

# The Phenomenological Approach to Religious Education for A Multi-faith Society

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## **Religious Education Problems in a Multi-Faith Society**

The idea of religious education presents few difficulties when the society is unambiguous about its religion, or where the majority of the population claims formal allegiance to the State Religion, However, in a society where such unanimity is not present then a solution is found in excluding religion from state schools, as in the public schools in the United States. On the other hand, as in England, where there has always been a strongly established church and vigorous bodies of dissent, a compromise position was evolved. As far back as 1870 there was agreement that if religion was taught in the maintained school it would exclude

‘... formularies and catechisms distinctive of any denomination.’  
(Hull 1981, p.196: a list of sources used in this paper appears in the bibliography on p.248)

After 1944, instruction in religion is to be given but only in matters about which the participating denominations agreed. Thus the English experience has been of plurality in religious education, and this experience is more than a century old. (Hull, 1981, p.196)

This plurality has been complicated by the presence in Britain of groups of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and others. Thus, any religious programme must also provide for the newer minority groups, as well as for the many Roman Catholic, Humanists, Atheists and Jews who form an important part of British society. (Horder, 1982, p.30). Hence the legal provision which gives parents the rights to withdraw their children from religious instruction in state schools is out of date. For far more people could be excluded from some schools than those who are included in such instruction. And when the number of pupils

who are significantly not Christian reaches a certain point, questions of fairness begin to be asked. (Hull, 1981, p.197). The question that now faces British society is whether the State should offer religious education to children in its care, or whether it should offer it only to some and not to others. As Hull puts it:

When the State not only offers religious education, but insists (as it does) that it will be received (subject to rights of withdrawal) then we must ask this question more urgently. (Hull, 1981, p.197)

It is the thesis of this paper that the State should provide religious education. But then, the question one is faced with is what kind of religious programme should the school offer to meet the needs of a multi-faith, multi-cultural society? Before we set out to answer this question we must first clarify what we mean by religious education.

### **On what is Religious Education**

While religious study is the study of religions, religions on the other hand, involve unique ways of looking at the world and unique claims about such things as salvation and the good life. Thus, religious studies offers unique perspectives relating to 'forms of life', and of 'viewing the world'. It is the assumption of this paper that religious education should help the student in his quest for the meaning of life: his life and the life of others. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, the central areas of religious studies will be the religions of man. The secular areas will be included, of course, both because they are important and because they share some important features—a philosophy of history, a view of man, a detailed ethic and so on—with religion. (Hull, 1981, p.204). The non-religious life styles have an important place to play in society. Their inclusion is another effect of pluralism, and it is right and proper that the religious life styles should be set against the non-religious ones in order to facilitate the understanding of both. (Hull, 1981, p.192). So, for example, Humanism should have a place, because it is a conscious dialogue with religion, rejects religion, and offers itself as a viable alternative to religion, in offering a purposeful life set within our overall understanding of man and the world. However, when we get to Communism and Fascism then it is not very clear whether or not and to what extent these ideologies should feature in the religious education curriculum in a democratic, pluralistic society. Perhaps the proper place of study of such areas should be elsewhere—say social studies, political studies or some such areas. Enough has been said above to indicate the approach to the study of religious education, to which this paper is committed. It is to this approach—the phenomenological approach—that we now turn our attention in order to answer the question which we raised above, namely, 'what

kind of religious education programme should the school offer to meet the need of a multi-faith, multi-cultural society?’

### **Approach to Religious Education in a Multi-faith Society**

The claim of this paper that the broader phenomenological approach to religious education is the best means of enhancing the understanding of all pupils, from whatever religious backgrounds, of the plurality of faiths in society, and of bringing them to an understanding of the nature of belief and the religious dimension of human existence. This approach seems to be the best means of helping pupils to appreciate the diverse and sometimes conflicting life stances which exist and thus enabling them to determine and to justify their own religious position. This view of the phenomenological approach to religious education is a response which seems to accord with the fundamental principles underlying the ideal of cultural pluralism and personal autonomy. (Swann Report, 1985, p.475). Happily there seems to be a move towards the phenomenological approach to religious education, as indicated above. (See the Swann Report, 1985, Ch.8, Annex B). The questions we now turn to answer are: ‘what is this approach and what does it have to offer?’

### **The Phenomenological or Non-denominational Approach**

The phenomenological or non-denominational undogmatic view draws a clear distinction between what can strictly speaking be termed ‘religious instruction’, that is, instruction in religion, and ‘religious education’, that is, education in the concept of religion and in the range of belief systems which exist. It is seen to be the function of the home and of the religious community to nurture and to instruct a child in a particular faith (or not) and the function of the school to assist pupils to understand the nature of religion and to know something of the diversity of belief systems; the significance for individuals; and how these bear on the community. It does not stress the acceptance of a particular faith or belief system, which is the privilege of religious bodies to do, nor does it press for conversion. It is committed to a search for religious meaning, purpose and value which is open to all men. (Swann Report, 1985, p.471). It reflects a multiplicity of beliefs and non-beliefs. No belief system is seen as the only source of value in society. Thus, the phenomenological approach is specially suitable in a society which has many diverse views about religion and has a multiplicity of life-stances. (Swann Report, 1985, p.479). This latter view is shared by others such as Phillips-Bell (1983) and Meakin (1979), who see the demand for

personal autonomy as logically justifying a multi-faith approach to religious education. According to Phillips-Bell:

If education is to do with the development of a child's autonomy and consequently, if the child is to have genuine religious choice, then the child must be exposed to a multifaith approach. (Phillips-Bell, 1983, p.88)

The justification for a multi-faith approach is based on the nature of education and on the nature of religion rather than on what just happens to be the case in society. (*Ibid.*)

### **Education and Religion**

It is widely accepted in this society that education should seek to encourage children to question, to criticise, to investigate, to challenge, to debate, to evaluate and to be able to make decisions and choices about their future adult lives. To some extent at least, these objectives can be seen as in conflict with a faith whose very essence is considered to lie in an acceptance of revelation and adherence to forms of behaviour and conduct. (Swann Report, 1985, p.504). Hence, where a religion emphasizes submission and instruction and tries to confirm pupils in its faith through a confessional style approach, then a conflict situation will arise between the school's purpose to educate and the religious aim to instruct. It is to avoid this kind of conflict that the paper stresses the phenomenological approach to religious education in schools where the religious education syllabus should be used to enlarge and deepen the pupils' understanding of religion by studying world religions, and by exploring those elements in human experience which raise questions about life's ultimate meaning and value. This involves informing pupils in a descriptive, critical and experiential manner about what religion is, and increasing their sensitivity to the areas of experience from which a religious view of life may arise. It should stimulate within pupils, and assist them in the search for, a personal view of meaning in life, whilst enabling them to understand the beliefs and commitments of others. (The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, quoted in the Swann Report, 1985, p.484).

### **The Task of Religious Education following the Phenomenological Approach**

The phenomenological approach accords well with the views of the School's Inspectorate as expressed in its Curriculum 11-16 Working Paper. Religious education, according to this paper, 'shares with the other subjects the task of helping children to acquire the skills, knowledge and social competence necessary for their personal development and life in society . . .' However, religious education

also makes a distinctive contribution to the curriculum in directing attention to the religious understanding of human life and the central values (many of them derived from religion) which society seeks to uphold and to transmit. In this consideration of religion and values, the intention is to help pupils to understand the nature of religious questions and religious affirmations, and to develop a personal intellectual integrity in dealing with the profoundest aspects of their own experience now and in adult life. (H.M.I. Red Book: *Curriculum 11-16*, Working Papers by H.M Inspectors: a contribution to the current debate, December 1977).

### **Religion and Morals in a Changing World**

The immense technological development that is taking place in the world has, among other things, produced great uncertainties in the lives of many people, both young and old alike. We live in an age of great transition and great social and economic turbulence which calls for major changes in perceptions, attitudes, values and institutions. The advances of new technology such as computing and micro-electronics are having profound impact on work, home-life and leisure activities. In the midst of this turmoil and uncertainty young people are no longer satisfied with ready-made unchanging religious and moral explanations for current religious and moral problems. As educators we need to take into account and adapt our educational institutions accordingly. Among the objectives we may set ourselves, are opening up the minds of our pupils and the establishment of basic principles of guidance for evaluating actions and proposed actions in the social interplay of all persons. We should aim towards developing a young mind that is open enough to revise a former outlook and to be adaptable to new conditions. The search for answers to religious and moral questions in the context of today's rapidly changing society, is a search for a basis to deal with the issues of 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' and 'evil', in a manner which will extricate us from a strait-jacket position of moral absolutes, (which is failing to attract the young) yet which will allow us to steer away from the position of subjectivism (which spells chaos and selfishness). (Pratte, 1970, p.254).

Young people need to acquire an understanding of the nature of belief held by different belief systems and how these have and are still influencing human experience. Such knowledge can by extension help in the formation of pupils' personal beliefs and values, whether religious or non-religious. (Swann Report, 1985, p.468).

Religion, therefore, has a place in the educational scene on educational grounds where education is understood as the enriching of a pupil's experience, the opening up of a pupil to all the influences which have coloured his or her environment. The existence of a religious interpretation of life is a fact of history and of present

human experience. (The Durham Report: 'The Fourth R', 1970, cited in Swann Report, 1985, p.469).

### **Democracy, Freedom, Value Conflicts and Multi-Faith Religious Education**

It should be pointed out immediately that a democratic society must allow the free exchange of ideas and of the rights of individuals to choose their own modes of (religious) practice, that the principles of democracy warrant. But this freedom and the rights of individuals must be constantly judged against the freedom and rights of others. The school is therefore under an obligation to meet any value conflicts emerging from this freedom, head on. That is, conflicts between ideas must not be glossed over. Pupils must be encouraged to examine these ideals and values and to recognize that in a democratic society such as Britain, there is continuing conflict between, say, religious values and other values of freedom, equality, justice and fairness. Moreover, pupils should be encouraged to examine various interpretations of the discrepancies between ideals and realities in British life and history. (Banks, 1981, p.263ff). Later on, perhaps, they may move on from identifying value problems and value conflicts both in themselves and in others, to proposing alternatives based on values and making choices between values in the light of their consequences. Religious and moral practices must be judged by their consequences on the lives of others.

Thus the question here, is, to what extent should individuals be allowed to decide what are 'right' or 'wrong' or 'good' or 'bad' practices? It goes without saying that we cannot allow people to decide anything and everything for themselves and assume that whatever they decide would be good and desirable. The moral principles we come to share may depend upon our view about human nature, and this view may differ from person to person. Thus, although we ought to encourage people to think for themselves what is right and proper to follow, not everything that people think for themselves is right and proper would be right and proper. The individual must be encouraged to put over his own views as rationally and reasonably as he can, but must be made to understand that despite the fact that he is being as rational as he can be, he must realise that there are other views which are also reasonable. One has to accept the fact that there are other people about and that there are other persons who are also rational, moral agents as it were, and that one has to take them into account when one is trying to work out what one ought to do. For morality is not merely an individual problem, but a communal one as well. Our moral or religious decisions may involve others and may touch upon their ultimate and fundamental concerns.

## **Is Inter-Faith Communication Possible?**

Although no criteria exist for establishing universal truths in religion there are sufficient common elements that will allow inter-faith communication to take place, despite the conflict between competing paradigms of what is to count as the truth in religious studies. (Aspin, 1983, p.231). Such common elements as there are, allow propositions uttered in one form of religious discourse to be understood by those who do not belong to that particular religion in which such discourse takes place. Hence, if what is said here is true, not only does a comparative religious educational study become possible but inter-cultural understanding becomes possible too. Translation between systems of religious beliefs becomes a feasible proposition in the classroom.

It could be argued however, that since there is no single way of thinking and experiencing the world that is shared by all men; and that since the experiences we have, the ways in which we come to perceive the world and the concepts we use, are the products of our own culture, then given these facts, and according to this argument, cultural differences are insurmountable. The thesis of this paper is that these cultural differences can be overcome, at least to some extent, by cultural interaction, cultural borrowing and cultural assimilation. But above all, problems arising from cultural differences could be overcome by shared experience, by working towards common goals or objectives, by reasoning, or by rational discussion between different cultural groups of people and by agreement in response if not in judgment.

It must be pointed out, of course, that differences are not only to be found between cultural or ethnic groups, but they are also to be found between individuals in the same social or cultural group. This point is forcefully made by Wellman (1975), who argues that:

not only do individuals from different cultures perceive and infer differently, but any two individuals from the same society differ in their ways of experiencing and drawing conclusions. In fact, the same person perceives himself and his world or weighs the pros. and cons. in moral decisions quite differently on different occasions. (Wellman, 1975, p.217)

Within any given cultural group there is much interaction and communication, much agreement in re-action. There is also as much interaction, inter-communication and inter-agreement between cultural groups as there is within a single group, and these interactions make inter-faith communication possible.

## **Inter-Faith Communication Based on a Common 'Form of Life'**

Various sub-cultures within our society share much in terms of material and non-material aspects of life. Such sharing makes

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inter-cultural understanding possible. For as Blake (1983) argues, within our pluralist society, all groups have something to do with, for instance, schools, hospitals, police, local government, cars and buses, post-offices, pubs, television, the press and cinema, housing estates, and so on. Thus everyone in British society shares some 'form of life' with members of other ethnic/cultural groups. And in sharing a 'form of life' with someone, one shares not only those concepts peculiar to that 'form of life' but a number of other concepts involved in sharing any 'form of life'. (Blake, 1983, p.249ff).

It is not to be presumed, however, that because members of different groups share some aspects of a given 'form of life', each member of a different group would perceive reality, or interpret the world in the same way. For, as Loukes (1981) puts it:

It is to be expected . . . that a multi-faith group can go through the same form of moral reasoning and, perfectly properly, arrive at different decisions on what is right for them now, in the present case. (Loukes, 1981, p.213).

Loukes further adds that their:

. . . moral reasoning would be better and not worse for being conducted in a multi-faith group. (*Ibid.*)

Hence, the assumption here is, that if it is moral and religious reasoning we are after, then the question 'What ought pupils to know?' must eventually give way to the question, 'How can they be equipped to deal with religious questions and to understand religious phenomena?' For such equipment should enable them, according to Horder (1972):

. . . at whatever point they may encounter aspects of life calling for religious perception, sensitivity and skill, they should be able to cope. (Horder, 1972, p.30)

Of course, there will be those who will argue that no amount of reasoning, or understanding will resolve ethical or religious disputes arising between different groups of people: that no amount of reasoning will lead rational men to agree on which ethical or religious conclusion is acceptable or right. Reasoning does not produce agreement. But as Carl Wellman (1975) argues, this argument does not dispute the fact that *some* ethical agreements could be settled by reasoning. What is required in ethical matters is that the process of giving reasons to resolve a disagreement will demand that those who disagree on the ethical conclusion must at least agree on the ethical premises. (Wellman, 1975, p.213). For example, we must at least agree that killing a human being is wrong, for us to agree that capital

punishment is wrong.

Hence, although cultures differ in their beliefs concerning what is 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' and 'evil', and although we may lack the means of settling which cultural claims are true and which are not, a number of beliefs about 'rights' and 'wrongs', 'good' and 'evil' have a validity beyond the several cultures in which those beliefs originated or are held. (White, 1984, p.7ff). Hence, as White puts it:

. . . it would not be too difficult to establish that . . . murder, torture, rape, theft, etc., are considered to be wrong in most, if not all societies. On the other hand, every society must abide by the social and logical demands of truth telling if it is to exist in relative harmony. (*Ibid.* p.8ff)

Thus, all societies possess moral beliefs of one kind or another. There is no society in which indiscriminate lying, arson, rape, robbery, for example, are considered to be right. Men do have some common principles that allow them to deliberate together and to agree to abide by such principles as 'human rights' or the rights of children and women. Thus, and to cite White again:

if men's central moral beliefs were not common beliefs, no translation of moral expressions could ever get under way, nor 'a fortiori', comparisons between systems of belief. (*Ibid.*)

All cultures possess at least some fundamental principles in common and there exists and can exist agreement among cultures on a considerable number of fundamental moral judgments or principles (*Ibid.*, p.8ff). These fundamental principles make inter-faith communication, at certain points, possible.

### **Religious Education as Rational and Moral**

As part of a liberal education, religious education will be concerned with such awareness and understanding as are based on accurate information, and as are rationally understood and considered in the light of all relevant facts. (Horder, 1975, p.13). Thus, the aim of religious education in a multicultural school should be the development in pupils of the ability to understand religious phenomena and discuss them critically (without becoming converts). Central to this approach is that other religions besides Christianity, together with secular systems of beliefs, should be studied and that the whole enterprise be based on a rich concept of education rather than on that of evangelization or conversion. (Meakin, 1979, p.53).

The aim is to allow the individual to form beliefs and make judgments for himself on criteria which he has accepted rather than being tied to convention or authority. However, the criteria on which such beliefs are held must themselves be subject to constant review. For one must, from time to time, assess the judgments by which the

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criteria were reviewed in a continual process of self-examination. The purpose of constant review is to enable one to come to embrace a particular religion with considerable understanding of its claims. (*Ibid.*, p.53ff).

If religion in a multicultural classroom could be seen as embodying many different conflicting belief systems about what is the case, what is of value, how should one live and so on, with no final adjudicating authority to settle such fundamental controversy that may arise in such conflicts, then the individual, if he has not yet become riveted to any one religious or non-religious system of belief, should be helped through the religious educational process to make up his own mind. To the degree that the individual is able to decide on rational grounds, which, if any of the belief-systems to embrace, to that degree is he being autonomous. As Meakin (1979) puts it:

. . . part of being autonomous is understanding whatever is at issue and being able to think critically about it. Autonomy concerning religion then, will be impossible without some understanding of at least the major religions, together with their secular alternatives and without some capacity for critical thought about them . . . religious education being advocated, seeks to develop that understanding and critical thought which are essential to autonomy'. (Meakin, 1979, p.54)

### **Aim of Religious Education for a Pluralist Society**

The aim of religious education in a multiracial, multicultural education context should be:

to explore the place and significance of religion in human life and to make a distinctive contribution to each pupil's search for a faith or a life-stance by which to live.

Underlying this aim, is the basic notion that the pupil's education must assist his task of choosing responsibly and selecting critically between the available possibilities within a pluralist society. The educational process should help the pupil to understand the religious heritage of society, and as a later stage, to assess the significance and value of this heritage for the well-being of everyone. The pupil will need to be able to examine his own beliefs, so that he can properly understand these, as well as the beliefs of others. Still later on, the pupil may be made aware of the sources and validity of various belief-systems. The aim is to help the pupil to find a life stance by which to live, and religious education can play a part in bringing about the choice of an informed and intelligent life stance.

But helping pupils to discover a life stance by which to live is an acceptable aim of religious education, provided 'stance' is defined widely enough to embrace all major religious and non-religious stances for living. The search for a stance by which to live, must be carried out in terms of underlying religious and non-religious

presuppositions about man, nature and society. The process will be an open one where every religion would be seen alongside every other religious and non-religious view and where any single religion would be seen as a basis for a dialogue, as a basis of insight, appreciation and understanding.

Thus the major aims of religious education should be to broaden the horizon of all pupils to a greater understanding and appreciation of the diversity of value systems and life styles which are now present in our society, whilst at the same time enabling and assisting ethnic minority communities to maintain what they regard as the essential elements of their cultural identities. According to the evidence collected by the Swann Committee (1985), respect and recognition for the religious beliefs of ethnic communities is seen as one of the central factors in maintaining their communities' strengths and achievements.

Religious education as suggested here, can play a central rôle in preparing all pupils for life in today's multi-racial Britain, and can also lead them to a greater understanding of the diversity of the global community. In following the phenomenological approach outlined above, religious education can also contribute towards challenging and countering the influence of racism in our society. (Swann Report, 1985, p.498). The phenomenological approach to religious education could lay the foundations for a genuinely pluralist society. It could, as we mentioned above, avoid any conflict arising between the rôle of individual faith communities to provide religious instruction and the rôle of the school to provide religious education.

### **Teaching Materials and Resources**

There is much concern among teachers about the difficulties of obtaining textbooks and teaching materials which reflected a multi-faith view of religious education and which did not present religions other than Christianity in negative or inaccurate terms. (Swann Report, 1985, p.488). Thus, pupils of ethnic minority groups are likely to encounter ill-informed and damaging comments about their religious beliefs. This problem could be overcome if teachers teaching in a multi-faith school could draw on the experiences of adherents of different faiths within the classroom and from the community. But the experiences of individual pupils should be used sensitively, and should not be presented as 'curiosities', which could add to the existing negative stereotypes. Opportunities for visits to places of worship of a range of religious groups is also a potentially very helpful 'living resource' for the teacher, but such visits should not be presented as

'a zoo trip or a safari into hostile territory. (Swann Report, 1985, p.488)

but must form an integral part of an ongoing educational programme with adequate preparation to establish the context of the visit and adequate follow-up to resolve any outstanding misunderstanding or questions. Moreover, involving adherents of different religious faiths in speaking to pupils about aspects of their beliefs could prove immensely valuable both in bringing to life the faiths concerned and in enhancing the pupil's appreciation of the presence of a range of faith communities within this society and possibly within the school's own locality. (Swann Report, 1985, p.486ff).

The phenomenological approach to religious education is not to teach children a religion but rather to teach them to understand the nature of belief and a range of belief systems. However, this approach requires considerable skill, knowledge and sensitivity on the part of the teacher—who might well have a personal commitment to a particular faith—in order to present other faiths as valid in their own right and great care is needed in seeking to 'define other people's realities, especially when teaching a class which included pupils who are themselves drawn from particular faith communities. Again the use of outside speakers from different communities could prove helpful.

The school syllabus should thus be placed within a wide frame of reference. The whole life of the school should be one in which the mind of the child can be enlarged and moral responsibility exercised. The syllabus should help to prepare pupils to play their part in the life of the community where all children and adult members of the community must learn to live and work together in a pluralist situation. Every religion must be seen as a source of guidance and inspiration. The syllabus and indeed the school must acknowledge the presence of significantly large minorities of people committed to their religions and stances for living and seek to utilize this situation to create new unities and new insights rather than deeply rooted divisions. Prejudice arises from ignorance and fear: evils which can be fought and overcome to some extent within the context of the school community; for here ignorance can be confounded by knowledge and fear may give place to mutual understanding. (The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, cited in the Swann Report, 1985, p.485).

The plea is that religious education should aim to make pupils able to react in a discerning manner to any manifestation of religion that they may encounter by giving them the intellectual tools to be intelligent about religion generally. (Schools Council, 1977, p.12). Accordingly, religious education involves more than teaching certain facts about various religions. It should aim to *develop the capacity to think about religious matters*. It should enable pupils to acquire the necessary concepts and understanding intrinsic to religion, such as prayer, worship, places of worship, study of symbols, rituals, holy texts, moral values, institutional structures, and certain historical and

ultimate questions of life; the nature of man, the nature of society, of the 'Divine' and so forth.

Thinking and making choices are what education is about. Therefore education should enable pupils to make rational and moral choices. For we live not only in a multi-religious, but also in a multi-problem society. Consequently, and as they grow older, pupils should be able to face up to their own problems and devise their own solutions with responsibility and understanding. (Loukes, 1981, p.206). The emphasis here is on some act or interpretation or judgment by one's own mind. Such experiences and acts of judgment are forced upon our children in a multi-faith society, in ways in which they may not be suggested to children in a single faith society. (Loukes, 1981, p.206).

Religious education, accordingly, will involve more than imparting of a particular body of knowledge to pupils on the essential beliefs and values of their family and community since it raises complex questions relating to the spiritual and aesthetic development of the individual young person as well. (Swann Report, 1985, p.467).

### **Classroom Implication of this Paper**

The classroom implication of this paper for religious education of children in a pluralist society is that the teacher should not give a privileged position to any one faith. For the school should, according to Hull (1981), make:

. . . no assumptions about the truth (or falsehood) of any one of the religions. It simply presents them, describes them, holds them up in all their beauty and their ugliness, helping the pupil to understand without prescribing what the outcomes for any pupil may be should he make choices or rejections. (Hull, 1981, p.200).

Thus it is imperative that one should present a faith sympathetically but openly, by showing appreciation of the alternatives to it rather than by teaching people that it is true while remaining silent or prejudiced about alternatives. Apart from the fact that children in a multiracial, multicultural classroom will expect this, such a procedure will pay respect to the basic educational notion of respecting a child as a rational choice maker. To understand other people, one needs to penetrate people's intentions, beliefs, myths, desires, views of the world. For, in the words of Smart (1966):

. . . it is fatal if cultures, including our own are described merely externally, without entering into dialogue with them. (Smart, 1966, p.104)

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Hence, accordingly,

The test of one who is teaching reasonably in a society such as ours is openness, not what his commitments are. (*Ibid.*, p.98).

Consequently, the Humanist teacher for instance, should have some imaginative grasp of religion, just as the Christian teacher should be able to elicit from his pupils an appreciation of the force of Humanism. The Christian should be able to teach Buddhist Studies, and to do so without judgmental attitudes. It should, in *any event*, be a cause of joy that there is good in others, not a defensive cause of sorrow and fear. (*Ibid.*, p.98).

Smart maintains that 'one can reject the evangelizing view, allow the possibility of persuasion and yet retain an open policy in regard to religious education. Similar remarks apply if one begins from the question of why children should be influenced to take Humanism seriously.'

'It is not to be supposed that biases run in only one direction'. (*Ibid.*, p.99). Hence Smart argues that:

... just as a Communist Party member would not teach children in such a way that they were deprived of choice and truth, so the Christian or agnostic teacher should be loyal to the primary requirements of education and the primary duty of being a sympathetic teacher. Propaganda is not the aim of teaching, but the production of a ripe capacity to judge the truth of what is propagated. In brief, the rôle of the teacher is not that of taking advantage of the young. (*Ibid.*, p.97).

The stress here is for all pupils to share a common educational experience which prepares them for life in a pluralistic society. In order to achieve this aim all schools, both multi-racial schools and those with few or no ethnic minority pupils, will need to re-appraise their curricular provision; the attitudes and assumptions which underlie their work, in order to challenge and indeed overcome the 'barriers', whether physical or psychological, which at present exist between the majority and minority communities in our society. (Swann Report, 1985, p.509). If schools were seen by parents to be offering a more broadly based curriculum which reflected the multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-faith nature of Britain today, then according to the Swann Report, this will counter many of the anxieties which have been expressed by different sections of the community over the questions of religious education and the establishment of separate religious schools. Moreover, if ethnic minority parents were able to exercise some direct influence themselves over policy development and decision-making through

greater involvement in governing bodies, this would also enhance their confidence in existing schools. (Swann Report, 1985, p.509).

Hence, granted what has been said above, the religious education teacher does not need to be an expert in every aspect of religious study and every subject touching on religion. 'He needs to know enough to deal with the minimum body of knowledge required by all pupils and be able to branch out enough to satisfy the interests of pupils and to equip them with the key skills, concepts and attitudes that unlock doors to the understanding of man's religious heritage'. (Border, 1972, p.30).

This, of course, imposes upon us the need to know more about the world and experience of the children we teach, as well as the need to know our religious material well enough and to see into it sensitively enough to know where it is relevant. The aim is a religious interpretation of life which means being able to recognise and interpret religious values and concepts in religious and non-religious contexts. Thus anything which helps children to understand themselves and other people, better their relationships with other people and the world, and to cognize life in religious perspectives, is laying the right foundation for the latter development of these basic theological/religious demands. (Holm, 1969, p.16).

Thus, the aim of a religious education course in a multicultural, multiracial context would be to stress religious understanding. For to understand a religion is to grasp its meanings to those who practise it. Hence a religious proposition will be considered as true by being accepted by the faithful. Its essential truths will not be truths in a fact-finding literal sense. Its perceived truths will be made up, among other things, of myths which could be weak, powerful, significant, insignificant, appealing or repulsive, worthy or unworthy of acceptance. They will be true insofar as they make believers feel some truths. (M. Warnock, 1979, p.35). For each religious tradition is, according to its nature, the vehicle for truth, and its truth is not merely dependent on the claims of its adherents that it is true for them. (Hardy, 1979, p.102). Thus, the presentation of a religious tradition as 'absolutely true' prejudices other religious or non-religious views as false or defective. (Hardy, 1979, p.103). Religious traditions could be presented alongside each other and with non-religious ones without engaging in any prejudgments. 'They should be presented in such a way that they can be seen to engage in real dialogue and mutual understanding without the initial supposition that each is less than the presentation of truth. That is the precondition for a positive approach to the pluralism of a multi-religious and multi-cultural situation . . .' (Hardy, 1979, p.103-104). Such presentation would not begin with prejudgments about pre-established similarities between them either from a matrix of dimensions or from the similarities discerned by a comparer standing

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over them. Instead

‘. . . let the particular practices and ideals of different religions emerge with full clarity and without prejudgment of their truth or dissimilarity.’ (Hardy, 1979, p.104).

If religious education is to contribute to improving the quality of life for all, and the quality of children’s general education, then it will require that teachers familiarize themselves with the cultural conditions, value-systems, learning styles and prior experiences which influence the intellectual potential and behavioural patterns of children from all social and racial groups. Teachers so informed can make better and more viable decisions about educational needs of culturally or ethnically different children; make more realistic assessments of pupils’ intellectual potential and academic performance and thereby create appropriate learning strategies, activities and alternatives to complement different learning styles and experiential frames of reference. For to do so is to teach effectively and this is what multicultural religious education is about.

Thus, the teacher of religious education would not be expected to start with any pre-established common denominator between religious traditions or religious experiences. The similarities or dissimilarities should emerge in the mutual questioning that goes on between them. Comparabilities between religious traditions would be emergent, but not pre-established. This could be achieved through full interaction of people from different religious and non-religious traditions. A communicative and critical approach would benefit the whole group of pupils and the non-religious person’s freedom will not be impaired so long as he shares the fundamental commitment of being open to the truth present in religious and non-religious traditions and thereby being open to those who live in these traditions. The assumption here, is not that pupils share a common denominator of religion or meaning, but share only the way by which they establish meanings. This enables them to be open with each other without sacrificing their representation of truth. (Hardy, 1979, p.107).

## Conclusion

Thus, in conclusion, while in teaching, class-work and class-discussions, effort should be made to relate to the main aims and objectives (as established above) of the course of religious studies; *content*, (illustrations, explanations and the like) must be drawn from a multi-faith, multi-cultural context reflecting different ‘forms of thought’, different ‘systems of belief’ and values. Above all, *teaching method* must be governed by the dual principles of ‘respect for truth’ and ‘respect for persons’.

Hopefully teachers would engage pupils in a number of learning activities designed to accomplish a sensitivity to inter-religious, inter-cultural understanding. Hence the content of the 'discipline' of religious education would, in part, be derived from and related to the many cultures, many religions and to the problems of a culturally diverse society. Similarly, written class work, homework and other assignments would not only be given to test or evaluate and to explore for knowledge and understanding of this subject area, but to help pupils to understand better the nature and place of religion in human life. Hence the religious education course could serve as a vehicle for fostering tolerance and understanding among both pupils and staff. These objectives could be realised through open discussion, reflection, deliberation, participation, mutual tolerance, commitment, and in the search for truth. Religious education as postulated here, implies not only good, sound education, and good, sound teaching and learning, but also appropriate knowledge, skills and ethical dispositions. To succeed in developing pupils' cognitive and affective powers *and* socially appropriate ethical and moral and religious dispositions is to succeed in religious education.

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