

# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CHRISTIAN VALUES IN THE 1988 EDUCATION REFORM ACT

A Reply to J. D. C. Harte

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In his article 'The Religious Dimension of the Education Reform Act 1988' (*Ecclesiastical Law Journal* No. 5, July 1989, pp 32-52), J. D. C. Harte has provided a helpful summary of the new legal framework in the context of the legal history. His interpretation of the implications of the legislation for the theory and practice of religious education in the schools is less satisfactory, and the theological assumptions of his article are at least questionable. It is thus as a religious educator and (if you like) a theologian specialising in educational problems that I would like to respond. In order to appreciate the exposition of Mr Harte, it will be necessary first to have some insight into the history and recent developments of religious education.

## I BACKGROUND AND RECENT TRENDS IN AGREED SYLLABUSES

The practice of determining the content of religious education in county schools by reaching agreement between the interested parties (employers, teachers and religious groups) developed during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>1</sup> The 1944 Education Act recognised and confirmed the best professional practice of the previous twenty years, giving legal support to a tried and tested negotiating machinery. It is significant, and a mark of the wisdom of the legislators, that the provisions were confined to the administrative framework and did not enter into the difficult area of content. Section 25 required that 'religious instruction shall be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus' and Schedule 5 set out the arrangements for the four-fold committee structure of the Agreed Syllabus Conference which was to be convened by the local education authority.

Nothing whatever was said in the Act about the content of the agreed syllabuses. It was the Birmingham experience in the mid-1970s which established the limits. The document had to be agreed, it had to be a syllabus, it had to deal with religion, and it had to be instructional. The discretion of the LEA Conference could be exercised within these boundaries. Nevertheless, the definition of content remained rather general and a principal feature of the 1988 Act has been an attempt to remedy this. In order to keep a historical perspective, it is worth remembering that the definition of agreed syllabus contents has not always been regarded as too vague; there was a very well informed and responsible group of critics in the mid-1970s who regarded it as too restrictive. Such is the change of climate which has taken place in the last decade.

1. John M. Hull 'Agreed Syllabuses, Past Present and Future' in *Studies in Religion and Education*, Lewes, Sussex, Falmer Press, 1984, pp.73-92.

In 1974 an early draft of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction proposed to include the study of secular world views, and the legal opinion obtained by the Authority suggested that this would only be acceptable if it were clearly shown that these secular world views "... advanced the instruction of religion and related to religious instruction and were not taught for their own sake".<sup>2</sup> Thus it was that in the final form of the Birmingham syllabus, secondary pupils were to study "a secular stance for living which shares many of the dimensions of religion whilst not admitting belief in realities transcending the natural order".<sup>3</sup> In other words, the document had to be a syllabus of *religious instruction*, it being granted that the purposes of such instruction could be served by forays into areas such as art, literature and secular world views which were not, in themselves, religious. Since it had been common, particularly in the sixth forms, to study secular world views in religious education,<sup>4</sup> this was a useful clarification, again confirming professional practice and enabling the subject to resist any tendency to become too ambitious in its scope. The proper content of religious education was religion. The British Humanist Association was dissatisfied with this result, although not opposed to the study of religion as such, and made an attempt to introduce a change in the law which would enable secular world views to have parity with religions.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of this rather general definition of their content, the agreed syllabuses both before and after the 1944 Act followed a similar pattern nationwide. In general, they concentrated upon the origins and history of the Christian faith, with special attention to the Bible. The primary syllabus was almost entirely stories from the Bible, while secondary syllabuses tended to study the history of Israelite Religion and the life and teaching of Jesus in the early years followed by the Acts of the Apostles and John's Gospel in the middle years, while the final years of secondary education were devoted to the social and ethical teachings of Christianity, the philosophy of religion and the study of world religions and their secular alternatives. This broadly summarises the content of the agreed syllabuses from the 1920s until the middle 1960s.

Certain aspects of this consensus were subjected to widespread and increasing criticism during the late 1950s and in the 1960s. Insufficient attention was being paid to the living Christian faith, too little heed was being given to the actual life interests and concerns of children and young people, and the tendency to teach the Bible and history of doctrine in historical order was shown to require an historical awareness and an ability to appreciate abstract propositions which were beyond the grasp of most children of school-going age.<sup>6</sup>

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2. Quoted by Harry V. Stopes-Roe "Education and the Law in Birmingham" *Learning for Living* 15, Summer 1976, p.134.
  3. City of Birmingham District Council Education Committee *Agreed Syllabuses of Religious Instruction*, Birmingham, 1975, p.10.
  4. John M. Hull, *op.cit.* pp. 88ff.
  5. British Humanist Association *Objective, fair and balanced; A new Law for Religion in Education*, 1975.
  6. For criticism of the pre 1965 syllabuses see Institute of Christian Education, *An Enquiry into the workings of the 1944 Education Act*, 1954.  
Edwin Cox *Changing Aims in Religious Education*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.  
J.W. Daines *Meaning or Muddle?*, University of Nottingham, Institute of Education, 1966.  
H. Loukes, *New Ground in Christian Education*, SCM, 1965.

A new wave of syllabuses appeared which developed the 'experiential' approach, i.e. greater effort was made to adapt the content to the needs, interests and aptitudes of the pupils. This pedagogical revival was, however, confined mainly to teaching the Christian faith in a more lively and contemporary manner.<sup>7</sup>

In the late 1960s a new phase began, and it is this development which has now found confirmation in the 1988 Act. This has been marked by two features: first, the content of the subject has been widened so as to take account of the teaching and practices of the principal religions of the world whilst retaining a substantial emphasis upon Christianity, and second, the methods of teaching have made progress in accordance with changes in the general theory of education. Differences between the work of the school and the church were increasingly recognised and safeguarded by distinguishing more clearly between Christian nurture as an activity which seeks to foster the faith of Christians, and religious education, as an educational activity appropriate for the county schools. There was, to put it simply, a move away from instruction towards education.<sup>8</sup>

The move from instruction to education, which is confirmed by the change of wording in the 1988 Act, was accompanied by a search for adequate methods which would reflect the present-day approaches both to religious enquiry and to general teaching method. One of the most influential approaches which has developed is sometimes called the 'phenomenological approach'. The weakness of certain forms of the experiential approach was that one could not assume that pupils had Christian religious experience nor that it should be the task of religious education in county schools to facilitate such experience. The experiential method itself has undergone considerable revision since the 1960s and is now generally associated with the phenomenological approach. The essence of the latter is that an honest attempt is made to convey to the student the practice and belief of the religious person or group as understood by *them*, not as coloured by our own experiences and, perhaps, prejudices. The phenomenological approach is not the only new approach, and the details of its philosophy and technique are under continual discussion within the profession, but it has undoubtedly made an outstanding contribution to the educational viability of contemporary religious education.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to distinguish method from content. One can use phenomenological methods in the teaching of Christianity, and one could have a syllabus which comprised of nothing but Christianity and which was taught

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7. For the experiential Christian education movement see the writings of Douglas S. Hubery, e.g. *The Experiential Approach to Christian Education*, The National Sunday School Union, 1960. *Teaching the Christian Faith Today*, NSSU, 1965. *Christian Education and the Bible*, R.E.P., 1967. The most influential agreed syllabus of this type was County Council of the West Riding of Yorkshire Education Department *Suggestions for Religious Education. West Riding Agreed Syllabus*, 1966.
  8. The most influential single document was probably Schools Council *Working Paper 36, Religious Education in Secondary Schools*, Evans, Methuen, 1971.
  9. One of the foundation works of the phenomenological movement in religious education was Ninian Smart. *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion*, Faber, 1968. See also Ninian Smart and Donald Horder (eds) *New Movements in Religious Education*, London, Temple Smith, 1975. John M. Hull (ed) *New Directions in Religious Education*, Lewes, Sussex, Falmer Press, 1982 and Robert Jackson (ed) *Approaching World Religions*, John Murray, 1982.

entirely by phenomenological methods. It would, indeed, be difficult to imagine how one could teach Christianity effectively in British classrooms today without taking serious account of the phenomenological method. At the same time, it would be possible to teach Christianity by other methods, or to use the phenomenological approach with a content which excluded Christianity. Method can be applied to any content and content can be taught by any method.

### THE 1988 PROVISIONS

Section 8(3) of the new Act requires that any new agreed syllabus “. . . shall reflect the fact that the principal religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain”. One notices the careful balance of the two parts of the sentence. The new syllabuses are to reflect a certain fact and to take account of certain teaching and practices. Nothing is said about *the manner* of this reflection or of how and to what extent the relevant teaching and practices shall be taken account of. We note, however, that the plurality of Christianity is emphasised: “. . . the . . . traditions are . . . Christian” means that the family of Christian traditions are regarded as part of a larger whole, i.e. the religious traditions of Great Britain. Christianity is thus quite properly subsumed within the category of religion. It is one group of traditions amongst others, and its general preponderance (“. . . in the main”) is to be reflected in some appropriate way. We must assume that local authorities will be free to arrange such reflection as is appropriate to the needs of local communities, bearing in mind that the general scope of study is to be Great Britain. One assumes here that the Celtic traditions of Ireland, Wales and Scotland as well as the Roman Catholic traditions will have as good a case to be reflected as any other, and it will no longer be appropriate to confine any agreed syllabus to the traditions characteristic of the local county. There is, of course, nothing to stop an agreed syllabus from including the Christian traditions of the rest of Europe or of other continents; the reference to Great Britain is the minimal political/geographical context not the maximal.

It will be illegal however, for any new agreed syllabus to confine itself to the study of these Christian traditions, however plural its approach. The second half of the sentence is carefully worded: both the teaching and the practices are to be included, and more than one other principal religion is to be studied. Moreover, the other religions entitled to consideration are not those which are religious traditions of *Great Britain*, but those principal religions which are *represented in Great Britain*. It will be impossible for any mainly Christian area of England and Wales to argue that the treatment of other world religions is not relevant to the needs of their pupils because these other world religions are not represented in their county. The county is not the area of reference.<sup>10</sup>

This provision is a clear summary of the trend in agreed syllabus revision over the past twenty years. The Birmingham syllabus of 1975 made Christianity the only compulsory religion, which was thus to be studied by all secondary pupils regardless of their background or belief. It may be fairly claimed that in this

10. John M. Hull, *The Act Unpacked: the meaning of the 1988 Education Reform Act for Religious Education* (Birmingham papers in Religious Education No.1), CEM, 1989. (Available from CEM Publications Department, Royal Buildings, Victoria Street, Derby, DE1 1GW.)

respect the Birmingham syllabus reflected the required fact in a manner not inappropriate to the needs of the City of Birmingham in the mid 1970s. The Religious Education Council of England and Wales has published a survey of twenty-three agreed syllabuses from the period 1973 to 1987.<sup>11</sup> Fifteen of the syllabuses included the aim, “. . . to appreciate Christianity and the Christian tradition” while thirteen have as an aim “. . . to explore world religion and to understand living in a multi-faith society”. It must not, of course, be concluded that there were eight syllabuses which did not prescribe Christianity. This religion is always included in the syllabuses whether or not it is specifically mentioned in the aims. As far as the content of the syllabuses is concerned, nineteen of the twenty three recommend, “. . . events/teaching of Jesus and/or early Christianity” for the infant and junior years, while only four syllabuses include, “. . . stories of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism”. For the top junior and lower secondary years, only fourteen syllabuses were surveyed, and only three of these include a study of one or more world religions other than Christianity, and for the post-fourteen secondary years of the twenty-three syllabuses surveyed only six include one or more world religions other than Christianity. Seventeen of these secondary syllabuses specifically emphasised Christianity, while in the remaining five Christianity is included in the range of topic work. If one had been trying to summarise the general outlook and content of these agreed syllabuses, one could hardly do better than say that they reflect the fact that British religious traditions are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of other religions, except that, perhaps they tend to be a little on the light side in the latter respect.

The first new agreed syllabus to appear since the 1988 Act continues this tradition, describing the requirements of the new Act briefly but correctly, and giving an interpretation of the meaning of the crucial wording which is not inappropriate for local conditions, whilst setting the study within an adequate broader context. It is true that this syllabus does not make much specific reference to particular religious traditions, leaving that to working parties as has been customary for many years. The general orientation of the syllabus is, however, fully consistent with the new requirements when, having quoted section 8(3) it continues, “. . . therefore the aim and objectives set out in this syllabus assume a multi-faith approach”.<sup>12</sup> The document goes on immediately to quote the Swann Report making it clear that this and the 1988 Act are substantially in agreement and may thus be looked upon as the sources of inspiration and authority for this new syllabus. The previous syllabus in force in the area was the 1963 Middlesex County agreed syllabus which deals almost exclusively with the Christian religion and is thus quite clearly inconsistent with the new wording; not that the 1988 Act requires that any new agreed syllabus should be produced, but it is natural that many LEAs feel uncomfortable about the solidly Christian nature of the pre-1970 syllabuses, several of which are, unfortunately, still in use.

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11. Religious Education Council of England and Wales *Handbook of Agreed Syllabus Conference, SACREs and Schools*, 1989. (Available from the RE/ME enquiry service, St. Martin's College, Lancaster, LA1 3JD.) See the appendices I and II.

12. London Borough of Ealing, *Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education* 1989.

## II J.D.C. HARTE ON THE AGREED SYLLABUSES

We can now turn to the exposition of the new Act offered by Harte. Harte describes the new law as one “which contradicts the prevailing orthodoxy in school religious education” (p.32). He thinks that the Act ensures that “the teaching of religion will normally now give specific recognition to Christianity as the national religion, even in schools which have largely non-Christian pupils and staff” (p.35). The Act, in his view, provides “a golden opportunity to clarify the substance of religious education and to restore its Christian character” (p.36). The “specific emphasis on Christianity” is “a remarkable achievement” (p.37) necessary because “over recent years, many education authorities have adopted syllabuses of religious education following the ‘phenomenological approach’ and have given little attention to Christianity or have treated it merely as a social phenomenon without confronting children with its content” (p.38). Instead of “restricting religious education to some bland mixture of very general ideas which may be shared by various faiths”, we now have something which “clearly encourages pre-eminence for Christianity” (p.40). He tells us that the reference to Christianity has “infuriated some of the opponents of explicitly Christian content in religious education” (p.41).

On all of these points I must, with respect, disagree with Harte. The agreed syllabus provision in the new Act does not contradict the prevailing orthodoxy; it supports it and confirms it. It has been normal to give explicit recognition to Christianity as the religion of the host country, even in schools where a majority of pupils are from other religious traditions. As far as I know, this has hardly been controversial in British religious education, and the new Act will leave this quite unaffected.

I do not know what Harte means by saying that Christianity is the national religion. The religious traditions of Great Britain are, in the main, Christian. Whether this makes Christianity a national religion, or the national religion, is not clear, and the Act says nothing about it one way or the other.

If one wishes to look for clarification of what Harte calls “the substance of religious education” one would consider the local agreed syllabuses after the Act, just as one would have prior to the Act, and although the Act may be said to briefly and perhaps helpfully summarise this, recognise it and enforce it, it in no way clarifies it. I express myself in this rather cautious way because I am not clear what is the “golden opportunity” which the Act provides. In other words, although I agree that the Act provides a convenient summary of professional practice, it creates no opportunities which were previously lacking. I do not agree that the new Act restores something which might be called the “Christian character” of religious education, and I put that in a fairly reserved way as well, because it is not obvious that it would be desirable that this should be done at all, nor appropriate for it to be attempted through Parliamentary legislation.

It is perfectly true that many agreed syllabuses have included amongst the recommended methods the phenomenological approach, but as has already been explained this has nothing to do with the question as to whether the syllabuses give little or much attention to Christianity. Some agreed syllabuses are rich in content; others may be described as offering a general orientation towards the subject, but leaving the detailed delineation of content to working parties and

curriculum development groups. One often has to look, therefore, not at the official agreed syllabus of an LEA but at its advisory documents. In almost every case these are quite rich in Christian content, just as they are usually quite rich in content suggestions about other major world religions. That is as it should be, has been, and will be.

I do not understand what Harte means by suggesting that some of these syllabuses have sometimes been restricted to a bland mixture, as he calls it, of very general ideas which may be shared by various faiths. Perhaps he is thinking of the themes or topics which are sometimes recommended: these may include subjects like pilgrimage, places of worship and sacred books, or maybe studies in themes such as what the religions teach about death or marriage. I know of no religious education syllabus which restricts itself to such thematic or topical suggestions, and where they are recommended great care is usually taken to represent each religion accurately in its distinctive belief and practice, rather than conveying a bland mixture.

It is not at all obvious that now we have something which clearly encourages the “pre-eminence of Christianity”. Harte himself recognises that the crucial provision succeeds in “balancing Christianity with other major faiths”. He turns this balance between one religion and others into an argument for the pre-eminence of the one over the others by the doubtful claim that “it builds on what are actually Christian virtues of toleration and respect for all people irrespective of race and creed” (p.40). No doubt it does, but people with other points of view, from Humanists to Hindus, could make a similar claim. Harte knows of those who have been infuriated by the emphasis upon explicit Christian content; I am not aware of such reactions from within the religious education profession. On the whole, the reaction which I encounter and which I myself share is that we can live quite happily with this guideline, as we were doing beforehand without it. I detect a marginal preference against the new legislation, since it was generally felt that the 1944 Butler legislation on agreed syllabuses had proved its durability and its versatility and was working well. There is a view (again, one I myself share) that the 1944 legislators had shown their wisdom in refraining from detailed definitions. Nevertheless, section 8(3) is on the statute book; it is so bland it will make little difference, but if it should ever become necessary to repeal it, that will be quite possible without disturbing the general religious education framework.

### III J.D.C. HARTE ON COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Let us now go on to the question of collective worship in schools, the requirements for which are set out in Part I of the 1988 Act, sections 6 and 7. I agree with Harte that section 7, which introduces the idea of collective worship which is to be at least partly “. . . wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character”, is new. Whether it is significantly new, or new in a worthwhile and workable manner is, however, a more complex question.

It may be questioned whether Harte is correct in claiming that “Christian worship” is the norm (e.g. the headings of Harte’s seventh and eighth sections, pp. 45,46). It is “collective worship” as required by section 6 which is the norm; the schools can make application to their local Standing Advisory Council (SACRE) to have section 7 (dealing with worship which is “wholly or mainly



of a broadly Christian character”) lifted, but there is no way out of a basic requirement for collective worship. Parents have the right to withdraw their individual children, but schools per se cannot withdraw from this. It is the norm. It is perfectly possible that following a whole series of determinations, not a single school in a given LEA would be having collective worship which would be “. . . wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” and in such an area the situation would be no different (in this respect) from that required by the 1944 Act. That which is compulsory and ubiquitous is the norm. This is no quibble, but a significant alternative interpretation to that offered by Harte.

Be that as it may, let us turn to the crucial section 7. The expressions “Christian worship” and “Christian assembly” do not appear in this section, although Harte regularly uses these descriptions (pp. 33, 44, 45, 46). These may be convenient shorthand expressions, and I note that in section 12, dealing with the powers of the SACRE to determine applications from schools wishing to opt out of the type of collective worship referred to in section 7, the expression “Christian collective worship” is used. Nevertheless, such shorthand expressions can be misleading if they oversimplify a complex situation. Section 7(6)(b) does indeed refer to acts of collective worship which may be “distinctive of any particular faith” but these are envisaged as a result of a successful application to SACRE to opt out of the type of collective worship described in the opening sections of the same section, i.e. the “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” type. We may thus distinguish between those assemblies which may be distinctive of the Christian faith and those which may be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character”. I assume that it is the type of collective worship which is distinctive of the Christian faith which Harte has in mind when he refers to there being separate worship for pupils from a Christian union (p.45).

In making these remarks I am not trying to avoid “concentrating too specifically on the Christian faith” (p.41) but to pay attention to details of the legislation. The expression “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” is certainly, as Harte puts it, a “rather circumlocutory expression” (p.45) and he does not exaggerate when he described it as “rather tortured wording” (p.45). The truth is that section 7 opens with a curiously guarded and indirect statement, followed by an equally unsatisfactory definition (collective worship shall be deemed to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character if it reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief: section 7(2) and then proceeds to dilute its own circumlocutions with a series of qualifications and exceptions which, in the end, leave us more or less where we were. I have discussed these qualifications in detail elsewhere.<sup>13</sup>

It is doubtless true, as Harte says, that a Christian headteacher of a county school will normally be free to keep the school assembly entirely Christian. I do not accept the inference that this would necessarily be the best policy for a Christian headteacher to adopt, nor that headteachers would be justified in imposing their own religious beliefs upon school life. Moreover, there are many other patterns open to headteachers. Not a single school assembly is required to be *wholly* even of a broadly Christian character, since the alternative *mainly* could

13. *The Act Unpacked* op. cit. pp. 15-24 and my editorial in the *British Journal of Religious Education*, Vol. II, no. 3, summer 1989.



be chosen, and even then (as the following section declares) that need only be the case in a majority of the acts of collective worship in any given school term. One of the difficult things for headteachers and governors to grasp about the provisions for school worship is precisely how many options are open to them. Bill Gent has set out twenty-three questions which a school must ask before a clear policy can be formed.<sup>14</sup> It is not surprising that many headteachers are concerned about the administrative complexity and the religious evaluations which this extraordinary legislation requires of them, and it is a pity that Harte shows such little sympathy for them.

Harte is mistaken in suggesting that “the spirit of this definition of acceptable worship suggests . . . that it should express the richness of the full range of Christian faith and practice” (p.45). On the contrary, school worship can never be full Christian worship. It is not liturgical, except in some rather general non-denominational sense, and it is not sacramental. It does not take place in a community of faith, but in a school.

Here lies the rub: the collective worship sections of the 1988 Act are so convoluted because those who were negotiating over the wording in the spring and early summer of 1988 were labouring under impossible demands. There is a contrast between the nature of religious worship and that of education. In many situations this contrast can be put to creative use, but sometimes a tension can be created which can lead to difficulty. This tension has been experienced quite sharply in our county schools in recent decades, but has been mitigated by adopting a rather general understanding of worship, and by making strenuous efforts to relate assemblies to the rest of the life of the school and the surrounding community.<sup>15</sup> Educators, civil servants and church people, many of whom were only too well aware of this tension, were suddenly asked to prepare legislation which would undoubtedly increase the tension by abandoning the only relief previously offered, i.e. the low definition of worship provided in the 1944 Act. A heightened and more specific understanding of the nature of worship could only be introduced if (a) it were undefined as rapidly as it was defined, and (b) a wide range of options were created so as to accommodate the many different needs of schools and communities. Those who drafted the clauses did a very good job in these difficult circumstances, but they should not have been asked to do it at all.

Of course, all is not lost. We must hope that some good will come of this legislation, and it does seem possible, perhaps probable in many cases, that governing bodies and headteachers, watched by vigilant SACRE's, will take their responsibility for the spiritual lives of their pupils much more seriously than before. It is much to be hoped that the habit of devoting school assemblies to the delivering of moral exhortations and the reading out of notices, a practice far too widely spread in secondary schools, will be brought to a halt by this new legislation and the publicity it has received. It is possible and desirable that schools with a significant variety of religious communities will indeed enrich their distinctive and corporate lives by sometimes worshipping apart and sometimes together,

14. Bill Gent *School Assembly/Collective Worship. Some Perspectives* London Borough of Redbridge, 1989.

15. The tension is discussed in John M. Hull *School Worship: an Obituary*, SCM Press, 1975.

and by sharing each others' insights in multi-faith classroom education. Sad to say, it is equally possible that this legislation will lead to an uneasy relationship between religious communities, a sense of injustice and exclusion on the part of some, and that in other schools it will collapse under the sheer weight of its own complexity, sinking into an apathy which will be worse than the earlier condition. These unfortunate outcomes must be avoided if at all possible, and religious education teachers are surely united in working for constructive solutions.

#### IV J.D.C. HARTE ON CHRISTIAN VALUES

The Act “. . . certainly does declare religious, and indeed specifically Christian, values” (p.36). That these emerged at all was due to the fact that there was a wave of “concern from Christian parents and individual teachers outside the main professional hierarchy” (p.38). Referring to the fact that the “other denominations” committee of an Agreed Syllabus Conference must now include representatives of the principal religious traditions in the local area and can no longer be confined to the Christian traditions, Harte observes that “the responsibility of the Church of England to represent the specifically Christian concerns of the local community is highlighted” (p.40). He contrasts the Church of England with the “general religious committee”. “One particularly contentious aspect of multi-cultural and multi-faith teaching for the Christian parent may be when children are involved in worship of non-Christian faiths and even in practices such as seances and black magic. The Act does not appear to ban such practices and in the last resort a parent’s only means of coping with them may still be to withdraw a child from religious education altogether” (p.41). “. . . A Christian headteacher of a county school will normally be free to keep school assemblies entirely Christian provided they are not biased towards the teaching or forms of worship of any particular denominations” (p.46). “Despite its qualifications, the wording of the Act does provide a means for Christian parents to influence county schools so that really Christian worship is provided in them” (p.48). It is necessary to “protect the children according to their parent’s wishes” by withdrawing them from anything else (p.48). “The extent to which those changes (i.e. in the Act) will help to support Christian values and teaching in schools will doubtless depend very much on the contribution of Christian parents, especially as governors and on Christian teachers” (p.52). The Act gives encouragement to all those who are “concerned to affirm a Christian character for education and the school community. It provides an opportunity to reassert the Christian heritage of the nation in its schools” (p.52).

Although Harte is certain that the Act declares specifically Christian values, his certainty seems to waver later in his study, when he concludes that the wording is so vague that Christian parents will have to rely upon their general influence and pressure to get what they want. In short, the Christian values can only be realised through the exercise of rights which are, after all, open to parents of all religious outlooks. Thus in the sense urged by Harte, the Act no more enshrines Christian values than it does Hindu or Jewish values. Of course, there are the two references (in section 7(1),(2) and section 8(3) to the Christian religious traditions and to collective worship being of a broadly Christian character. Harte does not seem to realise, however, that the syllabuses which concentrate upon world religions including Christianity which have emerged in recent years

and are now required by law have been inspired by the work of religious educators, many of whom are active Christians as well as prominent in what he calls the professional hierarchy. They included members of the Church of England, the Free Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, supported and often led by religious educators from Jewish, Hindu, Humanist and other commitments. While I agree with Harte that these world religion syllabuses are fully consistent with and do express the spirit of the Christian faith (not that he says it in quite that way), this gift to the child is not the sole prerogative of Christianity, but is a vision generated by several other principal religions.

As far as Christian values in collective worship are concerned, head-teachers are no more free to ensure that all of their assemblies are of a Christian character than they were before. In view of the many restrictions and qualifications placed upon Christian worship, it would be just as true to say that Christian worship is circumscribed as to claim that it is unambiguously enjoined. Sentences do not become Christian nor enshrine Christian values in some magical way just by inserting the word. One has to consider the history, social context and likely effects of these sentences, and one must always clearly distinguish between those values which are merely consistent with the Christian faith and those which are uniquely generated by it.

Why should the responsibility of the Church of England to represent the specifically Christian concerns of the local community be highlighted merely because the representatives of the other Christian churches find themselves working side by side with the representatives of the other principal religious traditions? Are we to presume that Christian vision is more pure when it is not involved in contact with other people? Is it not possible that a lively concern of a local Christian community might be to find a greater understanding and fellowship between faiths? In that case, would not the Christian churches on what Harte calls the "general religious committee" be in a better position to represent the interests of that community than a denomination which is forced to work in isolation and (as Harte correctly reminds us) is denied a place on a broader committee? Are there not parents who welcome the participation of their children in multi-cultural education and in multi-faith teaching? Are there not Christian parents who are concerned not so much that their children should be protected from black magic as that they should be made aware of local and global poverty? Harte too often assumes that what Christian parents want is withdrawal rather than participation, departure rather than dialogue. There are however many Christian parents who will want to bring their influence to bear upon schools so as to make sure that a warmer welcome is extended to the stranger within the gates. There are after all Christian parents who will follow the policy of all the leading British churches, a policy expressed again and again over the years, in favour of a multi-cultural approach to the curriculum. These Christian parents will want to encourage heads and governors to provide acts of collective worship in which the legitimate spiritual aspirations of all sections of the community are adequately celebrated without infringing the conscience of any. Are there not Christian parents whose main conception of the Christian nurture of their children is not expressed in terms of protection and safeguards, but who seek to challenge their children to go beyond the family context and to encounter the Spirit of God's work in unexpected places?

Let us pose the question in a wider fashion, and ask about the very mission of the church and the nature of its faith. It has been said that the church is a unique institution because it exists solely for the benefit of those who are not its

members. Harte too often seems to assume that Christian parents and Christian teachers will want their own beliefs and values replicated everywhere, and that this is how they will understand the Christian mission in education. He seems to envisage a Christian church enclosed within its own ideas, preoccupied with its own hopes, intent upon establishing its own strength. There is, however, another Christianity and another church, which I claim to be the true holy, catholic and apostolic church, and it is built upon the image of One who was among us as a servant. Harte's theology of education is based upon too narrow a view of both church and mission.

## V CONCLUSION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1988 ACT

It is hard to believe with Harte that the 1988 Act has introduced a "new dispensation" (pp.35, 50). He is, however, keenly aware of the limits of legislation. Of the statement that education shall advance the spiritual and moral development of the pupils and of society, he remarks that it is "an impressive sounding declaration, but standing alone it is difficult to see how it could be directly enforceable in any meaningful way through the courts" (p.35). He seems to suggest that the references to the Christian traditions were included in order to overcome this problem, but as he ponders on why "more concrete touchstones of what is central to the Christian faith are still left out" (p.37) he comes to the view that ". . . the spirit of the formula for new agreed syllabuses may be clear, but the *wording is calculated to deter legal action*. It will be difficult for any Christian parent to challenge a syllabus, or the content of teaching in a particular school, on the basis that it infringes the Act" (p.41). In asking why the 1944 Education Act was not more explicitly Christian, Harte has already expressed the view that, "the reason why nothing explicit was included then seems to have been so as to avoid court cases between members of different denominations over the meaning of 'Christianity', which would have been damaging to the cause of religion" (p.37). The 1988 legislators seem thus to have been as wise as their predecessors, but in that case it is not easy to see in what respect the 1988 Act marks a new dispensation.

As Harte explains the various qualifications and circumlocutions of the tortured legal sentences, his doubts seem to grow deeper. In spite of the new dispensation, Christianity "could be treated in a very woolly manner, with little or no attention to the Bible or even to Jesus Christ as a person" (p.41), the outcome of any judicial review would be "uncertain" (p.41), and having referred to the problem of black magic he concludes that the Act "does not appear to ban such practices" (p.41). In view of this omission, which Harte seems to find rather regrettable, parents will just have to be on the alert and ready to make a fuss, "if collective worship is used as the occasion for such practices" (p.41). On page 42 he becomes quite uncertain as to whether the new freedom which governors have to change the religious foundation of Grant Maintained Schools is a good thing or not. It might lead to more Christian schools, but it might not. It is a two edged sword. It might lead to Muslim schools, but it is not clear if this would be a good thing or not. He has more doubts about the motivation behind the Act: the word "broadly" and the general indirectness of the language "may be used simply to discourage any legal proceedings which might be brought to challenge arrangements for worship in a particular school or local authority area, on the basis that

the Christian faith involves any particular doctrinal standpoint" (p.45). This is the motive which he here attributes to the legislators. We are faced with the rather curious phenomenon of a law which is so anxious to discourage any legal use being made of itself that it is deliberately couched in an unhelpful manner. Whatever a head did would be "difficult to challenge in court" since the new law might permit "worship of a very general and syncretistic form". The wording of the Act is so vague that it would be possible to have worship which is within the law and yet which does not refer to Jesus Christ at all. This could be defended on the grounds that it was, nonetheless, in some kind of general sympathy with a broadly Christian outlook (p.47). He suggests that the complaints procedure can be used "In those areas where the wording of the Act is unclear" (p.49) but we are left with the rather worrying thought, which Harte has planted in our minds, that the very intention of this unclarity might be to frustrate effective complaints.

This then is the 1988 Education Reform Act which, Harte thinks "helps to lay the foundation for a historic new settlement between Church and State" (p.40). If this is to be effective, we must share Harte's hope that the Church will not successfully "thwart the aims of the Act" on several issues which vitally affect the interests of the Church (p.50). We remain perplexed about the character of a so called settlement which manifests such oppositions. It is possible, as Harte suggests, that the Act could be regarded in future ages as "a basic statement of values reminiscent of great constitutional documents such as Magna Carta and The Bill of Rights" (p.41) but some less lofty destiny seems more likely.

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