma 2006).

It is clear that many today are not religious in the sense described above (Dobbelaere 2002; Baumfield 2005; Mason et al. 2007; Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2010). When religious commitment is negotiated, however, beliefs and behaviours are not seen as binary choices, that is, a person is either religious or not religious and that there is very little common ground between these positions. Indeed, in this view no longer is the only alternative to high commitment no or very limited commitment. Rather, the ground between these two poles seems to be somewhat elastic and dependent on personal circumstances. As a result, beliefs and behaviours may vary over time. This dynamic view has some parallels with the notion of lived religion (McGuire 2008). Simply put, lived religion looks to everyday life to find examples of people seeking out some type of transcendent dimension to life that is beyond a simple positivistic worldview (Ammerman 2013; Mercadante 2014). Importantly, a range of options are now available and multiple associations are possible such as maintaining a historical but somewhat distanced institutional affiliation alongside other more secular allegiances (Lambert 2005; Stoltz et al. 2015). Wuthnow described a similar process where many, in the face of so a multitude of options, 'tinker' with what is available to them and arrive at a personalized system of meaning, which is modified and adapted in accord with changing circumstances (Wuthnow 2007). This allows for some associations to be time dependent and of varying intensity (Usher 2005).

The new reality reflects a much more fractured position where the boundaries that supported religious communities in the past have become much more porous (Hoge et al. 1994). While people may not be strongly committed, they are also able to retain some type of connection with a religious community. The nature of their involvement though is fluid and can be seen as a manifestation of negotiated religion. The exact contours

of this negotiation can be quite complex and idiosyncratic depending on circumstances. The basic features though are quite clear. In a negotiated religiosity, individuals select from a range of behaviours, beliefs and social interactions that best meets their needs. One desired aspect is wanting some type of religious affiliation but this must be neither too onerous nor premised on ongoing, strong affiliation (Dixon 2004; Rymarz 2013).

Catholic schools, and the teachers who work in them, are imbedded in this new cultural context (Rymarz 2012; Franchi and Rymarz 2017). Many younger teachers are shaped by the new forms of religious expression that are evident in the wider culture, the most notable of these being a loosening of association with religious communities (Cook 2000; Belmonte and Cranston 2009; Rymarz and Belmonte 2014). In addition, many of the traditional religious supports, such as a strong network of religiously engaged friends and family, are not a feature of the lives of many younger Catholics (Rymarz and Graham 2006; Smith et al. 2014; Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2014; Dantis 2016).

A critical question then for those involved in Catholic education is how can formation and support of younger teachers working in schools be best facilitated. It can no longer be assumed that younger teachers in schools will arrive with a strong sense of identification with the Catholic community. Schools, therefore, can take on an important role in their formation.

Methodology

This chapter reports on an empirical study that examined how younger teachers in Catholic schools can be better supported, especially, with regard to their formation as educators who can support and animate the Catholic identity of the school. Younger teachers, defined in this study as teachers less than 30 years of age, were chosen as they, potentially, represent those with the longest careers in Catholic schools still ahead of them. In addition, younger teachers are also the ones who are likely to be influenced by the changing social landscape discussed in the Introduction section.

In the study, key members of school leadership were interviewed. It was reasoned that school leaders are in a good position to give an authoritative overview of the formation needs of younger teachers due to their longevity of service and also their role in interacting with a large number of younger teachers. In the future, it is anticipated that this study will be expanded and younger teachers themselves will be interviewed on what they see as their formation needs. In the course of the study, 36 semi-structured

interviews were conducted. All interviewees were from the same regional Australian diocese and were invited to take part by the local Catholic Schools Office. Participants comprised 7 priests, who in the Australian system have oversight over primary schools, 7 principals, 11 Religious Education Coordinators (REC) and 7 principals who also served as RECs were interviewed. In total, over 75 per cent of schools in the diocese had one school leader interviewed as part of the study.

Each participant was interviewed for no more than one hour. Interviews were seen as an effective way of gaining insights from educational leaders on the formation of younger teachers. Interviews are well suited to this task as they are a means to delve into complex issues (Wuthnow 2016). The interviews followed a semi-structured, in-depth pattern (Minichiello et al. 1995). Three general probe areas were established, namely the religious experience and background of younger teachers in schools, with special reference to family, religious beliefs and practices and social networks; what is being done to support younger teachers and how can these strategies be developed; and any particular challenges in the formation of younger teachers. All interviews were recorded. After each interview, participant responses were analysed in detail, using contemporaneous notes as well as the taped record. On the basis of this analysis, thematic response codes were developed (Miles and Huberman 1994). These codes were related to common responses and dominant categories identified. These categories then informed the next interview, and response categories became more and more refined (Taylor and Bogdan 1984). Interviews were conducted during work hours at either the school for principals and RECs or in the presbytery for priests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There was a strong consensus amongst those interviewed that younger teachers were highly valued and offered great gifts to Catholic schools. One principal put it in these terms: 'they [younger teachers] are fantastic, they give a real energy and dynamism to the place, they really are the future'. Many of the participants also commented on the willingness of younger teachers, when asked, to support the Catholic identity of the school. To illustrate this, many participants commented on teachers being involved in sacramental programmes that involved close cooperation with parishes.

In the view of those interviewed, many younger teachers are not well connected to parish communities and, while willing to support the ethos

of the school, find it difficult to spontaneously animate Catholic witness. This finding is to be anticipated if we take the view that teachers in Catholic schools are imbedded in a changed cultural context and not separated from this. Younger teachers in Catholic schools are influenced by the same cultural forces that shape students and their families. The results here support the contention that younger teachers in Catholic schools are not networked to supporting religious structures. One principal summarized this point well when she made the very pertinent observation that there was a time when schools were part of a Catholic culture that was far more cohesive. The well-known analogy of the three-legged stool where family, school and parish all reinforced each other was apt. She commented,

> When I was growing up we all went to church and then we saw all our friends again at school on Monday morning. It's not like that today, where do our teachers get their support when the door [of the school] closes.

More porous religious boundaries mean that what happens at school is of great significance in the formation of the teacher as an effective witness and educator.

From this study, there emerged a number of fascinating and informative vignettes about younger teachers in Catholic schools. These invite further work in this area. For example, one principal/REC described a younger teacher on her staff in the following terms:

> she's found her place, went to a Catholic school, goes to Mass at Christmas and Easter or when one of her brothers is receiving a sacrament, it's just not a priority for her.

In a similar vein, another REC commented that many younger teachers in her experience in Catholic primary schools teach Religious Education in a 'positive' fashion. She went on,

> RE is part of the job they do it well but I'm not sure how much of it is enthusiastically embraced in their own lives…I suppose they're in a bit of a bind really.

Many of those interviewed spoke of the need to assist teachers with content material in Religious Education as there was a gap here that was exacerbated by a lack of connection with parish communities.

These findings point to a religious mentality amongst younger teachers that is not static but rather can take on new contours in response to particular circumstances. This is well illustrated if we consider major school-based liturgical events. There is a sense that many younger teachers, in the terms of one principal, will 'fill the breach' on these occasions. As one REC commented,

> we have great class Masses once a term, the teachers all take part, take a leadership role but they don't follow up on this. Next Sunday they are not at Mass, bit like the parents really.

The final phrase here makes the telling point about the similarity between parents and teachers. This is not necessarily a complete correlation. Teachers are more likely to have higher level of involvement in parish communities than other Catholics of a similar age but it is a higher point on a continuum. As one priest remarked,

> the Mass is something that most [younger teachers] closely associate with school, I think you would find the same thing with prayer and reading the scriptures.

When teachers work in Catholic schools they are accepting an emphasis on religious identity and seem to be willing to support this, especially when it comes to major celebrations. The participants in this study strongly made the point that when new, younger teachers are interviewed for positions. The Catholic identity of the school is clearly enunciated. One principal put it in these terms:

> we spend a bit of time with them during the interview explaining what we do and the first point that I make is that we are a Catholic school and they need to be on board with this.

Many of the priests made a similar point. From the school's perspective, its identity is clearly set out and it can be assumed that when teachers join the school they are acknowledging that they can work within this framework.

If we accept teachers are prepared to support the religious ethos of the school, this needs to be seen in the sense of people accepting an invitation. Some principals expressed a view that they were, on occasion, frustrated. Others seemed to question why their staff were not more connected with

the worshiping community. One principal captured this sentiment well when he commented on the difficulty that he has in attracting applicants for positions at his school who display a strong and readily professed Catholic identity. He noted,

> It's not like we are turning them away. It's just hard to make these appointments when we do not have those people applying. Our only option is to work creatively with what we have.

This again is consistent with a cultural template that sees religion as something that can be negotiated. Even if teachers arrive at the school without strong religious commitment this can alter as their circumstances change. And a prominent example of this is when younger teachers start working in a Catholic school. One principal related the comment of one of her younger staff. This teacher had mentioned to her that when she started working at the school, 'the game changed, I had to take religion a bit more seriously'.

In a negotiated schema, religion is seen as part of the atmosphere that seeks to cultivate dialogue. A picture of younger teachers did emerge from comments made by priests, principals and RECs which is in accord with the basic tenants of negotiated religion. One of the most important of these is that there is no overt hostility to religion but rather a weakness in affiliation. Just as many parents see religion as part of the mix of Catholic schools, so too many teachers also seem to share a similar mentality. One principal remarked that her teachers were open to religion but it seemed to her a 'hard sell'. She added a very pertinent comment when she observed that the approach taken with younger teachers is not of a different nature to that taken with students in her school, 'We need to encourage them to enter into dialogue'.

How then to best engage and assist younger teachers, in particular, in their vital role in Catholic schools? It is important to consider this question in light of the reported openness of teachers to further involvement. As one principal remarked, 'we have to keep the door open'. Two dominant responses to this question emerged from the research. Firstly, it was clearly stated that many teachers have a poor cognitive grasp of what was could be called the Catholic vision and worldview. This was not so much a matter of isolated pieces of information but rather a cogent sense of how teaching, practices and beliefs are connected and integrated. One priest described this as a substantial deficit in how all these things, 'hang together'. An

example of this that was mentioned was understanding of scripture. The difficulty for many younger teachers lay in being able to hold together a critical reading which took into account the best of modern scholarship with a sense that the scriptures were the revealed Word of God and not just an interesting collection of myths and fables. Linked to this was the observation that many teachers are not having their religious questions and issues addressed in a fashion that they find comprehensible. One REC made the following point, 'it's not about engaging in another degree but being able to get into things that are troubling them straight away'.

This REC went on to observe that it seems that, for too many of the younger teachers that she works with, 'we have something to hide'. In light of this, there is a need to look more closely at providing concise, focused and sequential programmes that address the Catholic worldview in an engaging fashion. In such programmes, a very high priority should be given to engaging with questions at a very early stage in the process. Although younger teachers may not have strong, coherent content knowledge, they do not approach the Catholic worldview with a *tabula rasa*. They do have existing ideas and beliefs and while these may not be accurate they do offer a valuable departure point for discussion and engagement. One REC made the point quite bluntly, 'we have to address the "it's all rubbish argument"'.

Another suggestion that was made in regard to the type of professional development and support that could be offered was to focus programmes around key themes in the RE curriculum. A number of principals and RECs suggested that by addressing key themes in the curriculum and beginning with a practical focus, a platform for higher learning could be established. One example that was given makes this point well. Developmental programmes on the sacraments could begin with session on 'how to do a Mass'. The departure point here would be the practical steps involved in preparing a class or year level Mass. This would also establish an opportunity for more directed teaching about the Mass and other sacraments. This was seen as a way of heightening teacher interest and also giving them access to good contextual theology. Another example of this approach that was suggested was to give formation on scripture by addressing where it appears in the RE curriculum. As one REC put it, 'why not teach about scripture by starting with how to teach about parables in the classroom'. Another advantage of this approach is that it could easily be extended to include the school context with RECs working in schools providing ongoing support in the selected topic areas.

A second proposed way of engaging and assisting younger teachers was to make better use of what can be broadly defined as the affective religious dimension. In simple terms one REC commented, 'It's just not about the head, we need to touch their hearts as well'. For many of the participants in this study a very successful and established way of doing this is to make more use of the retreat as a vehicle for formation of younger teachers. There is very strong evidence that one of the most effective pastoral strategies in Catholic education is the school-based retreat (Rossiter 2016). Catholic schools on the whole do an excellent job of providing students with memorable and engaging retreat experiences. This has been a long-standing finding. As most of the teachers working in Catholic schools today have also attended Catholic schools as students, they may well have a recent, positive memory of these retreats. This seems to be fertile ground for using well-conducted retreats as a way of assisting teachers better understand the mission of Catholic education.

Many principals commented that, in their view, the retreats that are offered for teachers now are very effective and they would like to see the range and scope of these expanded. Some participants identified difficulties in finding suitable people to run retreats and a desire to 'mix it up a bit'. This refers to retreats needing to offer some variety in approach and direction and also to identify new groups or people to provide leadership. It should be noted, however, that the retreat is not a counterpoint to a more cognitive professional development programme but rather that both approaches complement each other. For instance, an informative, sequential and focussed professional development programme that addresses key aspects of the Catholic worldview is a very good segue into a retreat that explores similar themes but in a manner that makes much more use of prayer, reflection and liturgy. One priest commented on this general point when he said, 'we are at our best when we engage all the human faculties'.

Conclusion

The participants in this study saw a clear distinction amongst younger teachers working in Catholic schools. They were prepared to support the school in a broad sense while still maintaining some distance from the worshipping community and not identifying as a person of strong religious commitment. It was often commented that younger teachers will become involved in the religious activities of the school as this is part of

their employment. They are very happy to work in Catholic schools and do not begrudge this involvement. At the same time this religious connection does not extend to their lives outside the school in a strong and tangible way. The negotiation here is that the religion can play a more prominent part in professional life but is muted outside of this sphere. As with many parents, this mentality is quite stable but does not preclude the possibility of greater involvement given certain conditions.

In keeping with the findings of this study, one helpful way of considering the Catholic school is to see it as being a common meeting place or narthex where many people without strong connections can come together and be invited into a greater engagement with the faith tradition. The idea of accompanying people is a seminal theme in the writings of Pope Francis and is also well supported in the research literature. Pope Francis notes,

> A special place of encounter is offered by new Areopagi such as the Court of the Gentiles, where 'believers and non-believers are able to engage in dialogue about fundamental issues of ethics, art and science, and about the search for transcendence'. (*Evangelii Gaudium* 2013, p. 257)

One way of realizing this is to utilize the notion of Pope Benedict XVI about the need to replicate in Church structures, broadly understood, the old Jewish idea of a Court of the Gentiles (Fisichella 2012; Franchi 2014). Another rendering of a similar idea is that of Catholic schools serving as a type of narthex, again facilitating the interaction of people from a range of backgrounds (Roebben 2013). Both analogies maintain a strong religious connection. The Court of the Gentiles and the narthex are associated with religious institutions. This is very clear in the Court of the Gentiles but also in the case of the narthex as it is the entry point to the church and in this space the religious aspects of dialogue can be expected to be brought into the discussion. This is how Benedict XVI explained the idea of the Court of the Gentiles and its religious significance to a group of young people gathered outside Notre Dame in Paris on March 26, 2011:

> This image refers to the vast open space near the Temple of Jerusalem where all those who did not share the faith of Israel could approach the Temple and ask questions about religion. There they could meet the scribes, speak of faith and even pray to the unknown God. The Court was then an area of separation, since Gentiles did not have the right to enter the consecrated area, yet Jesus Christ came to 'break down the dividing wall' between Jews

and Gentiles, and to 'reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility in himself'. In the words of Saint Paul, 'He came and proclaimed peace …' (cf. Eph 2:14–17). (Zenit Staff 2011)

The idea of the school as a meeting place can also be used in a modified sense when we examine how to better support younger teacher in schools. Teachers have a formal commitment to the school and more can be expected of them as they have entered into a professional agreement about working in Catholic education. It is still important, however, to view this commitment in invitational terms, as a more coercive approach is likely to lead to deeper alienation. As this chapter has argued, what is needed is further assistance for younger teachers, helping them to open up their horizons and to consider new questions and possibilities. The expectations on teachers are clear but at the same time they are can be invited into a deeper sense of their own religious identity as they are now working in a place where religious questions can be engaged with. If we continue with the analogy of a meeting place these questions can establish a firm basis for ongoing dialogue.

This study has identified a number of avenues worth exploring as means of better engaging younger teachers working in Catholic schools. Catholic educational leaders could look at further developing short, engaging and content-rich courses for younger teachers which address their questions and issues. Courses for younger teachers could be developed that would focus on both practical and conceptual dimensions of key themes in the RE curriculum and in school identity. Along similar lines a strong focus on retreats could be pursued as a way of supporting and engaging younger teachers. Both the content-rich courses and retreats for younger teachers should be seen as complementary programmes.

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Interpreting Texts More Wisely: A Review of Research and the Case for Change in English Religious Education

Robert A. Bowie

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews research carried out since 2000 that identifies weaknesses in the teaching of the Bible in English schools. Religious Education (RE) lessons are not encouraging students to read the Bible wisely. This is important and significant because RE in England has changed to focus more sharply on the study of religion at examination level (DfE 2015). That new policy could amplify existing weaknesses unless changes are made to address the issues identified. Hermeneutics, as exemplified by the Protestant scholars Thiselton, Wright and Ford, as well as official Catholic documents,[1] offer insights into wiser explorations of the Bible. Educationalists offer similar insights around the place of interpretation in education. This chapter identifies, for the first time, the striking degree of consistency around hermeneutics and interpretation between important and influential theological and educational writers in faith and education contexts. It concludes by asking whether it is time for a more radical change to RE that moves away from studying religion and towards

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211

studying wisdom texts. It considers *Understanding Christianity's* focus on 'virtuous readers' (Pett 2016, pp.42–43) as an illustration of one response to the issues identified.

RE in state-funded English schools is compulsory. In 2016 over 284,000 secondary age students took public examinations in Religious Studies (JCQ CIC 2017). The most popular options in the content of these examinations have tended to focus on ethics and philosophy (Horrell and Davis 2014; Conroy et al. 2013), rather than the study of sacred texts, but new government policy (DfE 2015) requires a sharper focus on religion. Secondary age students are studying more religion and more Christianity at secondary examination level. However, such a focus is in danger of amplifying weaknesses in the quality of teaching of Christianity found in many studies (detailed below). A key component of those weaknesses is around poor interpretation of text and, therefore, poor approaches to reading the Bible. A range of factors interplay to produce this situation including weaknesses in teacher subject and pedagogy knowledge and inadequate resources. However, a review of the research shows the overriding driving influences are the unintended consequences produced by the examination system, weaknesses in published resources and questionable classroom techniques used in responding to standardised question types. The examination criteria specify what should be studied, the kinds of questions asked and what constitutes a good answer. A second factor is a lack of focused attention to the kinds of interpretation relevant to study in RE. This is revealed in weaknesses in how texts are handled. It speaks much more significantly to a more fundamental question about whether learners' capacity to interpret religion and belief is being developed.

THEMES IN THE RESEARCH ON THE TEACHING OF CHRISTIANITY AND THE BIBLE

A great deal of research has produced important insights into teaching biblical texts and Christianity in English RE classrooms. This has been a focus of many studies including university-based research. These include the *Biblos* research project (1996–2004), based at Exeter university in partnership with the Bible Society (Copley 1998; Copley and Walshe 2002; Copley et al. 2004b), the UK Research Council funded project *Does Religious Education Work?* (Conroy et al. 2013), a multi-dimensional study of RE that took place over a period of five years, as well as more

focused small-scale studies such as Horrell and Davis' (2014) study of how the Bible is used in secondary RE. There are other major qualitative studies that have included RE but not had it as a focus, such as Cooling, Green, Morris and Revell's work (2016) and also some government-funded research into resources (Jackson et al. 2010). In addition, there are the findings of the English school inspection agency, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) which used to undertake detailed subject-level surveys (Ofsted 2007, 2010, 2013).

A number of common themes emerge from these studies. There is a general weakness in the teaching of Christianity as a whole (Ofsted 2007, 2010, 2013). Although Ofsted reports identified examples of good teaching of Christianity they repeatedly found too much poor teaching and many pupils leaving school with a limited understanding. A 2013 report found 'teaching about Christianity one of the weakest aspects of RE provision' (Ofsted 2013, p.9).

Research suggests a significant area of concern is around theological understanding both in terms of lessons and pupil learning. RE teaching is reported as avoiding theological interpretations of text, with pupils failing to achieve a theological understanding of the Bible (Copley 1998, p.16; Copley et al. 2004a, p.25; Copley and Walshe 2002, p.29). Ofsted reported finding Bible texts disassociated or decontextualized from Christian beliefs:

> Christian stories, particularly miracles, were often used to encourage pupils to reflect on their own experience without any opportunity to investigate the stories' significance within the religion itself. (Ofsted 2013, p.15)

Personal responses were not theologically informed or connected (Ofsted 2010, p.33). Theological concepts were vague or badly explained in textbooks, leaving readers 'more confused than when they started' (Jackson et al. 2010, p.91).

Teachers in primary schools seemed reluctant to address biblical material and learners struggled to achieve a theological understanding of the Bible and were ambivalent to it (Copley et al. 2004b, p.9). Teachers presented Biblical narratives to pupils but theological interpretations were not connected to the narratives and secular interpretations were encouraged instead (Copley 1998, p.16; Copley et al. 2004a, p.25; Copley and Walshe 2002, p.29).

There seems to be a lack of confidence in an educational approach to the Bible as a source of study. Teachers in primary schools seemed reluctant to address biblical material and learners were ambivalent to it (Copley et al. 2004b). Ipgrave (2013) saw an essential obstacle in teaching the Bible to be a 'behind the text' concern that learners have around the texts' status as literal truth, limiting its reach beyond its confession and its reputation as a harsh unbending authority trapped in a historical time that had nothing to say to the contemporary world.

Research has criticised the resources and examinations used in teaching RE. One major project reported that students were aware of a difference between 'exam religion' and 'real world religion' (Conroy et al. 2013). Students sometimes articulated scepticism about the representation of religion by the authors of the textbooks they used. Another major study of resources noted that some textbooks 'did not feel detailed or profound enough in historical and theological areas about Christianity' (Jackson et al. 2010, p.99).

A specific concern is related to the extent to which diversity within Christianity is explored. Horrell and Davis concluded their study with the critical observation that the use of texts in examination study fails to adequately represent the diversity of Christian responses to the topic of environmental stewardship (Horrell and Davis 2014, p.82). In some resources, single denominational interpretations of Christianity were presented to the exclusion of others (Jackson et al. 2010). A particular problem was perceived to be around the link between text books and GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) examinations (Conroy et al. 2013, pp.141–167). Key biblical texts are identified by examination boards and written about by examiners, sometimes poorly or incorrectly (Conroy et al. 2013, pp.147–150).

There are specific concerns about the use of texts. One study documents how sophisticated hermeneutics, for example the historical critical method, was seen to be significantly above what was expected by the GCSE examiners (Conroy et al. 2013, p.157). Another commonly cited problem is around the use of proof texts with isolated quotations learnt to justify views (2013). Years before, Ofsted had described 'standard, mechanistic responses rather than thoughtful engagement with the issues' (Ofsted 2007, p.14). Horrell and Davis' (2014) study of how the Bible is used in secondary RE found 'proof-texting' being used in the topic of religion and the environment. Biblical texts are used without interpretation

to sustain Christian beliefs about a duty of care to the environment. Horrell and Davis write,

> RE runs the risk of reducing biblical texts to points of reference that support some aspect of Christian belief, without inviting consideration of the diversity of contemporary Christian perspectives and the extent to which that diversity stems in part precisely from different (often competing) interpretations of biblical texts. (Horrell and Davis 2014, pp.76–77)

They refer back to Hayward's study of the teaching of Christianity (2006) and her concern that 'Learning *that* there are different interpretations held by different groups is not the same as discovering *how* or *why* this is so' (Hayward 2006, p.164).

Fancourt has undertaken a major review around the teaching of Christianity (2017) and one of his conclusions is that poor activity design may be a significant factor, echoing a concern identified by Wintersgill (2000). Cooling et al. (2016) provide an illustration of the impact of GCSE question structures and poor use of texts. They found that even in schools which chose to focus on examination papers focussed on texts, the examiners' approach emphasised for-and-against arguments so proof texts were deployed as reasons for oppositional beliefs and practices. There was a conflict between what the students were being taught was important about, in this case, Mark's Gospel (such as the announcement of God's kingdom and the significance of the crucifixion) and the requirements of the examination (Cooling et al. 2016, p.92). One teacher, when discussing teaching about assisted dying, said that she found that her approach was directed towards the examination specification and the types of question and answers encouraged. She said,

> a Christian wouldn't necessarily sit there and go 'fors and against'. We'd actually look at what the Bible would say and the actual meaning and how we talk to people and how we discuss issues with people, looking at it from that angle, rather than the clinical 'fors and against'. (Cooling et al. 2016, p.79)

She felt the approach lead pupils to 'imagine that Christian ethics is primarily concerned with defeating opponents in academic arguments about values' (Cooling et al. 2016, p.168). Poor approaches to the text lead to poor conceptions of religion. Weak hermeneutics is not simply a

problem in teaching sacred texts: it negatively impacts on the engagement with religion as a whole.

Potentially, how the Bible is handled in RE classrooms could undermine or support attitudes towards Christianity and Christians. The *Biblos* study mentioned earlier found that:

> a more positive attitude towards the Bible is associated with a greater level of biblical literacy. RE is crucial here, because more pupils cited RE as a source of biblical knowledge than any other source and it is the only situation in which every child in the UK is inducted into 'theological' discourse about biblical narratives. (Copley et al. 2004b, p.17; see also Copley and Walshe 2002, p.29; Copley 1998, p.16)

These observations point to a problem with the ecology of the education system of government policy, examination boards, publishers and their resources in consolidating these problems or failing to adequately evade or avoid them. A key issue drawing many of these factors together seems to be about the extent to which learning in RE reaches deeper and more complex levels and how examination questions might encourage or discourage such complex intellectual dimensions.

Teachers clearly respond to examinations in their teaching by drawing upon sources, such as biblical texts, and encouraging pupils to use them as reasons for beliefs and practices. Students learn to connect sources (including textual fragments) and deploy them as reasons for beliefs and practices. For example, students presented with a question on war, might be taught to cite 1 Samuel 15:3, God's instruction to defeat the Amalekites, as a justification a Christian might rely upon for a contemporary war.

One problem with these kinds of practices is they do not necessarily encourage multi-level deep understandings exploring how different biblical texts are engaged with in different ways by Christians. They focus the student on a composition activity linking sources as reasons for beliefs and practices into a kind of conceptual 'pyramid'. Two 'pyramids' are constructed in opposition to one another in an argument exercise. The pyramids create a sense that religion, or Christianity, is about proposition-based argument, disagreement and competing to be right. Multiple meanings tend to be conceptualised as opposites or alternatives, not multiple levels that might be simultaneously grasped. Mystery, spirituality and paradox have little space in this kind of study. It does not encourage a study of passages in relation to the contexts of the text at the time of

writing or the history of religious thought or, indeed, contemporary understanding.

INTERPRETATION AND THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS FOR A WISER READING OF THE BIBLE

Interpretation has often been cited as an important part of RE. David Aldridge articulated a conceptualisation of RE as hermeneutics in which 'students come into dialogue with religious texts about some matter of shared concern' (2015, p.185). Jackson advocated interpretative hermeneutical methods to develop a kind of grammar, language and wider symbolic patterns of religions as well as the interpretative skills necessary to gain that understanding (Jackson 1997, 2009). The learner should become self-consciously aware of where they were coming from and how they interpreted what they encountered. They would become conscious of motives, intentions and identity, as well as of ways of thinking when interpreting. Aspects of religion are approached through contexts and ways of seeing and making sense of the world or, as Aldridge puts it, in ways 'dependent on the fore-structure or projection that the student brings to the hermeneutic exchange' (Aldridge 2016, p.184) so becoming aware of this fore-structure and projection matters. But as we have seen, how pupils are taught to read and interpret the Bible exemplifies an aspect of what is poor in the teaching of Christianity and the Bible as found in both government-led research (Wintersgill 2000; Ofsted 2007, 2010, 2013) and university-based research (Cooling et al. 2016; Copley et al. 2004b; Hayward 2006; Conroy et al. 2013; Ipgrave 2013; Horrell and Davis 2014). The poverty of the situation is such that RE might not only be poor education, but also a poor companion for learners seeking to develop a Christian faith at a crucial time in their lives.

These concerns mirror those identified by biblical scholars concerned with wiser reading of the Bible in all contexts, educational and faith developmental. Debate around the use of proof texts in understanding Christianity is ancient. Joyce (2003) and Young (2003) in their studies of Proverbs 8 describe how it received manipulated interpretations in the Arian controversy as a proof text for the creation of the Son, on the one hand, and then, on the other, through exegetical efforts to counter such use. Both sides of that ancient debate used proof texts in an institutional conflict to assert prior positions held already.

Contemporary hermeneutics scholars refer to these issues. Thiselton (1992) is concerned about the connection between the reader and the text which can be interrupted by the assertion of prior meanings and interests. He worries that too often the reader is in fact:

> trapped within his or her own prior horizons … for the nature of the reading process is governed by horizons of expectation already pre-formed by the community of readers or by the individual. (Thiselton 1992, p.8)

This leads preachers to draw from texts what they had already decided to say and it leads congregations sometimes to look to biblical readings only to affirm their community identity and lifestyle. The Word of God becomes an institutional mechanism to maintain corporate belief and identity. Teaching the Bible with preconceived meanings weakens its prophetic power. Preaching the Bible slips into social conservation/reproduction. There is no interruption, no innovation or challenge, but rather a process of preconceived self-assurance, self-affirmation and self-protection. This objection is theologically grounded in a concern that the Bible should be 'Good News', but it has striking commonalities with the concerns in education that the systems of education, such as the assessment and examinations systems, interrupt the encounter with text in the classroom.

Thiselton thought that learning to read the Bible better could change the way learners saw the text. Commenting on his own experience of teaching hermeneutics, Thiselton (2009, p.5) found that his students came to read the biblical writings in a different way from before. They learnt, especially from Gadamer (1975), the importance of listening to a text in its own terms, rather than rushing in with premature assumptions or making the text fit in with prior concepts and expectations. They learnt from Ricoeur (1970) a healthy measure of critical suspicion of self-interest and self-deception.[2] This resonates with the work of N. T. Wright, another writer of popular commentaries on the Bible and former Bishop of Durham. He argues for an approach to Bible study that goes ever deeper into the meaning of scripture, to refresh and energise the Church in a way that is free to explore different meanings, not just as a competency for scholars but as a vital ingredient in church life: 'Any church, not least those that pride themselves on being biblical, needs to be open to new understandings of the Bible itself' (Wright 2005, p.135). Wright and Thiselton both advocate a responsible hermeneutic which takes seriously a concern to read the Bible both in ways that are authentic to Christian faith

and also in ways that are open to new insights (Cooling et al. 2016). The transfer of fixed, given meanings, superficially pinned to decontextualized quotations, will not serve responsible hermeneutics for the congregation or the classroom. There is an alliance of interest between biblical scholars like Thiselton and Wright and educationalists like Aldridge (2015) and Jackson (1997, 2009) around interpretation, or wise reading of the Bible, for church congregations as well as for school pupils.

Many of the students studying GCSE Religious Studies are doing so in Roman Catholic schools. Roman Catholic scholarship in hermeneutics is striking in its plurality embracing multiple approaches to the text and being critical in that undertaking. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* presented by the Pontifical Biblical Commission to Pope John Paul II on April 23, 1993 (Pontifical Biblical Commission 1994) is a 62-page essay on different models of interpretation and their relative strengths and weaknesses. Wise engagement with sacred scripture is a high priority and this could be used to form the basis for a consensus around hermeneutics for schools.

There are many reasons to encourage multi-layered approaches to text. Bible texts may not be theologically understood, providing only space for preconceived meanings in authorised interpretations (through approved resources or examination question frames). This reduces the likelihood of the enrichment that comes from the deeper engagement with text of the kind Thiselton found that his students experienced. Biblical interpretation slips into knowledge transfer of approved meanings. This undermines the possibility that the Bible is Good News, offering something new, prophetic, something unexpected or challenging. The incarnational sense of the text, as it is understood in the Christian tradition, is lost without such readings. Bible study is reduced to preconception transfer rather than inquiry or discovery.

This is not to suggest that interpretations of the text should be relativized or made completely subjective. Too often, RE isolates and decontextualises texts away from their historical, linguistic or theological senses. Pupils express concern that they are learning about an exam-religion, remote from their own experience of religion. Religion is cast as a propositional position that is held up by text-as-reason proofs. Proof-texting encourages single meanings of a text without interpretation. Parables and teachings are deployed to lead to a meaning, attitude or behaviour. Learners are taught *what* the text means, rather than *how* a process of interpretation reaches a meaning. Expected answers do not aid proficiency

in interpreting text—quite the reverse. Examinations may encourage an awareness of the diversity of interpretations and the associations these have with different forms of Christianity but this still does not focus on interpretation itself, the *workings out* that have led an interpreter to a meaning, and the possibility of understanding multiple meanings within a theological understanding of the world, rather than simply framing them as being opposed to one another. In these cases, the learner's role becomes not one of interpreter, but rather one of a repeater of known meanings.

This is not so much learning-as-interpretation as learning-as-a-metaphor-for-knowledge-transfer (Hager and Hodkinson 2009). In this kind of learning, the process of interpretation need not be considered, examined or practised. Learners are learning what others have interpreted. Interpretation passes out of sight of the learner who neither experiences nor participates in interpretation of the kind that is an important part of Christian life. This is problematic. It means the process of illumination through the examination of text is difficult for the learner to empathise with. They are not practising a skill that will bring them close to this kind of experience. In addition, any sense of learner-led enquiry is subsumed by a dependency on external judging authorities to confirm or reject an interpretation. Learners cannot see through the process so the capacity to evaluate, to weigh up accounts, is compromised. The absence of a focus on 'good reading' of the Bible undermines opportunities in each of these critical engagements.

These mechanisms can be cast as a response to positivism in education (Cooling et al. 2016, pp. 133–135) and the propositional framing of religion in RE (Lewin 2016). They may also help readers to gain some sense of the dramatic narrative of scripture and some sense of how scripture offers insights into experiences of life (Ford 2007). These would need to be set alongside a range of methodological tools that help learners to acquaint themselves with different ways of reading the Bible. A curriculum is needed that enables learners to be introduced into multiple ways of reading that are authentic to Christian traditions, exploring plain meanings as well as symbolic and metaphorical meanings, grappling with the meaning of a given text in the context of the Bible as a whole, and the language and history of the time, as well as the central theological concepts of Christianity that shaped its development in the early Church. Learners could be introduced to readings of scripture that wise individuals of the past have discerned and have been inspired to live by in response.

There is a difference between introducing learners to oppositional meanings of texts (such as literal or metaphorical), and introducing them to multiple layers of meaning that contribute to deeper understandings of how texts might be related in different contexts through different processes. Christians may interpret texts symbolically when they pray seeking personal guidance or when they worship, seeking through the text an encounter with Christ. They may also interpret them as a code for living when considering specific moral dilemmas. In each case, different modes of learning and interpretation take place and the encounter with the text is 'serving' or informing different objectives while, at the same time, they live in a community of faith. This moves thinking beyond a binary attitude to the text. If learners consider and explore interpretations and practice processes of interpretation themselves they are more likely to gain some understanding of why wisdom texts have played important roles in the development of religious thought. Textual interpretation would aid the interpretation of other aspects of religion while poor biblical hermeneutics fatally undermines the study of religion, or so it would seem from the many studies referred to in this chapter.

Theological hermeneutics offer resources to address the problems of what GCSE examinations are currently doing to the reading of the Bible and seems to be the missing element behind much that the research reveals. For pupils to genuinely learn to interpret religion, they need access to appropriate scaffolds of interpretation and an opportunity to develop a focussed study of interpretation. Biblical hermeneutics offers a way forward.

Is Religious Education Turning the Hermeneutical Corner?

The urgent need for better methods to read the Bible was identified in the Church of England 2014 report *Making a Difference? A Review of Religious Education in English Schools* (Church of England Archbishops' Council Education Division and the National Society 2014). It concluded that RE needed to help pupils improve their ability to 'think theologically' and 'develop the skills to analyse, interpret and apply the Bible text' (2014, p.37).

The concern about the teaching of Christianity and in particular the teaching of biblical texts resulted in a project which produced *Understanding Christianity* (Pett 2016), a resource and pedagogical initiative to improve theological literacy at Primary and Key Stage 3. Coinciding with the launch of *Understanding Christianity*, the Church of

England published a new vision for Education, *Deeply Christian*, *Serving the Common Good* (Church of England Education Office 2016), which identifies wisdom, wisdom seeking and wisdom literature as central for a better approach to education. Drawing on the work of David Ford and others on reading texts, seeking wisdom and scriptural reasoning, it is inspired by principles and approaches that have been developed in ecumenical and interfaith scriptural study contexts (Ford and Stanton 2003; Ford 2007; Ford and Clemson 2013). It summarises, in a footnote, the crucial concern that text should be read and reread in conversation with others, including fellow learners, teachers and previous generations of readers (Church of England Education Office 2016, p.14 fn.7). Teaching should inspire these conversations and reading for depth of meaning and wisdom, not simply for pleasure, information, knowledge or assessment.

The Church of England sponsors schools that educate over a million children in England. It aims to improve how children learn to read the Bible, seeks to advance a theologically grounded approach to the Bible in RE, for all pupils in Church schools, irrespective of their religion or belief. It is a clear example of how seriously the Church takes the problems identified and is an indication of how it is seeking to provide a solution to the problems of English RE.

Understanding Christianity contains within it a hermeneutical approach to biblical texts. The curriculum resource outlines learning activities that seek to help learners investigate how Christians use text in different ways and the different ways in which interpretations are made of a text. This includes the context in which it was written, the wider significance and how it relates to other central Christians understandings (Pett 2016, p.13). Pett argues that poor understanding of a text is a key factor in extremism and that the development of skills in interpretation of texts and in the ways texts are used is important for understanding diversity within religion (p.40). It develops a concept of virtuous readers:

> there is a particular focus in these resources on developing in pupils the virtues of being good readers: paying careful attention to texts, coming to them with open minds, intellectual curiosity and humility, seeking to find what the text is saying, being aware of different readings, as well as becoming aware of one's own context and perspective. (Pett 2016, p.41)

Pett, drawing in Ipgrave (2013) and Gooder (2008), encourages learners to explore issues that are 'behind the text', 'within the text' and 'in

front of the text' (p.11). 'Behind the text' issues include matters of authorship, sources, context, the community for whom the text was written and its reliability. 'Within the text' refers to understanding the words themselves in context and 'In front of the text' explores the relationship between the text and reader and how different religious and belief perspectives respond. 'In front of the text' specifically addresses the possibilities of new insights being seen in the text. This approach is hermeneutically sophisticated, drawing on a broad range of the approaches to biblical and literary texts.

Pett argues that a broad aim of this approach is to contribute to the development of re-reading as a virtue, expressly encouraging the practice found within biblical texts themselves of returning to read again texts from different perspectives and contexts in search of further engagement and deeper understanding (see also Ratzinger 2007, p. xviii; Fowl 2008, pp.2–3). Pett acknowledges that this development is counter-cultural and in opposition to many practices found in RE teaching, such as a focus on reading for an A* /Grade 9 or the fragmentary attitude to texts in social media (Pett 2016, p.43). Instead he advocates reading for a 'deeper, slower exploration and engagement' (p.43).

Drawing on Vanhoozer's (2002) idea that different Bible genres are different kinds of maps, each with its own 'key' and 'scale' for understanding, Pett writes,

> I wonder if it is helpful to think about the Christian coming to the Bible as a map-reader comes to the world: with certain intentions and for certain reasons. So the reader decides what they are coming to the text for, and treats it accordingly. They might approach the same text with different intentions: from devotional use in private prayer, through to detailed study of the original languages; from devising a systematic theology to preparing a sermon; from singing a psalm in church to defending the Bible against hostile critics. In this metaphor, the readers come to the same text with different purposes, and therefore look at it in different ways. (Pett 2016, p.46)

These approaches are developed with examples of how specific texts can be engaged with in what is the most developed hermeneutical approach to biblical texts. The level of engagement is sophisticated and is a starting point and an illustration of how it could be possible for learners to be invited to consider multiple approaches to interpreting texts, studied in some detail and at some depth. They are not beyond the reach of learners in either primary or secondary schools. Simple techniques could open up

texts to interpretative learning. One example encourages young learners to discuss which of these titles might best suit a parable in Luke 15:11–32: the forgiving father, the lost son, the two lost sons or the careless country. This is in place of 'being told what it means'. However, this is only possible with time to study the text in depth. RE would need to give over space for biblical hermeneutics in the expectation that the investment would create a capacity for leaners to interpret many different aspects of religion and belief. Behind this suggestion is a calculation that it would be better for RE to narrow the range of content it would try to include and to focus on the development of a hermeneutical approach. Given the problems identified in the research reviewed in this chapter, it is at least worth serious consideration. The potential benefit to pupils is that they might have deeper and richer conversations around biblical texts and their interpreters. It encourages a plural engagement with text at multiple layers of depth, not exclusively in oppositional terms. It would create space for learners to engage with each other, teachers, the voices of different Christians and Christian communities and those of other faiths.

CONCLUSION

A striking conclusion from this review of research is the extent to which research has failed to make an impact in professional RE in this specific area of the treatment of texts. Issues and concerns repeatedly identified in different studies demand focussed attention from the stakeholders in the profession to better understand what is going on and how to avoid it. If there are alternative ways of developing learners as wiser interpreters of religion belief, then these need to be identified but there is evidence that the development of wise interpretation is not being sustained by RE currently. Pett's (2016) *Understanding Christianity* is an example of how richer and deeper encounters with biblical literature and wiser readings of the Bible are possible. Whether this key learning goes on to inform a hermeneutically confident study of religion and belief remains to be seen and may depend upon the extent to which other curricula for RE, including those focussed on other religious and philosophical traditions, embrace such approaches.

The current UK Department for Education's *Religious GCSE Subject Content* (DfE 2015) advocates textual studies which engage:

the significance, importance and influence of the texts for individuals, communities and societies, how varied interpretations of the meaning of such

texts may give rise to diversity within traditions' and 'how far communities give authority to such texts especially in relation to other sources of contemporary authority. (DfE 2015, p.6)

However, textual studies are not mandatory. Examination question structures and answer formulas may dominate classroom learning and may replicate the well-documented concerns discussed in this chapter. The ambitions of a richer deeper engagement with texts could be undermined by examination-focussed teaching and learning, unless specific steps are taken by the professional stakeholders to avoid such an outcome.

This chapter calls for a deeper, sector- and profession-wide change in the ecology of the subject, which, were it to come to full fruition, would affect curricula and examination questions as well as classroom experiences. There is a wide coalition of agreement about the place of interpretation in RE and the aims of education might be better served by a focus on interpretation. There is a compelling case to examine the effects of better hermeneutics on children and learning, and to develop further initiatives to counter system pressures that work against a more educated approach to texts. Ideally, wiser reading of biblical texts could be supported by reoriented system pressures so that supporting scholarly professional practices might be encouraged in the classroom.

Notes

1. Contributions include: Ford (2007), Wright (2005), Lundin et al. (1999), Pontifical Biblical Commission (1994), Granados et al. (2008).
2. See also White (1991).

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Christian Leadership in Education

David Cracknell

This chapter sets out to explore educational leadership as a context for, and expression of, Christian faith in action. The aim is to support a fuller understanding of how Christian faith can engage more effectively with the personal and professional challenges that leaders experience. We aim to answer the following questions:

1. What do we mean by Christian leadership in education?
2. What can Christian belief and practice bring to the study of educational leadership and how might Christian leaders engage with professional and secular thinking and practice?
3. How could Christians be better prepared for, and sustained in, their educational leadership roles?

What Is Meant by Christian Leadership in Education

> Work is a hugely significant frontline—one in which we can join in God's transformative mission through the work we do, the people we influence and the structures we touch. Our work matters to God because we matter to God, and he has given us a creative role to play in his world. (London Institute of Contemporary Christianity 2016)

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This chapter concentrates on the leadership work of Christians who are involved in education, regardless of their setting, formal designation or affiliation. They may be connected to schools, colleges or other educational organisations and systems.

Christian leadership in education is not defined narrowly but includes the work of anyone with responsibilities in and across education systems. Leadership might be exercised, for example, by frontline teaching and or support staff, by those involved in school or college management or in governance and other voluntary roles. It covers leadership roles of parents and employers as well as key people in local communities. Arguably we should include children and young people when they lead other learners. Beyond that, the work of many leaders entails developing wider relationships or working practices, across disciplines, professions and agencies.

Leadership in education is about 'leading' but also 'being led' and this has special resonance for Christian leaders. The dynamics between the leader and follower highlight the importance of skills for leaders that focus on the relationship they have with those for whom they are responsible, including, for example, building and sustaining trust. An extensive leadership literature on followership (e.g., Crossman and Crossman 2011) also reminds us that leaders spend most of their working lives in roles that are dependent on other leaders, rather than just leading others. So, to be effective, they will rely on a range of skills including those of following well. Christian leaders follow other people as appropriate but they have a significant additional dimension and dynamic—their followership of Christ.

CHRISTIAN PRIORITIES AND PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Thinking and policy about educational leadership come from academic theory and research, practitioner networks, independent agencies, think tanks and the process of 'policy travel' between nations. Educational leadership as a field of study is multi-disciplinary and contested. Rational, objective, positivist and scientific thinking was supposed to explain and control the workings of educational processes, organisations and systems. This has been challenged and to an extent discredited by radical criticism. Much educational leadership theory is now more rooted in practice—adaptive, imaginative and tolerant of complexity and ambiguity. However, it lacks, and may fundamentally reject, any sense of an over-arching coherence or meta-narrative. Christian faith offers such a coherence.

Some contemporary ideas and theories may sit well with Christian practitioners and others may not. Some models of leadership have more immediate points of connection with Christian values. These include 'servant leadership' and educational leadership that are described variously in the literature as authentic, ethical, spiritual, moral, adaptive, inclusive or transformative. Christian leaders need to be familiar with these models and, building from Christian principles, engage with them, recognising their roots and respecting changing needs and circumstances.

In her challenging analysis of the recent history of school leadership practice and research, Helen Gunter (2016) identifies and critiques what she describes as the dominant model of transformative leadership with its many hybrid forms, including system leadership. Transformative leadership concentrates on development, learning, change for the better and on taking holistic account of the complex interdependence and interaction within and between organisations and systems. This seems to fit well with the values of education but it is not benign. Gunter argues for a hard-hitting review of transformative educational leadership and its agenda-setting. Her aim is to flush out its potentially oppressive, anti-human and anti-democratic elements and consequences (Gunter 2016, pp.192–193). Christian leaders must be ready to take these into account.

A Christian understanding of current leadership thinking takes us beyond a critique of transformative leadership. John Sullivan, in a broader context, encourages Christians to adopt 'a counter-cultural stance in the light of their understanding of the kingdom of God as the ideal towards which human communities must aim' (Sullivan 2003, p.223). Rather than simply accepting and enacting prescribed values, pre-determined priorities, opaque policies and standardised practices, Christian leadership in education is well placed to introduce a challenging, faith-based dimension into this process. In so doing we recognise that faith, religious belief and life choices may be perceived by some as part of the problem and not a solution. The contemporary philosopher and provocative public intellectual Peter Sloterdijk, for example, is a fierce critic of religion's exclusive and fundamentalist claims. He argues that the 'sacralisation of leadership' through religion has brought unjustified legitimacy to centuries of division and violence in society (Sloterdijk 2016, p.11). Christian leaders need to be prepared for such arguments and respond. Christian faith has and will continue to bring purpose and coherence to leadership. There is a vital place in this fragmented world for leaders who are informed by current leadership thinking but who thoughtfully start from, express and apply Christian principles faithfully to their work.

An analysis of leadership literature suggests that it can typically be divided between writers who focus on the personal/individual and others who emphasise the social/organisational (Cheema et al. 2008). Christian leadership in education is rooted in recognition of both. The literature also identifies key contextual linkages between theory and practice—critical dilemmas, challenges or issues from leadership experience that cry out for theory-in-action. These features offer a useful starting point for thought, belief and practice. We will examine each of these in turn to see what kinds of leadership are consistent with or more open to Christian faith and practice.

Personal and Individual

Christians in educational leadership may prioritise personal beliefs, values, passion and commitment and express them in terms of their vocation or life mission. Moral and spiritual leadership theory does not feature in all secular leadership theories but, for a Christian, the moral and spiritual dimensions are essential to their approach to leadership. Christian discipleship at work may be strengthened by taking time to reflect, actively connecting faith and experience, being consciously missional and valuing the community of believers (Marshall 2012).

These reflective processes can draw heavily on biblical stories, parables and metaphors. Metaphor matters in communicating ideas about leadership. The Old and New Testament offer a great variety of metaphors that help Christians to build a composite picture of the leaders that God intends we should be. David Bennett records and explores 94 of them. Like salt in food, the influence of leaders on their organisations or communities should be pervasive and observable, not so much through specific actions as through their very character and faithful commitment to Jesus Christ. The shepherd metaphor in the New Testament is applied to Christ and then, after his resurrection, to Christian leaders in spite of the low esteem in which shepherds were generally held at that time in the rabbinical tradition (Bennett 1998, pp.150, 173).

A primary focus for Christian leaders is on the life and leadership of Jesus Christ. Jesus was a compelling leader who continues to fascinate and inspire writers on leadership. Peter Shaw, reflecting his experience in a very senior educational leadership role in the UK Civil Service, identifies six leadership characteristics of Jesus as visionary, servant, teacher, coach, radical and healer (Shaw 2004, pp.2–8). Within this framework, he looks at

current leadership challenges, pointing out, for example, how Jesus combined radicalism with a recognition of the importance of preserving and building on the best of inherited resources and traditions. Shaw also draws out, from the accounts of Christ coaching the disciples, the role of leaders in developing 'hard and soft skills' through a range of individual and group exchanges, including some very tough talking (Shaw 2004, pp.17, 18).

The biblical accounts of the life of Moses offer other fruitful examples for leadership learning, including: finding confidence in the face of unexpected leadership responsibilities; dealing with the challenge of the loneliness of leadership and its times of despair; demonstrating the value of persistence, fortitude and courage; and, against all the odds, steering a whole nation through key periods of transition (Maxwell 2014; Bridges 1987).

Jesus engaged with large groups but more often worked person-by-person, leper-by-leper, widow-by-widow and neighbour-by-neighbour (Brueggemann 2011, p.37). This encourages a personal focus on what Christian leaders do and how they do it. In educational settings, it means closely guarding a child-by-child, parent-by-parent and person-by-person perspective, especially where a distanced, de-personalised and disembodied culture may seem to be an accepted norm for leader behaviour. Christian leaders in education will also recognise the significance of building a theological or faith understanding of key features of their working environment, including that of learning and the learner (Astley 2002; Astley and Francis 2013; Willmer and White 2013).

Within cultures influenced by neo-liberal and market priorities, there is a strong sense of individual accountability driven by competition. Christian leaders aim to balance this against their primary personal accountability to God for bringing living hope to individuals and communities. We are personally accountable, in a contractual relationship, to the secular in the educational systems within which we work. There is also for Christian leaders a covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ that sets us in an enlarged and enriched working culture. This is shaped and sustained by grace and the gifts of God which include faith, hope, love … and leadership itself (1 Corinthians 13:13; Romans 12:8).

Social and Contextual

Leadership engages individuals with other people, the personal with the social, the human with the wider context. Educational leadership gives priority to relationships, especially as a basis for effective action and agency.

Agency is about getting things done. It is a capacity to identify our goals and work them out for ourselves. Relational agency involves a capacity to offer support and to ask for support from others as we interpret and respond to the challenge of working in educational settings (Edwards 2005, p.169). Collaborative agency is mobilised through engaged social interaction and focuses on collective leadership rather than on individual leaders. This account does not minimise the importance of individuals but argues that 'the self is as much a product of interactions with others as it is a self-defined unit' (Raelin 2016a, p.19).

The stronger and richer option of relational leading involves leaders in shifts, for example, from generating structures to attending to process, from adapting to innovating, from directing to enlisting, and from dictating to listening. It is in this context that leaders have a key role in building identity. They are the architects, entrepreneurs, artists, engineers and embedders of identity within and across their organisation (Haslam et al. 2011, pp.165–192).

Relational understanding, agency and leadership have much in common with Christian principles. The lifetime preoccupation of Martin Buber could perhaps be summarised by saying that in the beginning is the relationship (Buber 1996). More recently and springing from a Judaeo-Christian analysis of relationships, Michael Schluter and David John Lee proposed a 'relational proximity framework' of five key conditions or drivers of relationships. These are directness of communication, continuity of story, multiplexity of information, parity of power and commonality of purpose (Schluter and Lee 2009).

Alan Flintham, writing from his experience of research in church schools in the UK state system, represents leadership diagrammatically as three inter-locking circles. For each circle, he uses Greek terms infused with theological significance: *Kerygma* (sharing the vision to secure coherence of direction); *Kenosis* (supporting the vision through self-emptying care); *Koinonia* (serving the vision through building bonds of community); and at the overlapping centre of the three circles, *Metanoia* (transforming hearts and minds) (Flintham 2015). These ideas, though not unique to Christian leadership in education, suggest some of its characteristic dimensions.

Boundaries, Spaces and Engagement

Working with boundaries and associated spaces is challenging for leaders. The identification and management of boundaries play a vital part in effec-

tive leadership, whether those boundaries are ethical, moral, professional, organisational, personal or physical. Christian leaders might need to help people define professional boundaries, or give leadership in multi-professional teams, such as for safeguarding children or resolving financial, legal or probity challenges.

Boundaries help leaders define roles, respond to risk or establish identity and cultures but they also provide leaders with the opportunity to create new spaces. At boundaries, alternative creative visions about what can be achieved are worked up and translated into practice. In the spaces that are formed by boundaries there is the potential to work and engage with others in safety or under other agreed conditions, perhaps to share knowledge, achieve organisational goals and learn (Edwards 2011).

Leaders in an educational setting, perhaps a school, college or educational agency, frequently find themselves concerned not just with the internal operation of their organisation but also with the multi-layered interaction they have at their boundaries with other organisations—perhaps another school or the national government. Third space is a concept that has been developed to describe and help understand how the space works in between two or more sets of people, organisations or cultures where neither have overall control and within which exchanges and relationships need to develop. The idea has been applied to different fields of educational research and practice, including language development in early learning, home-school relations and multi-agency work such as the safeguarding of children. Third space is a place with rich potential for creativity, openness and engagement (referred to as 'hybridity') where change processes can work differently (Bhabha 1994). Such spaces of interaction are a challenge and opportunity for Christian leaders in education, working at the boundaries inside and outside their organisation, including those between Christian faith and secular belief systems.

Chris Baker explores the challenges and dilemmas that face Christians and the Christian Church in a post-modern and secular/post-secular world at the boundaries with other cultures, faiths and social or political organisations (Baker 2009). He highlights the need for Christian leaders to give priority to coalition building, partnership working and reconciliation. Two areas of competence and skill that become particularly important in this shifting and ambiguous environment are the leadership activities of skilful translation and negotiation (Baker 2009, p.45). This emphasis and these skills have helped Christian leaders in education to understand and work more confidently and effectively at and across cultural, organisational and professional boundaries.

Truth, Power and Performance

The features of Christian leadership in education that have been explored so far might be said to sit comfortably with some secular leadership models and could be applied to many other working environments for Christian leaders. So how is Christian educational leadership any different? The role of Christian leaders in schools has been described in terms of being 'a Christian faithful presence within' the school, working closely with its internal networks of change (Engebretson 2013, p.176). We follow Christ in journeys of faith and consequently our leadership practices are dependent on that relationship. Christians are called to develop a 'faith-full' as well as professional understanding of the culture and context of educational leadership. In that process of continuous learning and adaptation, Christian leaders, in the distinctive context of education and in a uniquely Christ-centred way, face a classic dilemma of how to engage truth with power.

Michel Foucault took a keen interest in truth and power. He wrote about the truth-teller and truth-telling as an activity. He wanted to know who can tell the truth, about what, with what consequences, and with what relations to power (Foucault 1983). Frank Pignatelli, a committed and influential Scottish educational leader, saw a strong ethical dimension to Foucault's analyses of power in education that required a response to the plight and marginalised status of the weak and vanquished. He applied this ethical stance to matters of educational leadership and school reform. He opposed ways of operating in the service of others that were marked by narrowness of purpose, inflexible systems of accountability, restrictive modes of surveillance and top-down mandates decoupled from local histories and issues (Pignatelli 2002, p.159). Other writers have challenged power assumptions about the hierarchical control of followers by leaders, on the basis that leaders know best, and the efficacy of unilateral top-down goal setting and communication. Effective leadership by contrast is seen to give a high priority to effective listening and concentrates more on developing people so they can work well within non-coercive relationships (Rost 1993; Hughes 2016). These are the kind of issues that emerge when truth and power are brought together and matter to Christian leaders.

Walter Brueggemann has outlined a biblical basis for understanding the relationships between truth and power that may help to clarify some of the responsibilities of Christian leaders in education (Brueggemann 2013). Examining the leadership stories of Moses, Solomon, Elisha and Josiah, he

sets out to show a continuity and development into the New Testament accounts of the life of Christ (especially in the gospel of John, culminating in the encounter between Christ and the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate) and the history of the Early Church. His analysis would lead us to argue that Christian leaders in education are called to live according to a different understanding of power and control that might involve re-drawing the maps of power in their educational settings and may bring them into conflict with the powers that be. Tom Wright suggests that, following in the footsteps of Christ, each generation of Christians needs to figure out wise and appropriate ways of speaking the truth to power and in the process, redefining power itself (Wright 2016, pp.160–167). The focus is not on preaching, but on action—advocating and modelling Christian principles that change lives and communities for the better. Speaking truth to power is performative—it is about advocating and doing the right things in the right way to achieve the best outcomes.

The challenges associated with living and speaking the truth, in a complex political and social environment such as education, raise many dilemmas, ethical issues and risks. Christian leaders in education should be ready to live and speak the truth with boldness, love and integrity but recognise the risks. Integrity does not just involve telling the truth, regardless of consequences. Stephen Carter writes about 'the insufficiency of honesty', reminding us of other, often competing, responsibilities. Inappropriate or careless truth-telling can damage relationships (Carter 1996, pp.52–67).

Christian leaders respond to the call to live the truth faithfully but can only resolve these dilemmas as disciples in the power of Christ. The performance and achievements of Christian leaders in education are judged not only or even primarily by the professional assessments of senior managers against prescribed targets, important as these may be.

FORMATION OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS IN EDUCATION

Patrick Duignan describes the formation of leaders in education as essentially an educative process that involves them being formed and transformed personally and professionally. (Duignan 2006, p.143). An inclusive and lifelong approach to learning, formation and development that emphasises human connectedness is just as important for educational leadership as for any other learning challenge.

Judith Chapman and David Aspin summarise key elements of an inclusive approach that steers through the complex, sometimes contradictory

and often confusing, array of philosophical and policy objectives for life-long learning. They argue that:

> This learning should be '*life-wide*'—recognising the interplay of informal, non-formal and formal learning in different life domains—and '*life deep*', incorporating the religious, moral, ethical and social dimensions that shape human expression…Such an approach requires us to be positive critics but equal partners in our learning. (Chapman and Aspin 2013, pp.57, 59)

The formation of educational leadership practice in complex settings has used insights from many sources including activity theory. These studies highlight the way relationships operate in terms of organisational behaviour and have special significance in educational settings such as schools and colleges, where learning is the core business. In activity theory, the importance of space is acknowledged as part of learning (Edwards 2005, p.171). In such spaces, the modelling behaviour of leaders on the job is significant because observing others helps us to clarify how new behaviours are performed, and later this coded information serves as a guide for action (Graca and Passos 2012, p.137). Group and networking opportunities to share and test out leadership experience and perceptions have consistently proved to be valuable as part of such an approach. They need to be well-structured with shared commitment and agreed ground rules.

'Leadership-in-practice', a related theoretical starting point, emphasises 'the experiential and embodied nature of leadership', with its dynamic, collective, situated and dialectic qualities (Raelin 2016b, pp.7–8). Other well established and relevant approaches to leadership development also characterise professional formation as knowledge creation—making tacit knowledge explicit by reflection in action (Schon 1983), valuing professional knowledge that is not just propositional but also personal, practical, technical and procedural (Eraut 1994), and recognising how knowledge is woven into participation in professional practices (Wenger 1998). Christian leaders in education can draw on all these sources of inspiration and shape their own responses depending on their context.

Coaching and mentoring are well established as core processes for progressively connecting leadership development to practice, focused on skills, performance, potential and the needs of the whole person (Parsloe and Leedham 2016, p.11). It is important to find ways of securing a 'co-constructed' approach to coaching that is analytical and critical as well as

creative (Kempster and Iszatt-White 2012, p.333). Effective coaches and mentors draw upon culturally relevant processes that will sustain the active engagement of the learner-leader while respecting their starting points in knowledge, experience and understanding. For Christian leaders in education, an important feature of their coaching and mentoring will be to support a continuing exploration and development of the faith dimension in their work. This is often not recognised by leaders or their coaches.

Steve Kempster (2009) proposed a systemic model of leadership learning which reflects both activity theory and our developing understanding of learning spaces. He argued that leadership learning is *observed*, *enacted* and *situated*, and that these formative processes have inter-personal and intra-personal dimensions. Through observation, enactment is guided. Through the processes of enactment, practice is refined, and situated practice is developed. As leaders navigate progressively through sequences of career contexts and learning spaces, they typically use these three formative activities of leadership learning.

Within their own learning spaces, which may have some of the third space features that were explored earlier in this chapter, leaders construct and test out their learning strategies. Kempster's research suggests that there are typically six components of those strategies (see Fig. 15.1):

- Identifying their own context (leaders get to know their boundaries, learning spaces and relationships)
- Observational learning (leaders wait, watch, listen and make sense of leadership)
- Trying out leadership roles (leaders trust, step out, practice the behaviour and learn how to do it)
- Developing their self-efficacy (leaders grow in confidence and belief that they can lead)
- Increasing prominence of the idea of leadership (leadership matters so leaders work at it and get used to it)
- Aspiring to a leadership identity (leaders work out who they are, who they are with and who they become)

Kempster's work on leadership learning, including that related to co-construction, clarifies and extends thinking about the processes which support and promote formation for Christian leaders in education. It is not suggested that these approaches are an exhaustive statement of what is needed. However, they are consistent with specifically Christian contributions
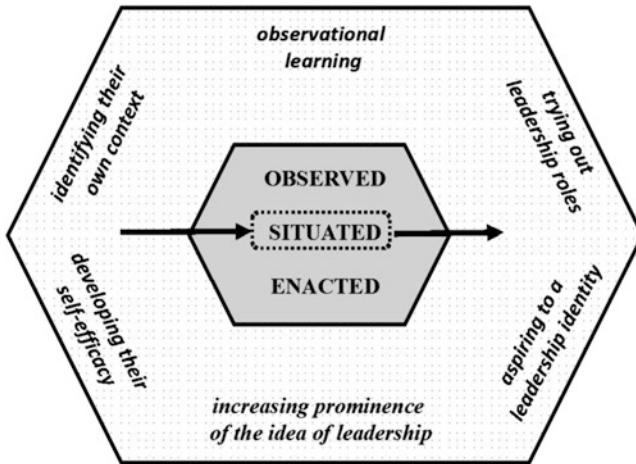
Fig. 15.1 Formation of leaders—learning in action

to effective leadership, including a capacity for working with others as complementary to an individual life of faith. Biblical patterns and tenets of the Christian faith will also illuminate the dynamic modelling role of leaders, especially as seen in the life of Christ. The quality of Christian leadership is tested and demonstrated in individual and organisational growth, improvement and development. It is transformative in purpose and outcomes.

Conclusion

This chapter sets out to tackle three questions about Christian leadership in education. Through our exploration of what we mean by Christian leadership in education, its relationship to the wider study of educational leadership and some of the ways in which it might be developed in people, we can sketch out a summary in the following propositions:

> Christian leadership in education is *God-centred* leadership that develops as *discipleship and service* not status and self-importance, in *community* not autonomy, with *empowerment* not exploitation, and with a vision for *learning* that leads to life and hope.

Christian leadership in education is essentially, though not exclusively, about relationships. It is God-led and God-empowered, engaging the tri-

une God with people in a shared mission of service to communities of learners of all ages for the advancement of learning, creativity, wisdom and fulfilment. It is visionary and inspired but rooted and relevant in the messy and complex reality of human experience. To advocate a learning focus for leadership formation is not just re-stating core business. For Christian leaders, learning is linked to God's creation, order, structures, boundaries and spaces within which life can be enriched and people find fulfilment. Christian leaders accept that learning leadership is about knowledge but even more about wisdom and a search for truth that recognises and promotes interdependence, connections and coherence. They seek to reconcile, faith and work, truth and power, justice and compassion, hardship and hope.

In this chapter, it has only been possible to suggest some of the many ways in which we might clarify our thinking and translate ideas into practice. It encourages Christian leaders in education to develop their understanding and to engage their faith boldly, faithfully and creatively with their vital work with learners and communities.

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Index[1]

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[1]Note: Page number followed by 'n' refers to notes.