

Inspiring Faith in Schools

Studies in Religious Education

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Foreword</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xix</i>
PART 1	1
1 Secularism, Schools and Religious Education <i>Brenda Watson</i>	3
2 Understanding, Belief and Truth <i>Joe Houston</i>	17
3 Confession and Reason <i>Ieuan Lloyd</i>	25
4 Religious Education and Committed Openness <i>Elmer Thiessen</i>	35
5 Religious Education in Australia and New Zealand <i>Grant Maple</i>	47
PART 2	61
6 Religious Education from Spens to Swann <i>Penny Thompson</i>	63
7 Religious Education and the Misrepresentation of Religion <i>Philip Barnes</i>	75
8 Religious Education, Atheism and Deception <i>Marius Felderhof</i>	87
9 Can ‘Skills’ Help Religious Education? <i>William K. Kay</i>	99
10 Is there Anything Religious about Religious Education Any More? <i>Joe Fleming</i>	111

PART 3	125
11 Dismembering and Remembering Religious Education <i>John Sullivan</i>	127
12 On the Grammar of Religious Discourse and Education <i>David Carr</i>	139
13 Religious Education through the Language of Religion <i>Iris Yob</i>	151
14 Religious Education and Liberal Nurture <i>Andrew Wright</i>	163
15 Crossing the Divide? <i>Jeff Astley</i>	175
Afterword <i>M.C. Felderhof</i>	187
<i>Index</i>	193

Chapter 1

Secularism, Schools and Religious Education

Brenda Watson

Abstract

A secularist outlook has been privileged in schools resulting in a form of confessionalism as controversial as more well-recognised religious forms. The educational vision of delivering a fair and balanced curriculum calls for a twofold approach: firstly, to articulate an alternative basis for the curriculum as a whole, which acknowledges the possible validity of both religion and secularism; secondly, to establish a Religious Education (RE) which is truth-focused and capable of challenging the assumptions of a deeply secularised society.

All education is founded on certain beliefs and has particular aims in mind. In this sense all teaching is confessional, whatever the subject, in that it conveys certain values and not others. Challengeable assumptions about the nature of the world, who or what human-beings are and the purpose of life, are inextricably involved in all decision-making.

We may deplore this unavoidable confessionalism because it seems to offend against the search for openness, pupil autonomy and reliance on what can be established by reason. Nevertheless, as no value-free education is possible, the question actually becomes, what is the appropriate confession; what values and beliefs are, or should be, put across?

The Prevalence of Secularism

It is the contention of the writers of this book that in Britain the values and beliefs conveyed in schools are, and have been for a long time, mainly secularist, that is, assuming that there is no God and that the world is explainable in principle without reference to anything that transcends it. Such secularism is shown particularly clearly in attitudes to RE. The dominant way in which religion has been portrayed is as a cultural phenomenon in which any claim to truth becomes privatised as subjective. This viewpoint implies that central religious beliefs are no more than human constructs invented for cultural usefulness.

Unlike the clearly confessional approach to RE of the pre-1960s era, most of the approaches currently in favour, such as the phenomenological, the experiential

and the ethnographic, lend themselves readily to acceptance within a secularist framework. This is because the focus of their concern is religious believers as people who do and believe certain things. The truth or otherwise of what they believe tends to be left in the air, as though bracketed out of the equation.

As other chapters in this book explain, this is at variance with how religious people themselves see their faith. The view of religion as basically cultural or purely personal is a possible way of looking at religion because of the longevity of religions and their incorporation within societies. It is fundamentally, however, an outsider's view, not what is at the heart of religion.

Religion revolves around belief in Spiritual Reality, named in most religions as God. Take that away, and religion becomes, however valuable it may be for an individual or community, an empty husk with external features such as rituals, buildings, dress, doctrine. These features are detachable and applicable to any ideology or way of life. In this sense football or consumerism can become a religion, as well as obvious ideological movements, such as communism and fascism.

It is only fair to add that such secularisation of RE has been aided and abetted by many religious people themselves who have frequently overemphasised the part played by external rituals, creeds and institutions. Without mostly realising it, they have gone along with the assumption that religion is to do with membership of completely separate communities, one called Christianity, another Islam, another Hinduism, and so on, each subdivided into smaller almost self-contained units. The analogy of boxes suggests itself. Outside them all – from the point of view of the secularist – is the beautifully open area inhabited by that section of humanity that has thrown off the chains of religion and escaped from tutelage within the boxes.

Such a view of religion has led to the extraordinary irony of a subject that purports to teach understanding of religion doing so often from a position fundamentally unlike how the saints and scholars of the great religions themselves understand religion. For them truth is supremely important. Thus for Muslims, Islam matters supremely because they are sure that Allah actually exists, and Christianity is a response to what is believed to be the truth about Jesus. The same can be said of all major religions; but the secularist confession sees it the other way round.

The Fact/Belief Divide: Intellectual Apartheid

A major reason why the secularist agenda has engulfed education and RE is the powerful impact of positivism in Higher Education for the past two centuries. This has influenced the intellectual leadership of society as a whole, and still does in so many ways despite the rise of postmodernism. The extraordinary overemphasis on assessment in education is just one example that betrays the presence of positivism.

Positivism holds that only empirically determined areas of study, such as the sciences or quasi-sciences, can claim the label of knowledge. It thus sets up what may be termed a 'fact/belief divide'. This presumes that subjects like the arts, ethics, politics, metaphysics and religion are – from a truth angle – meaningless and merely subjective. Thus, in discussing the arts today, it is hard today even to mention the

word 'beauty', and morality has become reduced for many to what can be negotiated and embodied within rules and laws for the benefit of society.

The impact on religion is clear. Religions can be described as phenomena in acceptable academic terms, but no adjudication regarding levels of truth within them is deemed possible. Individuals may practise such adjudication, but what they think has no universal validation: it is no more than just what they happen to think. Deeply felt awareness of the Divine has thus been reinterpreted in psychological or sociological terms, even in biological terms.

Besides promoting a false either/or attitude, this divide has also helped to de-power several generations from the capacity to think intelligently and sensitively about issues on the belief side of the divide. The extreme concentration of intellectual energy on empirical and pragmatic matters has produced an increasingly secularised society where, even though talk of the spiritual may be retained, it is regarded largely as a private domain governed by emotional reactions. This has both made it hard for secularists to understand religion, and deprived religious people of that proper open and respectful debate which they also urgently need. The rise of religious fundamentalism owes much to the intellectual apartheid created by the liberal West.

Secularist Indoctrination?

In an important book, *Indoctrination, Education and God*, Terence Copley (2005) argues that what has happened amounts to secularist indoctrination. Beginning pointedly with the question 'If we were being indoctrinated now, at this minute, would we know?' he asks: 'What if young people are never in a real position to choose between a religious way of life and a non-religious way of life? What if they irresistibly acquire a non-religious world-view in the same way they acquire a taste for jeans, logo trainers and pop music?' (Copley 2005, pp. xi and viii).

After a wide-ranging survey of both media and education, he concludes that our society has seen 'the surrender of mind to an uncritical secular world-view' (Copley 2005, p. 150). He considers that education has been complicit in producing such an effect:

Education is visibly preserving the discourse of religion but sometimes, rather like a fish that has been filleted. God, the backbone of religion, has too often been neatly excised from the presentation. (Copley 2005, p. 148)

In a thoughtful and provocative review Stephen Burwood (2006) considers that Copley has not made his case. He concludes that 'something like the current approach offers the best safeguard of children's freedom to discuss and question' (2006, p. 107). In the course of his argument, however, Burwood makes some damaging concessions. Thus he notes that 'all education reflects the biases and prevalent values of the society in which it takes place' (2006, p. 106). But we may ask whether there is no more to education than that? Should schools not challenge society as well as reflect it? What has happened to the notion of passing on knowledge in the pursuit of truth? Notably this still appears to be important in other areas of the curriculum. Thus scientists are

currently trying to ban the teaching of Creationism in schools because it is false.¹ If truth matters for science, then who has decided that it doesn't matter for religion? Isn't the pursuit of knowledge and truth, independent of the bias of any particular culture or society, part of what the word 'educate' properly means?

Secondly, he quotes the interesting phrase of Max Weber that our society is 'religiously unmusical'. Can we be satisfied with such an education? The philosopher Bryan Magee thinks it an advantage that he came from a home where God's existence was never considered: 'By sheer chance I had the good fortune to grow up in a family in which religion was never mentioned' (Magee 1997, p. 8). Would he, however, say the same about the arts: music, theatre, poetry etc.? Elsewhere he notes that 'he had the good luck to be born into a family that took an active interest in them' (Magee 1997, p. 25). Discussing philosophy, science and the arts, he writes: 'all three confront the mystery of the world's existence, and our existence as human beings, and try to achieve a deeper understanding of it ... and a fully rounded human being will find himself becoming naturally interested in all three' (Magee 1998, p. 9). Prior to this quotation, he had commented on and excluded religion as irrelevant. This seems a particularly clear example of secularism at work!

On the one hand the educational rhetoric wants to educate pupils for choice; on the other hand highly educated and cultured people like Magee imply that it doesn't matter if people are ignorant in religion. Yet ignorance is a poor basis for choice, as Daniel Barenboim remarked in his first Reith Lecture. Faced with a comment that schools should not push music on the young so as not to infringe their free will, he replied, 'Ignorance has not yet for me acquired the category of free will decision. First you have to know about it'.²

Thirdly Burwood admits that there is no 'value-neutral position' and that secularism is 'as ideological and value-laden as any other'. He sees no problem, however, regarding the dominance of secularism because he associates it with freethinking, promoting notions of openness, tolerance and perhaps even criticality. Such secularism cannot be considered as an attempt to indoctrinate, as the 'wholesale pumping'³ of secular values into children.

The problem is that by themselves these values are inadequate as the basis for education. It is impossible to be open all the time; and the appropriateness of tolerating the intolerant is increasingly seen today to carry immense problematic consequences. Furthermore, the use of reason does not easily lead to agreement, as philosophers constantly demonstrate. Commitment to such virtues is therefore no guarantee that they are pursued in practice. To take but one example, the openness of the secularist is often strangely selective – it appears to exclude openness to religion! Most philosophy, both academic and popular, has largely privileged secularism and looked with great suspicion upon the possibility of religious faith.

Finally, Burwood defends the status quo on the grounds that it is not just the responsibility of schools to teach understanding of religion: the home and religious

1 See for example, *The Independent*, 22 June 2006.

2 D. Barenboim (2006) responding to comment by Willard White at BBC Radio Reith Lecture 1, London, 7 April.

3 Copley's phrase.

institutions are crucial. This, however, misses the point of Copley's argument which is that it is through the secularist assumptions operating in schools, *and* outside them especially through the media, that children are effectively indoctrinated into secularism and against religion. Those from religious homes may receive nurture in religion. It is the majority who do not about whom Copley is concerned, and whom education in schools should be helping.

Fundamentally I believe that Copley's thesis concerning the power of secularism in our society is correct. But because the term *indoctrination* is highly emotive, one which moreover tends to imply *deliberate* conscious imposition of beliefs, the term is perhaps too strong to describe what has happened. It is not however overstating the case to speak of the serious *over-influencing* of the young in a secularist direction. By avoiding unnecessary controversy about the use of the term, we can avoid distracting attention from Copley's main point that the educational language of openness, accessibility and choice becomes meaningless regarding religion unless people have proper and fair exposure to the *possibility* of religious belief. In our society widespread ignorance and prejudice are operating against this. There is a clear need therefore for a truth-focused RE to counteract this situation.

Truth-Focused RE without Illicit Confessionalism?

But it is possible that some may still be inclined to see such an approach to RE which seeks to address secularism, such as is argued for in this book, as an attempt to establish an educationally illicit religious neo-confessionalism. The following section seeks to reassure readers that this is not so.

Such a charge would imply an unacceptably one-sided use of the term 'confessional' as:

1. appropriate only for religion;
2. acceptable to religious people because drawing attention to the crucial *faith* element in religion;
3. inevitably involving an attempted religious take-over if the teacher tries to communicate the truth of religion.

All these points need reassessing.

1. *Appropriate only for Religion*

The 'only' is false. Confession in the form of challengeable beliefs, assumptions, world-views, faith, lies behind all action, reaction and judgement-making and not just behind religion. This is a point brought out, for example, in John Gray's book *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (2002). His fierce dismissal of Humanism indicates that the Humanist stance in particular is not as unassailable as its advocates tend to imply.

Whereas religion openly affirms and celebrates, thus making itself vulnerable to the charge of confessionalism, secularists argue that they are not instilling any belief about God, but just allowing people to think what they want; by not teaching about

God it is presumed that a tolerant, neutral, flat playing-field is achieved. Secularism, however, is not neutral in its understanding of reality. It rests on the belief that there is no God and that the world can be adequately – as fully explained as is possible or necessary – in wholly molecular terms.

The denial has positive effect despite its faith-position being often masked by not being voiced as such. A chance example I have just come across occurs in *What Good are the Arts?* by John Carey. He specifically notes: ‘I shall assume a secular viewpoint in what follows ... not out of disrespect for religion, but because the assumption of a religious faith would alter the terms of the discussion fundamentally and unpredictably’ (Carey 2005, p. 3). This implies a secularist stance because he does not consider it important to lay before the reader the alternative understanding of the arts which religion might give.

The problem is further complicated in that not bringing God in can easily slide into alternative belief concerning the nature of the world and the purpose or non-purpose of human life. I mean by ‘slide’ accepting views not as a result of thinking about them but largely by default, by not thinking. So the secularist position is not the value-free neutral ground it pretends to be.

The fact that secularists are normally reluctant to admit that they operate from a faith basis enables the myth of their neutrality to continue flourishing. The issue has at least been raised recently in the philosophy journal *Think* around the question ‘Is atheism a faith-position?’ and has prompted some debate (Watson 2005 and 2006).⁴

2. *Religion concerns Faith*

A misleading either/or can easily be read out of this. Whilst faith is crucial for religion and raised to a special place, this should not imply that reason and experience are unrelated to that faith, or that faith is somehow an alternative to reason. This is partly what lies behind the easy separation of religion from anything associated with philosophy. Thus Bryan Magee omits religion from his discussion of the value of philosophy, science and art already quoted, on the grounds that philosophical enquiry operates ‘without making it a question of religious faith, or appealing to the say-so of an authority’ (Magee 1998, p. 7). In other words, the assumption here is that faith is blind and unrelated to reason.

Religious people have often unknowingly supported this false dichotomy by under-playing the cognitive element in faith and over-playing the emotional. Indeed the presumed split between cognitive and affective states is one of the manifestations of the fact/belief divide discussed above.

3. *Inevitably a Religious Take-Over?*

The word to be questioned here is ‘inevitably’. There have been many forms of religious, as of secularist, indoctrination. But it is as possible to teach a religious viewpoint as it is a secularist viewpoint without trying to pressurise conformity. The

4 Following comments by Brendan Larvor and Marilyn Mason.

understanding of RE expressed in this book takes for granted how crucial it is to avoid any hint of bullying.

All communication with the young, in home or school, conditions – and indeed indoctrinates – to some extent. It is well known that assumptions gathered in childhood exercise a very great hold over the adult mind. Immature minds are necessarily affected, in a way that they cannot at that time critique, by what the adults in their environment believe and regard as important and true. A measure of confessionalism is part of all upbringing and all education, not just regarding religion.

This is why I consider that the current debate about faith schools and community schools is unhelpfully supporting this misunderstanding. It implies that only religious schools are driven by faith when, in community schools, a secularist faith has been privileged over religious faith.

What is needed in *all* schools is space for pupils as persons to reflect on what is presented to them, so that they become capable of discerning for themselves insight from oversight, and understanding from misunderstanding.

The Educational Requirement

Regarding the secularist/religious controversy all educationalists, not just RE teachers, face a dilemma: how to educate without indoctrinating. For at base there are two very fundamental, conflicting faith-positions: *either* the world is the blind product of molecular evolution *or* it is the work of some Power outside it which in most religions is termed God.

Both these positions are challengeable. There is no rational proof for the view that there is no more to the world than its empirical reality, any more than there is rational proof for the existence of God, if by reason is meant a logical, absolutely objective demonstration of truth. For the theist and atheist positions both start from assumptions which people arrive at through reflection on life as a whole – using imagination, empathy, intuition, and many other aspects of cognitive and emotional activity.

The educational requirement must permit real choice based on knowledge, attentiveness and civilised debate. Education should enable pupils to grapple with this possibility. Not to share it with them is tantamount to over-influencing in one direction or another.

Education, as opposed to mere training, should seek to pass on to future generations what is important and help them to think about it for themselves. It is obviously absurd to equate all teaching with indoctrination, in that selection is inevitable. But faith in God or in a God-less world is a matter of such potential moment that failure to present the possibility of God may be seen as unwarranted conditioning. Legitimate specialist interests, or what is appropriate for hobbies, may be considered ripe for non-inclusion in an over-crowded curriculum. But the argument is not so persuasive when matters of potentially great moment are involved.

What is involved regarding belief in God is fundamental; it alters every aspect of a person's assessment of life, as the quotation from John Carey above implies.

The theologian John Magee put it like this: ‘Every society is based on a conviction concerning the ultimate nature of things.’ As a religious person he quotes T.S. Eliot,

What life have you if you have not life together?
 There is no life that is not in community
 And no community not lived in praise of God.

He goes on:

Modern efforts to build a purely secular society are in futile opposition to this principle of moral and spiritual togetherness in the community. When secularism has at last divorced man from his ultimate meanings, pulled him up by the roots and let him wither above the life-nourishing ground, then the frantic efforts to create an artificial community begin. These efforts produce at last the compulsory social collectives of modern history. (Magee, 1957, pp. 1–2)

The secularist will tend to dismiss this viewpoint on the grounds that it is partial and prejudiced. But the point is that the religious person can reply in like manner. What crucially needs to be presented in schools is that *both* religious and secularist convictions are faith-commitments that are challengeable.

How to meet this situation? I believe that two approaches are needed:

A. An Alternative Values-Basis for Schools

There needs to be widespread acknowledgement, right across the curriculum and affecting the whole ethos of the school, of the values needed to support education. In a time of marked uncertainty and changing values it is particularly important to be clear about this. Such clarity can give some kind of stability and coherence and act as a reference point in the life and organisation of the school.

In a specifically religious faith school, such as a Catholic or a Muslim school, the values in the school are presumed to flow from faith in God as perceived within those traditions. This is in effect a hierarchical top-down model. In community schools a different hierarchical model is presumed appropriate: one in which human values such as autonomy, openness and tolerance take precedence, and God is an option somewhere down the system. This is the solution adopted in Britain in the attempt over the last two centuries to include religion within an overall liberal approach to education – unlike in the USA, for example, where religion is generally absent from schools.

The problem with this is twofold. Firstly, there is a certain incoherence surrounding these general human values; they are unable to sustain the weight placed on them, as we have seen. They are not absolutes in their own right, for their validity is dependent on a variety of other deeper considerations. Secondly, to treat God as an optional or exotic extra is already to have lost touch with all the religions which see God as *THE* reality upon which all the rest is dependent. The apparent carrot of allowing toleration of religions merely underlines that the secularist view is on top and controlling the exercise.

The basic structure of core values for schools needs to incorporate a common approach agreeable to all which nevertheless does not compromise other beliefs held. The ‘human values’ solution will not do. But neither will the religious hierarchical solution which sees God as the *raison d’être* for education, for this is offensive to secularists who do not believe in God. It is important that integrity is safeguarded for all.

The following is an attempt to draw up a statement of core values permitting a school to function as a conscious unity whilst nevertheless doing justice to what is deeply controversial, that is, to satisfy both secularist and religious convictions. It is set out in two figures. Figure 1 sees a six-fold valuing as the basis of education: it depicts the need for balance, together with a commitment to trying to see things whole and not fragmented. Over-attention to one aspect needs correcting by being mindful of the rest (see, e.g., Watson and Thompson 2007, ch. 1).

Figure 2 expresses the possibilities of interpreting this six-fold valuing using the metaphors of a circle and an orb. What for non-religious people may appear to be a two-dimensional surface can be seen by religious people to constitute an essential and true aspect of a three-dimensional orb.

On the basis of this, both secularism and RE can operate in schools as consciously legitimate options, not one alone controlling the agenda.

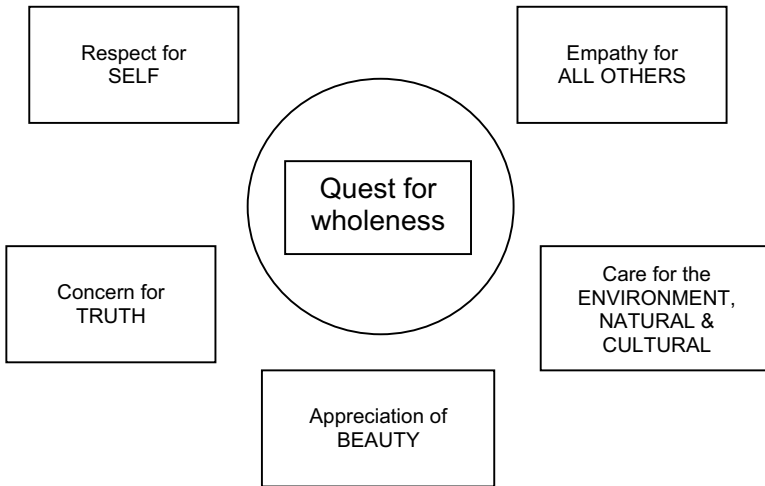


Fig 1 A six-fold approach to valuing, capable of being shared by all

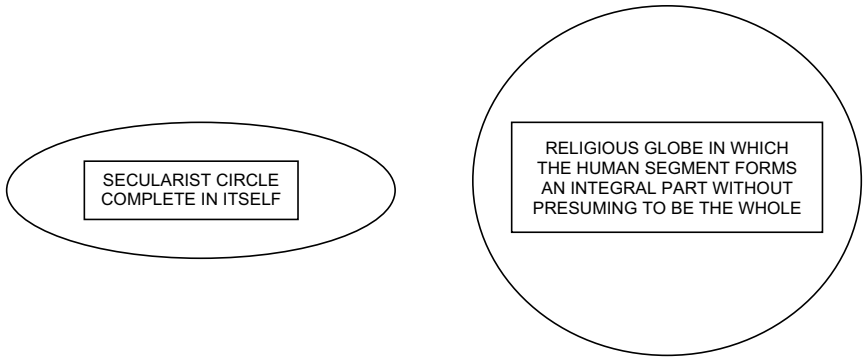


Fig 2 The circle and the orb, permitting the six-fold approach to valuing to be seen from a secularist or a religious perspective without loss of integrity

B. Truth-Focused RE

The second essential for creating a fair and balanced curriculum is for RE to be given a proper and respected place in the curriculum and be allowed to challenge the secularism of society.

Such truth-focused RE should exhibit at least the following four characteristics, whatever else is included, or whatever syllabus is followed:

It needs to

1. be primarily God-centred;
2. incorporate strong emphasis on thinking skills;
3. acknowledge the necessarily controversial nature of all assumptions;
4. encourage a growing capacity for discernment regarding the nature of religion and its possible counterfeits.

1. RE Should be Primarily God-Centred

This means opening up for pupils the *possibility* that the fundamental focus of religion on a Reality that transcends this empirical world is true. RE needs to be God-centred because no one can come to intelligent faith in God, nor intelligently deny the existence of God, unless they have acquired some developed understanding of this key concept. We can and should use names such as Ultimate Reality or Spiritual Reality or Transcendent Power to indicate something of that Mystery to which the word 'God' points.

This is a kind of RE which is not just descriptive of the externals of religion but which takes seriously the truth-claims of religion. RE must be aware of how easily in our society teaching about religious people and what is meaningful to them can promote a secularist view. Conveying factual knowledge about external

procedures such as the Five Pillars of Islam, without promoting real understanding of the underlying principles of religion, is unhelpful. The origins of Islam lie in the blinding vision of reality which Muhammad had. He became utterly convinced that Allah is the ruling principle behind the whole of reality to whom everyone is responsible and to whom submission is due. The central question which RE should enable pupils to reflect upon is: was he right? By failing to encourage pupils to wrestle with such gigantic truth-claims, RE can by default teach externalism.

2. *RE Should Teach Thinking Skills*

The assumptions which have led to such massive secularisation have had an unchallenged field day for far too long. RE should help pupils challenge those assumptions. The intellectual difficulties with the secularist case against religion need to be communicated.

We need specifically to move beyond the normal approach of the *Teaching Thinking Skills* movement.⁵ This has been on the whole secularly orientated, focusing on developing logical skills and problem-solving. There is an urgent need for RE to enter this field. I well recall the comment by one experienced primary school teacher attending a Teaching Thinking conference: on hearing that I taught RE he remarked as he walked away: ‘Oh you’re the folk who believe the moon is made of green cheese!’ RE should help even young children to see through that one!

Such work on thinking skills does not mean capitulating to a purely cognitive approach. Rather, RE needs to empower pupils/students to think and reflect in a way that engages their whole personality. It has been a serious weakness of much RE that it has tended to undervalue and underplay thinking. It has suffered from stereotypes derived from Piaget and Goldman, themselves dependent on the fact/belief divide already discussed. I believe that the time has come for reversing this suspicion of thinking and, joined to a more generous understanding of what thinking comprises, allow it to take centre-stage along with other ways of knowing.

3. *RE Should Openly Acknowledge the Controversial Nature of Religious Belief*

RE needs to accept fully the element of challengeability in all human knowledge and invite pupils into the debate. Neither intellectual nor emotional pressure should be placed on pupils to accept a controversial commitment as though it were not controversial.

We need to remember that the case against believing in God remains possible, and something that must be wrestled with. This is one reason why Rowan Williams has supported the inclusion of Philip Pullmann’s atheistic material in RE (2004). We must be honest about disagreements concerning the reality of God when we are dealing with children in schools. By trying to give the impression to them that there is no doubt about God, teachers are making it more difficult for pupils to understand and come to have a real knowledge and love for God; for even young children become

⁵ Associated with de Bono, Lipman, Buzan and many others. See, e.g., Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) and Fisher (1990).

aware that many people do not believe in God. The capacity of young children tends to be consistently underrated, as Olivera Petrovich's research shows (1989).

Teaching even young children, therefore, that belief in God is controversial will not result in their indifference provided that they are also taught that *not* believing in God is controversial too. They should be helped to see signs of the secularist bias of our society, especially in the media, and invited to question what is there presented to them.

The underpinning understanding of knowledge which the teacher needs, whatever age-group is being addressed, is one midway between positivism and postmodernism – one which does justice to the human situation, accepting the partial and provisional status of all our knowledge, and therefore, open always to the possibility of fresh evidence based on a range of ways of knowing.

4. RE Should Seek to Develop Discernment Enabling an Honest Evaluation of Religion

Real belief in God becomes impossible for those who do not learn to distinguish between genuine faith and the many counterfeits of the real thing which are possible. These may be due to such factors as superstition, hypocrisy and the operation of a power syndrome whereby those in authority try to keep others ensnared. RE should include a radical critique of what passes as religion. What indeed does it mean to be religious? Is a person a Christian or a Muslim just because they say so?

It will not do to try to give the impression that if everybody were religious then the world would be lovely. Unfortunately the damage which religion misunderstood and abused can do is only too apparent. Much anger with religion has a great deal of well-founded experience to support it, and it is a major reason put forward for secularism. Religion can work up strong emotions capable of use for good or ill. With religion we must never imagine that we are dealing with a tame lapdog of a subject; rather it is a potentially ferocious wolf.

Viruses present in almost all religions need to be openly spotted and corrected – racism for example. The peace of the world may depend upon learning to appreciate that any concept of God or Allah as an ethnic cleanser contradicts the fundamental perception in Judaism, Christianity and Islam of God as love, Allah as compassionate. Promoting discernment about the abuse of religion is especially necessary, and will link up with the teaching of thinking skills already mentioned.

Teachers are often fearful of introducing this awareness of negativity in the classroom. I think they do not need to be, provided they genuinely want to encourage children's thinking and involvement in the debate. For such matters lie close to questions almost everyone asks about religion. The usefulness of the virus metaphor moreover does allow religion to be seen in a positive way without pretending that all is well with religion throughout. The point needs to be made that the sternest critics of religion have often been religious people themselves, people like St Francis of Assisi. Such people see the need for reform from within, and work towards it.

Conclusion

RE which features such components as the four just discussed can supply the anti-indoctrinatory feature of the curriculum necessary to help counter the prevailing secularism of society and of much that is taught in schools. RE should appear on the curriculum in schools precisely because belief in God cannot thus easily be disproved. Such belief is a crucial question, completely unsettling attitudes to every other aspect of life, and therefore it is important that children and students have the opportunity to think about it and make decisions about it intelligently and sensitively for themselves on the basis of knowledge and understanding instead of ignorance or prejudice.

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