

# A new dawn for faith-based education? Opportunities for religious organisations in the UK's new school system

Hand, M.

DOI:

[10.1111/j.1467-9752.2012.00878.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2012.00878.x)

License:

Other (please specify with Rights Statement)

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Hand, M 2012, 'A new dawn for faith-based education? Opportunities for religious organisations in the UK's new school system', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, vol. 46, no. 4, pp. 546-559. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2012.00878.x>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

## **Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Hand, M. (2012), A New Dawn for Faith-based Education? Opportunities for Religious Organisations in the UK's New School System. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 46: 546–559. , which has been published in final form at [\[Link to final article using the DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9752.2012.00878.x\]](#). This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Self-Archiving.

Eligibility for repository checked May 2015

## **General rights**

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

## **Take down policy**

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

## A new dawn for faith-based education? Opportunities for religious organisations in the UK's new school system

---

**Michael Hand**  
**University of Birmingham**

*The 'new school system' described in the Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010) presents religious organisations with two interesting opportunities. The first is an opportunity to play a significantly enhanced role in the management of faith-based schools. The second is an opportunity to rethink quite radically the content of their curricula. In this paper I advance a proposal for the consideration of religious organisations: that they take up the opportunity to develop innovative, religiously distinctive curricula whilst eschewing the activity of confessional religious education. I show how non-confessional, faith-based curricula are possible and offer some suggestions about what they might include.*

The Schools White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010) sets out the Coalition Government's vision for a 'new school system' in the UK. The panacea with which the nation's various educational ills are to be treated is school autonomy, construed as the devolution of 'as much decision-making to school level as possible' (para 5.1). This devolution of power is to be achieved by enabling and encouraging all schools to become Academies: 'It is our ambition that Academy status should be the norm for all state schools' (para 5.6).

Academies are schools directly funded by and accountable to central government. They are legally classified as independent schools on the grounds that they are independent of local authority control. Academies must offer a 'balanced and broadly based curriculum' and must provide education for 'pupils of different abilities' and 'pupils who are wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the school is situated' (Academies Act, 2010, Section 1.6). Unlike local authority maintained schools, they are not required to teach the National Curriculum and are free to set their own pay and conditions for staff and to change the lengths of terms and school days.

The argument of the White Paper is that giving schools these additional powers and liberating them from local authority control will ensure that 'decisions are being made by the professionals best able to make good choices for the children and young people they serve' (para 5.1). US Charter Schools, Swedish Free Schools and UK City Technology Colleges are all cited as examples of publicly funded independent schools which demonstrate the advantages of school autonomy. The Academies opened under the previous Labour Government are credited with 'turning around some of the worst performing schools in the country' (para 5.4), a feat they were able to achieve by giving headteachers 'the freedom to innovate with the curriculum, insist on tougher discipline, pay staff more, extend school hours and develop a personal approach to every pupil' (para 5.8).

There is, however, a curious contradiction at the heart of the Government's vision. For in the same breath as it extolls the virtues of school autonomy and headteacher freedom, the White Paper advocates the formation of 'Academy chains' and emphasises the role of 'strong and experienced sponsors':

Schools working together leads to better results. Some sponsors already oversee several Academies in a geographical group, or chains of Academies across the country, and already seven organisations sponsor six or more Academies. These chains can support schools to improve more rapidly – by providing a common approach to professional development, sharing effective practice, and providing shared 'back-office' support. Along with our best schools, we will encourage strong and experienced sponsors to play a leadership role in driving the improvement of the whole school system, including through leading more formal federations and chains. (para 5.17)

The Harris Federation of South London Schools is praised for its success in improving nine underperforming schools by introducing 'new policies, systems, internal staffing structures, rigorous performance management, high-quality training, focused co-operative working and complete rebranding' (para 5.17). No doubt there is much to be learned from the achievements of the Harris Federation, but the model of multiple schools managed, regulated and branded by a sponsoring organisation stands in stark contrast with the model of autonomous schools to which decision-making power has been devolved. This is a tension highlighted by journalist Fiona Millar:

The vision of an education system in which thousands of autonomous institutions bloom, nourished by total control of their budgets has, superficially at least, been the holy grail for politicians on the right for almost 20 years. But scratch the surface and an alternative vision of the future emerges, one in which a patchwork of government-funded chains, each with a distinct brand, run thousands of schools, top-slicing revenue in the same way that local authorities have been doing for years. (Millar, 2011)

Notwithstanding the rhetoric of autonomy and devolution, then, the Government's Academies policy may be less about liberating schools from external control than about transferring operational responsibility for chains of schools from one type of organisation to another. Among the parties standing ready to inherit the mantle of responsibility from local authorities are religious organisations.

### **Religious organisations and school management**

The Church of England has responded warmly to the opportunity to expand its role in leading and managing publicly funded schools. In a speech to Anglican Academy and Secondary School Heads in September 2011, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams drew attention to the prospect of 'a middle-term future in which the Church of England will be quite conceivably the largest sponsor and provider of secondary education in this country' (Williams, 2011). March 2012 saw the publication of the Chadwick Report, a major review of the challenges and opportunities facing Church schools in the new school system. A key theme of the report is the need for the Church to rethink the function and composition of

Diocesan Boards of Education (DBEs), to ensure that they are properly equipped for a widened managerial remit:

In the absence of the local authority as the key supplier of services and support, schools will turn increasingly to other agencies. In some cases, schools will be sufficiently able to meet needs on their own, but in many instances they will turn to their DBEs for help... The areas that need to be covered can broadly be classified, in no particular order, as operational services support and goods, school improvement and effectiveness, and building of Christian distinctiveness. (Church of England, 2012, para 4.19)

Detailed work on how DBEs can take on these local authority functions is well underway. *Academies Update 5* (Church of England, 2011) sets out the preferred model, whereby each Diocese forms an ‘umbrella trust’ to which all its Academies belong. The functions of these trusts include ‘raising standards, placing spirituality at the heart of education, sharing resources, identifying and sharing good practice, achieving economies of scale, supporting governors with additional responsibilities which come with academy status, [and] working together at managing the risks associated with independence’ (para 6). In addition, and in return for a fee payable by each participating Academy, Diocesan umbrella trusts can take on responsibility for ‘finances, managing the Company, HR and payroll, shared services, crisis/contingency management, facilities management, shared staff, etc.’ (para 9).

Other religious organisations are also mobilising. In January 2012 the Methodist Church established the Methodist Academies and Schools Trust, an umbrella trust for all its Academies and Free Schools. An Education Commission Report presented to the Methodist Conference in July 2012 recommends the appointment of a new senior officer responsible for education, enabling the Church to ‘provide the necessary support for schools to raise standards of learning’ and to ‘seize new educational opportunities as they arise’ (Methodist Church, 2012, para 18.3.1). The Report envisages that, under the new dispensation, ‘state-funded schools can be expected to pay for some central support and buy in services supplied by the Methodist Church’ (para 18.6.2).

Unsurprisingly, the prospect of religious organisations stepping in to replace local authorities has been greeted with alarm by opponents of faith-based education. The British Humanist Association describes Rowan Williams’ account of the middle-term future as ‘a frightening vision, given the Church of England’s propensity to discriminate in admissions, in employment, and in the curriculum, and in forcing collective worship on children. If church schools are to become more prominent in the education system, this will surely lead to further societal division along religious lines, and social problems may well ensue’ (BHA, 2011).

### **Religious organisations and the curriculum**

If the opportunity to lead Academy chains has been enthusiastically embraced by religious organisations, they have to date shown markedly less interest in the other striking opportunity afforded by the Academies policy: the opportunity to rethink the school curriculum. As noted above, Academies must offer a ‘balanced and broadly based curriculum’, but they are freed from the requirement to teach the National Curriculum. Given that the National Curriculum currently comprises ten compulsory subjects for 5-11 year olds, and twelve for 11-14 year olds, the study of which takes up the vast majority of children’s time in school, this is a

remarkable exemption. It means that religious organisations leading Academy chains are free to design broad and balanced school curricula more or less from scratch.

Yet no religious organisation has yet given any serious indication that it intends to take advantage of this freedom. Existing religiously-affiliated Academies appear to be teaching the National Curriculum just as they did before converting. Whatever it is that religious organisations hope to achieve by taking on greater operational responsibility for schools, curriculum change does not seem to be high on the agenda.

A possible explanation for this caution about the curriculum, at least as far as the Church of England is concerned, is to be found in the ‘twofold concern’ that has historically underpinned the Church’s involvement in state education. The 1970 Durham Report distinguishes the ‘general’ and ‘domestic’ roles of the Church in education:

It is extremely important to recognize at the outset that the Church of England voluntary school of today is an institution whose roots go back into a past where its role was seen as twofold. It was general, to serve the nation through its children, and domestic, to equip the children of the Church to take their places in the Christian community. (Church of England, 1970, para 441)

This dual role is reiterated and reaffirmed in the 2001 Dearing Report, which proposes that the general role is underpinned by a ‘theology of service’ and the domestic role by a ‘theology of nurture’ (Church of England, 2001, paras 3.16-17). The service purpose exemplifies the Church’s concern ‘for the wholeness of the human being, for the quality of the common life, for the direction in which humanity goes’; the nurture purpose its concern for ‘the nurture of the worshipping community, and the nurture of young people in and from the faith’ (paras 3.16-17).

This twofold concern has, I think, been translated into a twofold conception of the curriculum. Church schools have understood themselves to be offering both a general education, delivered through a conventional set of academic subjects, and a confessional Christian education, delivered through Religious Education (RE) and collective worship. And they have taken the confessional element of the curriculum to be what distinguishes them from schools of other kinds. A good deal of ink has been spilt, by friends and foes alike, on the aims and content of RE and collective worship in Church schools; but very little has been spilt on the rest of the Church school curriculum, for the simple reason that it is assumed not to differ in any important respect from curricula elsewhere.

Since 1988, of course, and until the advent of Academies and Free Schools, all state maintained schools, including faith-based ones, have been required by law to teach the National Curriculum. RE and collective worship are the only areas of the curriculum over which the Church has been able to exercise any control in its voluntary aided schools – and in its voluntary controlled schools even RE is off-limits. It is plausible to suppose that this institutional constraint, together with the Church’s sharp differentiation of its nurture purpose from its service purpose, have tended to discourage the Church from serious engagement with questions of curriculum design.

Notwithstanding these points, it remains curious that religious organisations have been so alacritous in positioning themselves to lead Academy chains, yet so tardy in exercising their newfound control over the school curriculum.

## A proposal

I should like in this article to advance a proposal for the consideration of religious organisations. The proposal assumes that religious organisations will play the prominent role they seek in leading and managing publicly funded schools. It challenges them to exercise their freedom from the National Curriculum and to develop their own religiously distinctive curricula. And it requires them to eschew the activity of confessional religious education, thereby rescuing faith-based schools from the most troubling charge against them: that they are indoctrinatory or miseducational.

I suggested a moment ago that Church schools tend to see themselves as distinguished from schools of other kinds by their nurture purpose. It is confessional Christian education, delivered through RE and collective worship, that makes them distinctive. One problem with tying the distinctiveness of Church schools to their nurture purpose is that it discourages the Church from thinking too hard about their service purpose. A much more serious problem is that the nurture purpose is morally indefensible. The objection to it, briefly, is that there are no educationally legitimate means by which teachers can impart religious beliefs to pupils. Because the evidence and argument in support of a given set of religious beliefs is always, at best, ambiguous, the only way of reliably imparting those beliefs is to resort to some form of psychological manipulation or pressure. The trouble with beliefs imparted in this way is that they come to be held independently of the relevant evidence and argument, and are thus highly resistant to rational criticism and revision. This sort of teaching is correctly described as indoctrinatory, and indoctrination is rightly condemned because to damage someone's capacity to criticise and revise her beliefs is to do her a kind of harm. (For a detailed elaboration of this argument, see Hand, 2003, 2004.)

This objection to confessional religious education seems to me decisive. For as long as faith-based schools subscribe to the nurture purpose, to the aim of instilling and consolidating religious beliefs, their opponents will justly denounce them as indoctrinatory institutions.

My proposal, then, requires faith-based schools to abandon the activity of confessional religious education, and with it the idea that this is what makes them distinctive. Instead, I suggest, religious organisations can take the opportunity afforded by freedom from the National Curriculum to devise distinctive curricula for their schools that are faith-based but non-confessional. The Church of England can overturn its long-held assumption that its commitment to offering a general education implies a commitment to offering the *same* general education as schools of other kinds. What distinguishes a faith-based curriculum need not be the addition of confessional RE and collective worship to a conventional roster of academic subjects; it can be something both less objectionable and more radical than this. Religious organisations can ask afresh, and from their own theological perspectives, fundamental questions about the aims of education and the worthwhile activities into which children should be initiated, and build distinctive school curricula on their answers to these questions. Unconstrained by either the requirements of the National Curriculum or the ideological commitments that underpin it, they are in a position to offer curricula informed by their specific conceptions of human flourishing.

I do not underestimate the demands of my proposal. Devising coherent, innovative, non-confessional, faith-based curricula will require a great deal of hard theological and

educational thinking. And this thinking needs to be done by the religious organisations themselves: I shall not presume to do their theology for them. It will perhaps be helpful, though, for me to indicate how educational and theological considerations might come together in curriculum design, and to give examples of the sorts of activity one might expect to find in religiously distinctive school curricula.

### **Non-confessional faith-based curricula**

A plausible claim about the school curriculum is that it should, among other things, initiate children into intrinsically worthwhile activities, the sort of activities people engage in not just for instrumental reasons, such as wanting to earn money or lose weight, but because the activities themselves are fulfilling, or rewarding, or in some way important or valuable. R.S. Peters famously defended this claim in his landmark book *Ethics and Education* (Peters, 1966). And John White has recently defended it in his attempt to provide a robust set of aims for the National Curriculum:

We want all young people to have a successful life. This means success in worthwhile activities and relationships which they have freely engaged in and which they pursue wholeheartedly. Teachers and parents should help young people to experience a range of absorbing activities (e.g. community involvement, artistic and literary activities, the pursuit of knowledge, helping others, forms of work and enterprise, sport and exercise, making things, love of nature). (White, 2007, p.25)

What makes this claim plausible is the thought that education should do more than equip people to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, money and health. To be sure, people must be so equipped: it is a necessary condition of leading a flourishing life that one's basic needs are met. But it is far from being a sufficient condition. In addition to being fed, sheltered, solvent and fit, people must participate in the kind of activities, projects and relationships that give meaning and purpose to human lives. So the aims of education should not be restricted to imparting instrumentally useful knowledge and skills; they should include initiating children into a range of intrinsically worthwhile activities.

If this claim is accepted, it raises a cluster of interesting normative questions. Which activities are the worthwhile ones? If, as seems likely, rather a large number of human activities qualify as worthwhile, which of them should be included in the school curriculum? And if the answer to that question is the *most* worthwhile activities, which ones are these?

White argues persuasively that there is 'a huge and still proliferating array of activities and relationships in which a young person can find fulfilment' (p.38). Over the last few hundred years, he suggests, there has been a rapid expansion in the range of worthwhile activities readily available to everyone:

The last two centuries have seen an immense proliferation of fulfilling kinds of work, many or most unknown in a pre-industrial age... Extend the period back a century or two and you find equally impressive changes in intimate relationships... In field after field one could tell a similar story. Think of the invention of and variations in new sports and outdoor activities over that period. Think of the burgeoning of forms and genres of music. Think of

developments in home-making, in gardening, in foreign travel, in scholarship, in teaching, in socialising, in bringing up children. (*ibid.*, p.37)

How, then, is a selection to be made? How are we to decide which of these many and varied activities are to be included in the curriculum? There is, as yet, no robustly justified or generally accepted answer to this question. There is, perhaps, a *default* answer, to the effect that schools should concentrate on initiating children into a particular group of academic disciplines. But the arguments that have been advanced in support of the default answer are far from compelling. For the time being at least, the question must be seen as an open one.

Suppose it is true that curriculum design requires criteria for the selection of worthwhile activities, and that no such criteria currently enjoy the support of rationally compelling arguments. Under these circumstances, I suggest, curriculum designers must adopt selection criteria on the basis of whichever non-compelling arguments they find most persuasive; on the basis, that is, of their best guesses. And here, I think, there is room for religious considerations to enter the picture. One way of selecting worthwhile activities for inclusion in the curriculum is to identify some activities as more worthwhile than others, as having special value or significance in the lives of human beings. And one way to do this is to invoke a specific conception of human flourishing in which certain kinds of activity and relationship are centrally important. Insofar as religious belief systems include such conceptions, they supply just the sort of criteria needed for the purposes of curriculum selection. If religious beliefs may be said to represent the best guesses of those who hold them about the conditions of human flourishing, the curriculum criteria they supply will seem to those people to enjoy the most persuasive argumentative support.

Let me be clear: it is not my contention that the *only* way of selecting worthwhile activities for inclusion in the curriculum is by invoking a specific conception of human flourishing which finds greater intrinsic value in some worthwhile activities than others. An alternative strategy is to remain agnostic about the relative intrinsic value of worthwhile activities and inquire instead into their relative *instrumental* value. I have recently, and tentatively, pursued just such a strategy in the pages of this journal: my suggestion there was that curriculum priority might be given ‘to those worthwhile activities that enhance, enter into or shed light on all others’ (Hand, 2009, p.118). Activities satisfying this criterion are not assumed to have greater intrinsic worth, to be more fulfilling or rewarding or important, than those failing to satisfy it: they are selected for inclusion in the curriculum because, in addition to their intrinsic worth, they have a particular, educationally-relevant kind of instrumental value. I still think this strategy has some merit; but it is by no means self-evident that appeals to relative instrumental value offer a more robust normative basis for the selection of worthwhile activities than appeals to relative intrinsic value.

There are, then, various rationally defensible approaches to selecting worthwhile activities for inclusion in the school curriculum, some of which involve appeals to specific conceptions of human flourishing and some of which do not. There would, perhaps, be strategic reasons for favouring approaches of the latter kind if the task in hand were to design a single, centralised curriculum for a diverse, democratic society. It might make sense, under these circumstances, to adopt a pragmatic policy of discounting curriculum selection criteria derived from the specific conception of human flourishing favoured by any one group. But considerations of this kind have much less force when the task of curriculum design is delegated to individual schools and school chains, and when parental choice and diversity of provision are feted as salient virtues of the system. Here it is hard to see any good reason why the curriculum of a



particular school chain should not be informed by the best guesses of those responsible for it about the conditions of human flourishing.

What might a curriculum informed by a religious conception of human flourishing look like? It is hard to believe that a respectable theological account of what matters most in human life would find the subjects of the conventional academic curriculum to be the worthwhile activities of greatest intrinsic value. Let me offer just two examples of the sorts of activity that strike me as promising candidates for inclusion in faith-based curricula, which would immediately start to distinguish them from curricula of other kinds.

First, religious conceptions of human flourishing will tend to assign relatively high intrinsic value to an activity we might call *inquiry into the meaning of life*. By this I mean an existentially-engaged search for meaning and value, a form of inquiry at once theoretical and practical into the significance, origin and purpose of human existence. Religious believers characteristically hold both that there are good answers available to ultimate questions and that human fulfilment (or salvation, or enlightenment) involves apprehending and acting on those answers. Serious and sustained inquiry into the meaning of life is therefore taken to be an activity of the first importance.

The twofold character of this inquiry, as both theoretical and practical, is well described by the 19th century Protestant theologian James Orr, in his analysis of what leads people to seek a ‘view of things as a whole’:

The causes which lead to the formation of ‘Weltanschauungen’, that is, of general theories of the universe, explanatory of what it is, how it has come to be what it is, and whither it tends, lie deep in the constitution of human nature. They are twofold – speculative and practical, corresponding to the twofold aspect of human nature as thinking and active. On the theoretical side, the mind seeks unity in its representations. It is not content with fragmentary knowledge, but tends constantly to rise from facts to laws, from laws to higher laws, from these to the highest generalisations possible. Ultimately it abuts on questions of origin, purpose, and destiny, which as questions set by reason to itself, it cannot, from its very nature refuse at least to attempt to answer... But there is likewise a practical motive urging to the consideration of these well-worn questions of the why, whence, and whither? Looking out on the universe, men cannot but desire to know their place in the system of things of which they form a part, if only that they may know how rightly to determine themselves thereto. (Orr, 1989 [1897], pp.6-7)

Inquiry into the meaning of life, then, is not merely an intellectual exercise, not an *academic* activity insofar as this implies disinterestedness and detachment from practical concerns. It is certainly focused on truth, on finding the best ‘general theory of the universe’, but it is equally concerned with how to live, with what ultimately matters and what that requires of us. It is a form of inquiry that makes hefty emotional and intellectual demands: inquirers risk losing their grip on their most taken-for-granted assumptions, and must be open to changing not only their understanding of the world but also the way they ‘determine themselves thereto’.

I do not mean to suggest that inquiry into the meaning of life is entirely absent from British education and educational theory. Michael Grimmitt’s ‘existential approach’ to RE, in which

pupils explore 'depth themes' with a view to 'learning to think at depth, seeing new dimensions in their experiences and forging out for themselves both meaning and purpose in what they encounter and what they do' (Grimmitt, 1973, p.58), certainly comes close to it. As does Andrew Wright's proposal that RE should enable pupils to 'acknowledge and articulate their own answers to ultimate questions, striving to reach a deeper understanding of them, and be willing to alter and adapt them should this become necessary' (Wright, 1993, p.79). And there are at least some RE teachers who devote at least some of their lessons to deep, existential inquiry of this kind. But it remains, perhaps understandably, a marginal feature of mainstream RE. The non-statutory national framework, local agreed syllabuses and public examination syllabuses for RE focus principally on knowledge and understanding of world religions, on empathy with those who hold religious beliefs, and on engagement with religious points of view on ethical issues.

Nor do I mean to suggest that the idea of including this sort of inquiry in the curriculum is wholly foreign to those concerned with faith-based education. During his tenure as Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey declared that Christian education is about 'forming people who, however academically and technically skilful, are not reduced to inarticulate embarrassment by the great questions of life and death, meaning and truth' (Carey, 1998, p.10). More recently, Trevor Cooling, Director of the National Institute for Christian Education Research, has argued that 'grappling successfully with questions of meaning and significance contributes to developing into a healthy, balanced person and is a fundamentally important component of education' (Cooling, 2010, p.14). But there is little evidence that pupils in Church schools currently spend any more time grappling with questions of meaning and significance than pupils elsewhere. A religious organisation that made inquiry into the meaning of life integral to the curriculum of its schools would thereby immediately differentiate them from schools of other kinds.

Second, religious conceptions of human flourishing typically assign high intrinsic value to a class of activities I shall call *forms of service*. I take a form of service to be an activity whose primary purpose is to give help, relief or comfort to others. We think of such activities as intrinsically worthwhile because we hold there to be intrinsic value in helping people. While a person may have various non-altruistic motives for engaging in a form of service, to the extent that she engages in it for its own sake her motivation is altruistic.

I cannot see an obvious general reason why forms of service should tend to be more central to religious conceptions of human flourishing than to secular ones. As a matter of empirical fact, though, that seems to be the case. Perhaps the notion of service sits more easily with a worldview in which God is sovereign than one in which people are sovereigns unto themselves. Or perhaps it is psychologically more plausible to privilege altruistic motivation in human life if one takes human beings to be created in the image of the divine, or transformed by grace, or capable of liberation from the wheel of becoming. Be that as it may, calls to service, to almsgiving and charitable work, to feeding the hungry and healing the sick, to giving without thought of return, to altruistic concern and self-sacrificial love, are recognisably to the fore in the major world religions.

There are various forms of service into which children and young people might be initiated in school. They can serve one another through peer mentoring, peer support or friendship bench schemes. They can serve members of their local communities by visiting residents of nursing homes, preparing food for the homeless or gardening for the elderly. They can serve people further afield by charity fundraising through school fairs or sponsored walks, or by collecting

books, toys or clothes for children in poverty in developing countries. What unites this diverse range of activities is the common purpose of helping others, and the point of including them in the curriculum is not that they are particularly difficult to master, but that engaging in them is the best way of acquiring a deep and motivating appreciation of their intrinsic value.

Again, I am not claiming that forms of service are altogether missing from schools in the UK. But they feature much less prominently than they might (and much less prominently than they do in US schools, for example, where a 1999 survey found that ‘Sixty four percent of all public schools, including 83 percent of public high schools, had students participating in community service activities recognized by and/or arranged through the school’ (NCES, 1999).) Over the last fifteen years, such discussion as there has been among UK educational theorists about forms of service on the curriculum has been in relation to the aims and content of Citizenship, introduced as a compulsory school subject in 2002. But this discussion has consistently distinguished service from politics and insisted on the priority of the latter. For Bernard Crick, architect of the Citizenship National Curriculum, ‘active citizenship’ is at heart a matter of ‘popular participation in public affairs’, of ‘combining together effectively to change or resist change’ (Crick, 2002, p.2). Serving others in itself does not count as political engagement:

Cleaning up a field after a rave or a blitz to clean up a local park or young children’s playground is admirable, as is giving a party for the old and infirm, but it is not citizenship without a knowledge base (how can such despoliation or neglect be allowed to happen at all?), without a process that enhances skills of discovery and advocacy, or without any attempts to influence local authorities, councillors or the police, whatever, whoever is relevant. (*ibid.*, p.5)

While Citizenship certainly differs from old-style civics in its attention to action and participation, its chief practical aim is to enable pupils to ‘work individually and with others to negotiate, plan and take action on citizenship issues to try to influence others, bring about change or resist unwanted change, using time and resources appropriately’ (QCA, 2007, p.31). This is a perfectly respectable focus for a Citizenship curriculum; but a consequence of its adoption is that engagement in forms of service remains at best peripheral to the educational experience of most British schoolchildren.

Let me recap. Any defensible school curriculum will equip people to meet their basic needs and initiate them into a range of worthwhile activities. But the question of which worthwhile activities should be included in the range is one to which there is no uncontroversial answer. Where schools are managed by religious organisations, it is reasonable for those organisations to draw criteria for the selection of worthwhile activities from their specific conceptions of human flourishing. The use of theological selection criteria is likely to yield curricula distinguished by their emphasis on such activities as inquiry into the meaning of life and forms of service. In this way, curricula can be faith-based without being confessional.

Perhaps it will be doubted that my proposal really avoids confessionalism. To be sure, it may be said, persuading religious organisations to eschew confessional RE and collective worship would be a crucial victory in the war on indoctrination; but encouraging them to use theological criteria to select curriculum activities opens the door to a subtler form of indoctrination, whereby children are predisposed by their initiation into a particular configuration of worthwhile activities towards adoption of a worldview congruent with that

configuration. A child whose education powerfully brings home to her the intrinsic value of inquiry into the meaning of life and forms of service may be more inclined to adopt a specific conception of human flourishing that gives priority to these activities.

I have three points to make in response to this worry. First, there is clearly something in it. The point of initiating children into worthwhile activities is to give them an appreciation of the intrinsic value of those activities; and the judgments one makes about the significance, origin and purpose of human existence are almost certain to be influenced by what one takes to be intrinsically valuable. Second, it nevertheless seems wrong to describe this sort of influence as a form of indoctrination. Whatever else may be going on here, beliefs are not being imparted by means of psychological manipulation or pressure. If my education has stirred in me a passion for helping others I shall be more drawn to conceptions of human flourishing which emphasise altruism than those which do not; but it hardly follows that such a conception has been imposed on me or that my capacity for rational belief-formation has been impaired. And third, it is difficult to see how influence of this kind could be avoided. Any curriculum which includes some but not all worthwhile activities will be more congruent with some worldviews than others. When it comes to delimiting the range of activities into which children are initiated in school, we have no choice; when it come to imparting beliefs by non-rational means, we do.

My proposal rests, then, on a basic distinction between *imparting* religious beliefs and *using curriculum selection criteria drawn from* religious beliefs. The former has no place in schools of any kind. But the latter is a real possibility for faith-based schools, and one to which the Academies policy opens an unprecedented door. Freed from the constraints of the National Curriculum, and enjoying greater managerial control over their publicly-funded schools, religious organisations have an opportunity to redefine what faith-based education looks like in the UK. They can design school curricula that are at once genuinely faith-based, in the sense of drawing selection criteria from religious conceptions of human flourishing, and genuinely non-confessional, in the sense of disavowing the enterprise of confessional religious education. I challenge them to take up this opportunity.

## References

- Academies Act 2010, London: HMSO.
- British Humanist Association (BHA) (2011) 'Church of England looks to being largest sponsor and provider of secondary education as BHA calls for dismantlement of the grip of Church on state', <http://www.humanism.org.uk/news/view/903>, retrieved 4/7/12.
- Carey, G. (1998) 'The importance of Church schools', in G. Carey, D. Hope and J. Hall (eds) *A Christian Voice in Education: Distinctiveness in Church Schools*, London: National Society, pp.1-10.
- Church of England (2012) *The Church School of the Future* (Chadwick Report), London: National Society.
- Church of England (2011) *Academies Update 5: Diocesan Models*, London: National Society
- Church of England (2001) *The Way Ahead* (Dearing Report), London: Church House Publishing.
- Church of England (1970) *The Fourth R* (Durham Report), London: National Society.
- Cooling, T. (2010) *Doing God in Education*, London: Theos.
- Crick, B. (2002) 'A note on what is and what is not active citizenship',

- [http://archive.excellencegateway.org.uk/media/post16/files/033\\_bernarderrick\\_what\\_is\\_citizenship.pdf](http://archive.excellencegateway.org.uk/media/post16/files/033_bernarderrick_what_is_citizenship.pdf), retrieved 4/7/12.
- Department for Education (DfE) (2010) *The Importance of Teaching* (Schools White Paper), London: HMSO.
- Grimmitt, M. (1973) *What Can I Do in RE?*, Great Wakering: Mayhew-McCrimmon.
- Hand, M. (2009) 'On the worthwhileness of theoretical activities', in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43 (s2), pp.109-121.
- Hand, M. (2004) 'The problem with faith schools: a reply to my critics', in *Theory and Research in Education* 2 (3), pp.343-353.
- Hand, M. (2003) 'A philosophical objection to faith schools', in *Theory and Research in Education* 1 (1), pp.89-99.
- Methodist Church (2012) Education Commission Report to the 2012 Methodist Conference, [http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/media/118008/24%20education\\_commission\\_report.pdf](http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/media/118008/24%20education_commission_report.pdf), retrieved 4/7/12.
- Millar, F. (2011) 'Are profit-making academies the future for education?', <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/jul/04/profit-making-academies>, retrieved 4/7/12.
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (1999) *Service-Learning and Community Service in K-12 Public Schools*, Washington, DC: US Department of Education, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs99/1999043.pdf>, retrieved 4/7/12.
- Orr, J. (1989 [1897]) *The Christian View of God and the World*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications.
- Peters, R.S. (1966) *Ethics and Education*, London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) (2007) *Citizenship: Programme of Study for Key Stage 3 and Attainment Target*, London: QCA.
- White, J. (2007) *What Schools Are For and Why* (Impact 14), Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.
- Williams, R. (2011) Speech at the Anglican Academy and Secondary School Heads 2011 Annual Conference, <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2183/archbishop-addresses-anglican-academy-and-secondary-school-heads>, retrieved 4/7/12.
- Wright, A. (1993) *Religious Education in the Secondary School: Prospects for Religious Literacy*, London: David Fulton.