

FROM. LORD THORNEYCROFT.

NLW

Prime Minister 2



An interesting memorandum,
but unless these general
sentiments can be translated
into legislation.
I have asked for DES
advice.

26. May. 1988.

N.L.U I.G.

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Dear Prime Minister.

I enclose a note on the
religious clauses in the Education
Bill. It includes the outline of
a solution which just might be
negotiable with the conflicting
interests. I think you might
be willing to look at it and
to use your influence to
smooth these troubled waters.

Yours.

I don't think
the 'solution' is either
possible or desirable.

It should be within the
powers of an 'O.C.' authority

to ensure that there are
sufficient teachers who can teach
Religious education

RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS

A note by Lord Thorneycroft

This paper is an attempt to analyse the views of the main groups at present concerned with this subject and to suggest the outline of some solution which might be broadly agreeable to most of them.

The Agnostics. These would prefer to remove both religious teaching and religious worship from the schools. They regard it as ~~moving~~^{wrong} to indoctrinate children with a religious faith. Religious education and development should stem from sources outside the schools.

This approach is not without some powerful arguments in its support. Thomas Jefferson firmly separated Church and State in America and America remains to an important extent a deeply religious country. We might, but did not, start from the same position. An attempt to adopt it now would I believe be misunderstood and deeply resented by wide sections of public opinion.

The Christian approach. Perhaps more accurately described as the approach preferred by many Christians. This would assume that in a Christian country, if religion is to be taught in schools, it should be the Christian religion and that if worship is to take place it should be God Almighty, the One God, who should be worshipped.

Fifty years ago, just before the then Mr. Butler introduced his Education Act, this approach was accepted broadly without question. It was assumed and stated to be assumed that religious education was understood to mean Christian religious education.

The Compromise position. The present religious clauses of the Bill are an attempt to legislate on the basis of terms negotiated by the Bishop of London. They are offensive to many Christians. While providing and indeed highlighting the need for religious education they studiously avoid giving any indication as to what religion Parliament has in mind and indeed provide in terms that no preference should be accorded to any one religion over any other.

The existing Bill goes on to prohibit in specific terms the teaching of any catechism or religious creed. This is, to say the least, an odd provision to find in primary legislation. While ordaining that acts of religious worship should take place it specifically requires that they should not discriminate between one religion and another. As the Bill at present stands it would be wrong to give specifically Muslim religious teaching to a school containing 90% Muslims as it would be to give specifically Christian teaching to a school containing 90% of pupils of English, Welsh or Caribbean origin. The Bishop of London is considering how best to introduce the word Christian on to the face of the Bill but it may be found that more than one word is needed to change the general slant of the Bill which is at the moment almost wholly tilted towards a form of multi faith education.

The Problem. The Bishop of London faces many problems but it does not appear that any of them really stem from any of the ethnic groups. If there are schools which are largely Muslim no-one would object to them receiving religious education in the Muslim faith preferably with the help and agreement of leaders of the local Muslim Community. So far as is known, no ethnic group has opposed Christian Teaching.

The problem, and it is a real one, is that among the thousands of Christian Teachers, there are a number of agnostics who are not prepared to have anything whatever to do with Christian teaching in their schools.

This view is shared by some local Education Authorities and under the arrangements for drawing up a syllabus any of these groups can impose a veto. Even the removal of this veto would not however solve the problem. What is to be done with a school where no teacher is qualified or willing to give Christian religious teaching or officiate over Christian religious worship - or perhaps over any form of religious activity? It would seem to me that it would be best in such a school if no attempt was made to engage in religious activities. Certainly nobody will be quicker than children to recognise the artificiality of such an

exercise. In some cases the opportunity has been seized to substitute political for religious teaching.

OBJECTIVES

Amid these difficulties we can identify some objectives.

(a) The religious life of pupils of whatever ethnic origin should be catered for. Wherever possible provision should be made to give them education and encouragement in their own faith be it Muslim, Christian or any other. *but not 'spurious' faiths.*

(b) An attempt should be made, if only in the teaching of history, or literature to familiarise children of English, Welsh or Caribbean origin, with the facts and the superb language of the Christian tradition. No man or woman can be said to be educated in this country unless they have some knowledge of the authorised version of the Bible, including both the Old Testament and the story contained in the New Testament.

(c) Wherever possible children of English, Welsh and Caribbean origin should be given specific Christian religious education and engage in collective Christian Worship.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Solutions are not easy but I think that any solution should try to include the following:

(a) We cannot by legislation compel teachers who do not wish to give religious education to do so. They should not suffer in their careers for holding these views. I think that we should say so. Christian education by an agnostic or Christian worship led by an unbeliever would soon be recognised by children and should not be sought for.

(b) We should state objectives and these must surely include the fact that any substantial number of pupils of any ethnic origin can be educated if parents so wish in their own faith be it Christian, Muslim or whatever.

(c) Clearly all parents should have the right to withdraw their children from religious education or worship if they so wish.

(d) Children should be encouraged to meet together and be talked to about the problems of humanity and their relations with one another. This should not however be taken as a substitute for education and worship in their own faiths. The attempt to impose a multi faith type of education and worship as at present in the Bill should be dropped.

(e) Wherever possible the assistance of the local religious community should be enlisted to help in the development of religious knowledge of whatever faith is being taught.

Where the Christian religion is being taught help will obviously be drawn from wider circles than the Anglican Church.

(f) This type of solution will clearly mean that in some schools no Christian religious activity and perhaps no religious activity at all will be possible. I think that this will be better than a solution in which the theme is so degraded that the most ardent unbeliever can participate in teaching it. In such places parents and local religious leaders will have to do their best outside the school.

(g) We should then be attempting a quiet unprovocative teaching of the appropriate religious faiths that make up the varied pattern of our community. We should not attempt to muddle them up or we will surely muddle the children that we are teaching. We must accept that in some areas what we achieve will fall short of what we would wish and in some schools we will fail altogether but this is happening now.

The kind of solution here suggested is I believe simply a mirror of what is happening in the best of our State schools already. The Bill should be amended on Report in order to reflect these practices.

I believe that part of our problem in these religious clauses arises from an attempt to draft them in a form more appropriate to the imposition of a core curriculum in general subjects.

We can and should impose a core curriculum in general subjects but we certainly cannot impose any worthwhile form of universal religious education. We should therefore lay down objectives on the lines above. These should be clear, directed toward teaching knowledge of a specific religion and unmuddled. From then on we should have faith in the parents and Governors to whom we are giving additional powers as well as in the Local Education Authorities and above all in the Teachers. This seems not only to be the wisest but in many ways the only course that is open to us.

Thorneycroft

EDUCATION Policy 1718

