

## Religious Education and the Future

Alan Rainer  
December 9, 2014  
Universal Peace Federation  
House of Lords, London, UK

We are spiritual beings. The prophet Isaiah says:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold,  
My chosen, in whom my soul delights,  
I have put my Spirit upon him.  
He will bring forth justice to the nations  
(Is. 42.1).

It is more than Sir Anthony Seldon, Master at Wellington calls for today in the Times about the necessity for character building as did the founder of Rugby, Matthew Arnold. Michael Gove saw the importance of character building 'in the well-being of students to develop good citizens and good academic results' which in turn Seldon believes will close the class divide (The Times, Tuesday December 9 2014). It requires understanding the spiritual dimension of the battle between good and evil as represented by the temptation and fall from grace in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve, tempted by the snake's subtle 'Do you want to be like God, have eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Thus humankind has been given choice. This is why Isaiah, explaining who God is, says:

The Lord who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
Who spread forth the earth and what comes from it,  
Who gives breath to the people upon it  
And spirit to those who walk in it:  
"I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,  
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;  
I have given you as a covenant to the people,  
A light to the nations,  
To open the eyes that are blind,  
To bring out the prisoners from the dungeon etc...  
(Is.42.5-7)

For those who believe in the sacred power of scripture, God is indwelling, Immanuel.



The primary duty of a Religious Education teacher is to live appropriately a holy life to encourage and enlighten his fellow staff members and the wider society, parents and pupils to engage in the struggle to lead an exemplary good life by living it themselves. The Roman Catholic Bishops produced a paper called 'The Common Good'. This is why Mark in his Gospel introduces John the Baptist as 'the messenger', quoting Isaiah 40:3, 'to prepare the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight'. Jesus himself refers to 'the narrow gate (Mat. 7.13)'. The Koran addresses Allah 'Guide us to the straight path' (Saheeh International, Surah I, Al Fatihah: 29). There are dark forces, vested interests, including dynastic families, and human ignorance and weaknesses that have caused the Two Major World Wars and many others since which mean that the task is ever vibrant and ongoing.

Pure love is the final resolution (1 Cor. 13). Were it so simple?

## 2. Religious Education and Citizenship

The Interfaith Network started by Brian Pearce, a retired civil servant, 28 years ago had a meeting on 7 February 2006 on Faith, Identity and Belonging: Educating for Shared Citizenship (Crabtree, FIB).

Citizenship Education was included in the revised National Curriculum for England in 2003. It is now part of the non-statutory Framework for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) at key stages 1 and 2. At key stages 3 and 4, Citizenship is a statutory foundation subject. The curriculum aims to provide

pupils with the necessary factual knowledge and the required skills to become active citizens (FIB, 2006:69).

A suggestion was that RE teachers need to develop knowledge about citizenship and that there were great benefits from RE teachers and citizenship teachers working together to address these issues.

It was advised that the curriculum should include Criticality or Critical thinking, in addition to Curriculum, Culture and Community.

Schools should develop partnerships with the community and bring outside experts into the classroom. Teachers need to address prejudices, including their own. Paul Weller, my director of my Doctoral thesis was on the panel which produced the Review of the Evidence Base on Faith Communities for the Deputy Prime Minister London, on April 2006. It dealt with topics such as the significance and salience of religion. It gave an overview of the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh populations of England by ethnicity and by religion. The percentages of the population by religion was Christian 71.7%, Buddhist, 0.3%, Hindu 0.4%, Muslim 3%, Sikh 0.7%, the rest 22.3%, including 14.6% with no religion (2001 Census of Population). As part of the policy of Social Cohesion, it noted the concentration of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim Communities in Areas of Multiple Deprivation and talked of Ethno-religious resistance to 'social cohesion'. The conclusion on Faith communities and planning was that planners need to engage far more extensively with diversity to contribute to the overall policy of creating sustainable, inclusive communities and neighbourhoods (REBC, 2006:51).

The primary importance is to find a common way and unity between the religions and the non-faith systems and this is why they are included in the 1988 Education Reform Act, paragraph 8 and moreover they are to be taught without bias, the Cowper-Handley non-indoctrination clause (1871).

By living the four World Faiths for the past years in my Doctoral studies at Derby University through the Hindu Swaminarayan Temple, the New West End Orthodox Synagogue and the Qaderi-Rifai Sufi Group has been a revelation in seeing the barriers to unity between the human family of families. Professor Hans Kung has said that 'there will be no peace in the world until there is peace between world religions' and a common ethic (Kung, 1991: 25). In the InterFaith/Whole Person Series that I organised at Essex Church, Notting Hill in London. It shows how well people of diverse faiths and backgrounds get on creatively. It has been a long lasting twenty three year old campaign and now ever clearer to me that training children for exams for the work place was totally inadequate for the 'spiritual, cultural and physical dimensions and for adult life' (1988 Education Act Sect. 1 and 2). It is my sincere belief having been in 85 schools and spent the last three years meeting educational leaders at the London Centre in Leadership, Institute of Education that we need a 'College of Teachers'. It is teachers and parents who are in the main responsible for their influence on the children. There is nothing more important for the children than a sacred home with mother and father to cherish and guide them with supportive schools through their early lives as an essential part of the divine plan.

### **3. A brief account of the dissensions within England and Europe**

It was the life-times' work of Alfred the Great in reuniting the country of England. He commissioned the Anglo-Saxon chronicles, the source of our knowledge of the period after Bede and helped to establish institutions of Law and Justice 'based on those of Ethelbert of Kent and Offa of Mercia on a basis of Saxon precedent... As Offa had made kings subject to the Church, so Alfred made them subject to the law (Jenkins, 2012: 27). Pope Gregory the Great sent St. Augustine to England at Canterbury. The Norman conquest in 1066 meant that the Normans with their ready-made castle fortresses held sway. To control the lands for tax purposes, William demanded an oath of loyalty from the Barons whom he had put in charge of the castles in return for their favours thus creating the feudal system and produced the Domesday book to audit the land and its animals. Stephen took the throne in 1135. His cousin Empress Matilda, daughter of Henry 1st, challenged him at Oxford, lost and escaped to Wallingford castle. After a truce with Matilda, Stephen took the kingship.

Next year we celebrate 500 years of the Magna Carta (1415), the record of the Earls' Charter of Freedom from the domination under the Divine Right of King John 1.

These bitter struggles for power between the reigning monarchs and Church, for example Henry II and Thomas Beckett his Chancellor, to control his jurisdiction over Ecclesiastical law not only caused Beckett's martyrdom but much bloodshed which continued till the civil war between the Parliamentarians nicknamed the 'Ironsides' under the Protestant Cromwell and the divine right of the monarchy in the person of King Charles 1st. He was finally beheaded in 1649 and Cromwell was one of the signatories of the death sentence passed by Parliament. They seized control over Parliament. Cromwell was eventually elected by his fellow leaders on 16th December 1653 to be Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland and ruled to his death in 1658. The restoration came under the brief rule of Britain's last Catholic monarch James II (1685-1688).

On the Continent the striving between the Protestant Northern countries surrounding Germany where Martin Luther had made his protest of 95 Articles at Tübingen over the question of the sale of indulgences to expiate sins and sacerdotalism. In 1521 he was excommunicated by Pope Leo X and at the Diet of Worms he was condemned by the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V, as an outlaw. Henry Kissinger in his book *World Order* comments on the role of the brilliant diplomat Richelieu in 1624 in observing the fragmentation of the religious hold on Europe, it was in France's interest 'to support a plethora of small states in Central Europe and weaken Austria, the Hapsburg empire (Kissinger, 2014:21).

The Treaty of Westphalia the Catholic powers constituting the states of the Holy Roman Empire, gathered in the Catholic city of Münster and Protestant powers gathered in Osnabrück. The agreements were signed in January 1648 Peace of Münster in which Spain recognized the independence of the Dutch Republic. In October 1648 the Treaty of Münster and the Treaty of Osnabrück were signed. Though they professed a universal Christian church, 'the war had shattered any pretention to universality or confessional solidarity (Kissinger, 2014:25).

The significance of these separate treaties was immense. No longer would it be a battle between empires, dynasty or religious confession but the state would predominate. 'The inherent equality of sovereign states, regardless of their power or domestic system, was instituted... The right of each signatory to choose its own domestic structure, and religious orientation free from intervention was affirmed, while novel clauses ensured that minority sects could practice their faith in peace and be free (Kissinger, 2014:26). The concept of international relations had taken shape to avoid future wars. Lord Palmerston is quoted as saying in terms of policy to ensure our interests 'perpetual and eternal' where allies cannot be depended upon, 'that we mean to do what may seem to be best, upon each occasion as it arises, making the Interests of Our Country one's guiding principle' (Kissinger, 2014: 30). Please note this is not all humanity.

After the Emancipation Act (1849), the Roman Catholic Church was re-established. The restoration of the English hierarchy was in September 29th 1850 and on the following day, Wiseman was called to Rome and made a Cardinal.

The parishes are the building blocks of the Church. In 1851 Cardinal Wiseman sent his most prestigious convert, Henry Edward Manning to Bayswater to found a community whose mission would be to revitalize the clergy and faithful in the new diocese of Westminster. Manning drew his inspiration from St. Charles Borromeo who had founded an order of Oblate priests to renew the diocese of Milan in the sixteenth century. Manning founded the Oblates of St. Charles at Bayswater. He was made second Archbishop of Westminster. I served with Fr. Michael Hollings, a much loved Parish Priest there and ran the Parish Council and was later Chairman (1988/9) of the local Churches Together in England (CTE).

The Ecumenical movement has helped the various denominations to work together on reports such as the Anglo-Roman Catholic agreements (ARCIC I, *Salvation and the Church* (1986), *11 Church as Communion* (1990), and *111 Life in Christ* (1993). The first two reports concentrated on faith and order ecumenical subjects, such as ministry, authority, justification and behind all of them, the understanding of the nature of the Church itself, communion (Hill:1). ARCIC is still ongoing which shows how difficult it is to resolve Church and State divisions.

Fr. Michael was posted at St. Mary's at the time of the Notting Hill race riots in the 1960s and thus started the Notting Hill Carnival amongst other things to promote racial and religious harmony through joint projects, such as the Way of the Cross, an enactment in the streets of the final moments of the sacrifice of Jesus and, of course, the Notting Hill carnival.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The Congress of Vienna in 1814-15 and the Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War 1 (to end all wars!) emerged from a single conference. Churchill learnt from the heavily charged latter treaty to be more benign at the end of the Second World War.

Harsh cruel treatment and Grievances are never forgotten. Al Qaeda, Isis and the Taliban's resistance reflect the treatment meted out by Western powers in Iraq, Gaza, Syria and Afghanistan. The laws of cause and effect are inexorable.

The only solution for World Order is that each individual is given a holistic education as Royal Priest (Exodus 19.6 and I Peter 2.9), which should have happened from the beginning, and as such a full knowledge of the divine laws (Exodus 20) and their implications and the inner silence to understand and obey them in practice: 'You shall be holy as I the Lord your God am holy' (Lev.19.1). It would mean a vision of the genuine fellowship of the Royal Priesthood as a Kingdom of Priests (Ex.19.6). This involves co-operation, not domination.

Resolution of disagreements has to come from dialogue. This should be no problem as with my Doctoral thesis and the InterFaith/Whole Person Series everybody across the faiths has helped. This includes Archbishop Rowan Williams, Archbishop (now Cardinal Vincent Nichols), Professor Tariq Ramadan and Hindu Saddhu Palimpradagast in the Channel 4 film 'Do you believe in God?' in 2010, which Antony Thomas based on hearing my thesis at Lambeth palace.

There will only be peace in the world with equality of value for each living person and living being. This is reflected in the Jain idea that all living beings are sacred. That each person is sacred is understood in the Vedas that we participate in the divine, soul and God are one: Advaita but we have our independent consciences and freewill- Advishadvaita- dependent on God but with freewill. We are spiritual beings with all the dimensions of the Creator as we are born in 'the image and likeness' (Gen. 1.26) and therefore our education should be holistic to incorporate all the creative arts, music, science, literature, photography and prayer and contemplation etc. The wisdom of the major World Faith traditions gives us an important insight into a vision of the individual and collective harmonious Faith world and non-Faith world as a 'family of families' as concluded in my Doctoral thesis, each person with a ministry building the kingdom of God on earth. This would help to bring about a more universal view how to bring about a constructive civilisation which is in the interests of all. That is the important task of not only the Religious education teacher but everyone.

Alan Rainer (FCA, MA (Inst. of Education), MA in Ministry (Derby University))

---

### **Bibliography**

Beckford, JA, 2006, Review of the Evidence Base on Faith Communities, London, HMSO and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Bishops of England and Wales, 2000, The Catholic Directory, Manchester, Gabriel Communications Ltd

Crabtree, H, 2006, Faith, Identity and Belonging: Educating for Shared Citizenship, The Inter Faith Network for the UK in association with the Citizenship Foundation

Eyre and Spottiswoode Study Bible, 1976, for quotations

Hill, C, ARCIC 1 and II, An Anglican Perspective

Kung, H, 1991, (tr.Bowden, J), Global Responsibility, London, SCM Press

Saheeh International translation, Quranproject.org, 2013, Birmingham, Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers

Seldon, A, The Times , Tuesday, 9th December 2014, Build character and you close the class divide, London, The Times Newspapers Ltd