

Brian Russell

Note on Religious Education in Public Schools in England for those aged under 18 Years

The following broad generalisations might be made about changes in the provision of religious education in public, i.e. 'Statemaintained' schools in Britain within the last ten years. The word 'public' is used in this paper to refer to 'Statemaintained'. (There are also schools in Britain which are privately run and parents pay fees to the school over and above their payment of taxes to the central government. This paper does not discuss the arrangements in these schools.)

Before the current changes were introduced, the following generalisations could have been made:

- a) There was a measure of independence and autonomy given to local government geographical areas in deciding the curriculum and funding of the public school educational system, with each school's controlling committee having only limited independence of the local government authority.
- b) The Act of Parliament in 1944 required 'collective' daily worship and also religious instruction in schools, which it was assumed would be Christian in character. However, this was in some cases being carried out less and less effectively. Religious education had developed in a number of directions, including a provision for religious studies rather than Christian teaching whereby religious studies included a concern to look at other world faiths with increasingly less emphasis on teaching a content of exclusively Christian belief and practice. Even though the Church of England sponsors a number of colleges which train teachers for the schools, many of the teachers in schools required to give religious instructions were not themselves practising Christians. There was also a tendency to provide lessons outlining personal or social ethical issues, such as the values that might underpin the quality of life.
- c) The Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church continued to have a role in the management and funding of a proportion of public schools, and to some extent the Christian belief was presented in these schools often with the active participation of the local pastors/clergy. These schools were, in particular parts of the country, also attended by adherents of other faiths, especially the Islamic, because these schools provides an awareness and respect for religious beliefs and practice.

Over the last decade, and with an increasing speed, central government has initiated a series of far-reaching changes in the provision of public education in the schools culminating in the *Education Reform Act of 1988*:

- a) The independence or autonomy of the local government area has been diminished, placing greater freedom and financial responsibility/liability on the committee (Board of Governors) that governs each 'State-maintained' school. This has produced a greater measure of 'local control'.
- b) However, the government has imposed a national core curriculum which all 'State-maintained' schools must follow in a consistent manner. This has introduced a new central control on public education never before experienced in British society. The core of the curriculum for education in schools is established through foundation subjects, which are supplemented by 'required' subjects and 'optional' subjects. For the foundation subjects, there is a national curriculum for each stage in education and a system for testing students according to a standard national format at set ages in all public schools. Examples of foundation subjects are English Language, Mathematics, Sciences, and other languages.
- c) Religious education has, following much discussion, been included in the core of the national curriculum as a required subject, rather than as an optional subject. The arrangements are that the Act of Parliament of 1988 has established national criteria for religious education which must be followed in all 'State-maintained' schools.

There are broadly two kinds of 'State-maintained' schools. The first are "voluntary" State-aided schools which are either Church of England, Roman Catholic or Jewish Schools. In these schools, the curriculum is decided by the school in the light of its 'trust deeds' which include religious commitments. In the second kind of 'State-maintained' schools, the school must gain approval for its curriculum for religious education from a local committee which often serves as a Local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education.

The new criteria are that every agreed syllabus has to "reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian", but it also requires each syllabus to "take account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain". The Act's overall stated concern is that a curriculum "promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society".

There is concern expressed by the Church that the Christian dimension should inform and shape the whole life and outlook of a school. This should allow for critical enquiry and questioning by the students. In this regard, the Act has a second criterion that religious education in all schools must "prepare such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life". The new arrangements do not ask each school to instruct their pupils in Christianity as if it is to be assumed that this should be the pupil's own faith, though the arrangements do assume that anyone living in British society needs a knowledge of Christianity and its social and cultural implications in order to understand that society. Further information can be obtained from: The National Society, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3NZ, who publish *The Curriculum: A Christian View*, as well as *Religious Education* and *School Worship*, all readable booklets priced £ 3.65 to include all three.

Da ich die norwegischen Verhältnisse am besten kenne, wird die Darstellung eine gewisse norwegische Schattenseite erhalten.

I. Gemeinsame skandinavische Merkmale

In Skandinavien zeigt der Unterricht in Christentumskunde (Religion) in unserem Jahrhundert eine Reihe von Gemeinsamkeiten:

1. Die Demokratisierung von Gesellschaft und Schulbehörden führt zu einer entsprechenden Einschränkung der geistlichen Leitung der Schule und der geistlichen Aufsicht.
2. Im Laufe dieses Prozesses gerät die Kirche in Streit mit dominierenden Kräften innerhalb der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung.

Lassen Sie uns kurz den Verlauf der norwegischen Variante dieses Streites betrachten: Norwegen ist im 20. Jahrhundert in besonderem Maße von zwei starken Volksbewegungen – der Arbeiterbewegung und der Erweckungsbewegung – geprägt worden. Diese operierten in nicht geringem Maße als außer-parlamentarische Gruppen. Beide Bewegungen sahen die gesellschaftsformende Bedeutung der Schule. Beide hatten eine Schulpolitik und eine Schulideologie. Und noch wichtiger: Beide hatten eine utopische Vorstellung vom Ziel der Schule. Die Arbeiterbewegung wollte mit Hilfe der Schule die norwegische Ge-