

Ecclesiastical and religious factors which preserved Christian and traditional forms of education for citizenship in English schools, 1934-1944

(1) Introduction

Contrary to popular belief and the impression given by much ahistorical educational research, education for citizenship in English schools is not a new phenomenon. The conception of religious education and education for citizenship as curricular competitors and/or companions is not new either. Both education for citizenship and the relationship that it has with religious education are part of a much-neglected historical continuum. To fill this historiographical gap, I reconstruct and analyse the public discourse pertaining to the nature and purpose of religious education and education for citizenship in English schools between 1934 and 1944 (Freathy, 2005). The public discourse is defined as that formally articulated in published documents, such as reports of the Board of Education Consultative Committee, Ministry of Education pamphlets, Local Education Authority (LEA) Agreed Syllabuses for Religious Instruction, professional journals, books, pamphlets and newspaper articles. In this sense, it pertains to chains of ideas generated 'from above' by a small 'intellectual elite', of mostly upper-middle or upper class males, who were members of the political, ecclesiastical and

educational establishment of the time. The period between 1934 and 1944 was crucial in the development of these two aspects of educational provision and a time at which they were frequently discussed together. Despite this, the historiographical traditions pertaining to religious education and education for citizenship have been isolated from one another. This has meant that important aspects of both histories have been ignored.

The reconstructed public discourse relating to religious education and education for citizenship discussed two dichotomous forms of education for citizenship. The first form was Christian and traditional. It emphasised development of the spiritual and moral aspects of citizenship. It was indistinguishable from character training and a comprehensive form of religious education which used the educational process as a whole to transmit religious beliefs and values. Thereby, religious education was not taught to pupils, but 'caught' by them through indirect training and Arnoldian public school traditions, such as the school's ethos, structure and hierarchies, chapel services, the example of teachers, incidental teaching through curriculum subjects, pupil relationships and extra-curricular activities. The proponents of this form of education for citizenship included many members of the educational establishment, such as public school headteachers (e.g. Cyril Norwood), Christian educationists (e.g. Spencer Leeson), Board

of Education Consultative Committee Chairmen (e.g. Will Spens) and Anglican clergymen (e.g. William Temple). They were sceptical of direct instruction and practical training in regard to religion, citizenship and good character because they did not believe that such matters could be taught and they deemed social, political and economic affairs to be beyond the capacity of school-age children.

The second form of education for citizenship was promoted by the liberal intellectuals who founded the Association for Education in Citizenship (AEC) in 1934. These included Ernest Simon (1879-1960), who had a distinguished career as a local and national Liberal politician, and Eva Hubback (1886-1949) who was best known as a social, educational and political campaigner. Through the AEC, Simon and Hubback hoped to provide pupils with a motivation to assert their social and political rights more actively and to maintain Britain's liberal, secular and rational political progress by defending the country's democratic institutions, processes and values from the threat of mass media and totalitarianism. The form of education for citizenship which they advocated was secular. It sought 'to advance the study of and training in citizenship, by which is meant training in the moral qualities necessary for the citizens of a democracy, the encouragement of clear thinking in everyday affairs and the acquisition of that knowledge of the modern world usually given by

means of courses in history, geography, economics, citizenship and public affairs' (Simon and Hubback, 1935: 2). This would be done without recourse to a Christian ethical foundation.

Simon and Hubback's conception of education for citizenship was also progressive in an educational sense. Firstly, they promoted practical pedagogies associated with independent progressive secondary schools (e.g. Bryanston). These schools generally rejected the educational traditionalism, hierarchical structures and Christian ritualism associated with the more traditional public schools. Instead they promoted the personal, social and moral development of pupils through more democratic forms of community involvement. Secondly, Simon and Hubback assumed that indirect education for citizenship was already in existence and that it was ineffectual. Accordingly, they promoted curriculum innovation to include direct instruction in citizenship either through new subjects, such as Current Affairs or Social Studies, or revitalised versions of old ones, such as Civics.

(2) Citizens Growing Up

My central narrative ends at the point at which the Christian and traditional form of education for citizenship triumphed in gaining official support over and against the secular and progressive form (Freathy, 2005). One of the most significant pieces of evidence to

support this contention is the Ministry of Education *Pamphlet No. 16: Citizens Growing Up* which was published in 1949. *Citizens Growing Up* was the first Board or Ministry of Education publication specifically on education for citizenship and, judging by the references to the AEC, it seems likely that *Citizens Growing Up* was a direct result of the association's campaigns and of the promise of Earl de la Warr (President of the Board of Education, October 1938-April 1940) to Ernest Simon that an official pamphlet on education for citizenship would be produced (Ministry of Education, 1949: 39 and 42). For this reason, it can be interpreted as the 'official' reply to the AEC's requests, and the government definition of the relationship between religious education and education for citizenship which emerged between 1934 and 1944.

Citizens Growing Up subordinated the public and political purpose of education for citizenship as defined in terms of the democratic nation-state, to a private and spiritual purpose as defined in terms of humanity as a whole and its relationship with the universe and God (*Ibid.*: 52). This decision was justified on the basis that democracy must be defended by reasons stronger than political or social expediency. It even went so far as to say that those who reject both Christian beliefs *and* Christian ways of life are waging a full frontal assault upon civilisation:

“Over large areas of the world the gospel of force is now preached, as it was in Germany before and during the war, with all the weapons of science and propaganda, all the panoply of a crusade. These evil gospels, aimed not only at the overthrow of religion but at the slavery of man, can be met only by a faith as positive and confident as their own. A social conscience, unsupported by religious conviction, has not always the strength to defend itself against organised evil. If homes and schools and society at large are without spiritual ideals, they are houses built on the sand and cannot be relied on to stand against the rising storm. This is not a *reason* for religion. [...] It is, however, an *effect*, and a pamphlet on education and society is bound to stress the strength that comes from deep convictions about good and evil, about the nature of God, and about the nature and destiny of man.” (*Ibid.*: 11).

Citizens Growing Up thus promoted the spiritual and moral emphases of the old education for citizenship tradition in contrast to the specifically political reference point of the AEC’s new formulation.

This spiritual and moral emphasis was also evident in regard to what *Citizens Growing Up* had to say about curriculum reform. It dedicated a separate section to Religious Instruction and called upon its

teachers to relate the study of biblical material to the spiritual and moral issues which pupils face in their daily lives. Thereby, it would contribute a uniquely powerful emphasis on conscience, individual responsibility and service (*Ibid.*: 37). In addition, the pamphlet highlighted the opportunities afforded by corporate worship for pupil participation, and for the celebration of Christian, civic, national and international occasions. Lastly, it argued that both Religious Instruction and corporate worship would be rendered ineffectual without the right school atmosphere, the right personal example of teachers and the right relationships between staff and pupils (*Ibid.*: 38). This comprehensive form of religious education cohered with the Arnoldian public school tradition propagated by educationalists such as Cyril Norwood (1875-1956), Spencer Leeson (1892-1956) and William Temple (1881-1944).

Citizens Growing Up was the first and only 'government produced' pamphlet on education for citizenship prior to *National Curriculum Council Guidance 8: Education for Citizenship* which was published in 1990. For that reason, it is highly significant in terms of the general history of education for citizenship in England and it draws attention to the importance of explaining the historical factors which in the 1940s led education for citizenship to be conceptualised on a Christian foundation. It also raises the issue of the extent to which

advocates of religious education were responsible for preventing a secular, progressive and political form of education for citizenship from establishing a firm foothold in English schools in the mid-twentieth century. Important factors which need to be considered in this regard include changes within the ecclesiastical context, changes within the dual system of church and state schools and changes to the nature and purpose of Religious Instruction and corporate worship. These factors will be discussed below.

(3) The Christian foundations of British national identity and citizenship

The relationship between citizenship and the processes of secularisation and re-Christianisation constitutes the first factor which led education for citizenship to be conceptualised on a Christian foundation in the 1940s. Secularisation of the state had been catalysed by denominational conflict in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Nonconformists sought to separate Church and state, while Roman Catholics and Jews pressed for state pluralism and the patronage of non-established religions. Together, Nonconformists, Roman Catholics and Jews worked to ensure that citizenship was universal, just and egalitarian rather than coterminous with Anglicanism. Secularisation was further advanced by intellectual developments, such as a growing confidence in empiricism and rationalism, and by the deep suffering caused by the First World War. In this context, the founder members of the AEC promoted a progressively liberal, democratic and secular version of British citizenship and national identity (Myers, 1999).

However, secularisation was challenged in response to the rise of radical political ideologies in collectivist and totalitarian states which sought to impose a secular faith on all citizens and to confine the churches to private religious matters (Vidler, 1967: 59). In Britain,

through the 1930s and wartime, the political establishment increasingly used the traditional alliance of Christianity, national identity and citizenship as a means of defending British democratic values. Meanwhile, intellectual justifications for the re-Christianisation of society came from the Moot, which was a seminar group of distinguished Christian figures that met for residential weekends from 1938 to discuss post-war planning. Its members included T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), Karl Mannheim (1893–1947) and Fred Clarke (1880-1952). In *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), Eliot maintained that only Christianity was capable of providing the passionate devotion for British national identity which the Communists, Fascists and Nazis had aroused in the USSR, Italy and Germany (Edwards, 1971: 324). Later, in *Diagnosis of our Time* (1943), Mannheim argued that Christianity provides a *via media* between such communitarian ideologies and individualism, because it promotes the full development of the individual personality under transcendent Godly ideals as embodied in the Christian community (Michell, 1985: 89-90). Finally, Clarke's influential *Education and Social Change* (1940) maintained that the coherence of English society depends on 'faith and love' which derive their meanings from 'life and sound education and the grace of God'. Moreover, the purpose of this social cohesion is to provide a context 'for the making of souls' (Clarke, 1940: 67-9). Hence he argued that the purpose of

education is 'To know God and to enjoy him for ever' (Aldrich, 2004: 2).

The acceptance of the Christian foundations of British national identity was made possible in the interwar period because of two important developments. First, the assertion that Britain was religiously homogeneous was supported by ecumenical progress. The ecumenical movement had developed in foreign mission fields where the commonality shared by different Christian denominations had been stressed in response to alternative religious identities and secular nationalists. This prepared its advocates, such as J. H. Oldham (1874-1969), for the challenge posed by non-religious ideologies in the 1920s and 1930s, when the positive and optimistic Christian campaign to establish the kingdom of God became a more defensive and pessimistic attempt to reverse secularisation and counter militant ideologies (Bates, 1976: 271). Ecumenism allowed politicians and churchmen to argue that national identity, with its accompanying liberal, democratic parliamentary traditions, was founded on a common Christian heritage which transcended denominational differences.

Second, this was paralleled by a campaign within the Church of England, led by the broad churchman William Temple, to defend its

Establishment status. He argued that the Church of England is the agent of the common Christianity which provides the foundation for the national community and that it bears witness to Christian principles in terms of the socio-political, economic and educational spheres (Grimley, 1998). This occurred at a time when the nation was looking for a powerful enough ideology with which to fight off secular evils and to prepare for post-war reconstruction.

The prevailing concern for religiously sanctioned social and moral traditions, rather than secular political values, led the Board of Education and the wider educational establishment, to seek to maintain the Christian foundations of the English tradition of education and to reject secular forms of education for citizenship. They did this by utilising the international crisis to fashion policy in a conservative manner (Myers, 1999: 323-4). Thus, the traditional Christian nature of British national identity and the drive for re-Christianisation during the 1930s and 1940s should be understood as key factors in diminishing the chances of a secular, progressive and political form of education for citizenship being established in English schools. The importance of this point has been overlooked in previous histories of education for citizenship (Whitmarsh, 1972 and 1974; Heater, 1990, 2001 and 2004; and Kerr, 1999). For instance, Heater (2001) ascribes to political, social and pedagogical factors the failure

of education for citizenship to develop in England, but he fails to mention that for a considerable proportion of English history and for a considerable proportion of the population, consideration of social and moral responsibilities and community involvement would have been inconceivable without reference to Christian beliefs and ethics (*ibid.*: 104).

(4) Non-denominational forms of Christian education

Another factor which allowed Christian and traditional forms of education for citizenship to triumph in the 1940s was the development of non-denominational forms of religious education in LEA schools, in contrast to religious education in voluntary schools which aimed to inculcate pupils into specific denominational beliefs and values. Non-denominational religious education had emerged in Board Schools after the Forster Education Act (1870). It was constrained by three important clauses. First, a conscience clause allowed parents to withdraw their children from any religious observance or instruction and from school on days set apart for religious observance by their denomination. Second, to ease withdrawal, a timetable clause limited the provision of Religious Instruction and worship to the beginning or end of a school session. Third, the Cowper-Temple clause ensured that Religious Instruction was limited to Bible reading, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer rather than catechisms or

formularies distinctive of any particular denomination (Freathy, 2005: 73-74).

In this context, the development of non-denominational religious education was catalysed by the missionary and ecumenical movements which held that that which united Christians was far greater than that which divided them, especially when considered in the light of non-Christian religions and secular ideologies. In response, liberal Protestant Christian educationists, particularly Nonconformists like Basil Yeaxlee (1883-1967), promoted versions of Christianity which were devoid of much denominational particularity and which emphasised personal interpretations of the Bible and generic Christian experience. This was evident in the growing number of non-denominational Agreed Syllabuses of Religious Instruction produced after the Hadow Report (Board of Education Consultative Committee, 1926). Moreover, the ecumenical movement thereby strengthened the work of the Christian educationists as a pressure group because now their energies were directed against a common foe rather than towards one another.

As the nature and purpose of religious education changed, so the Board of Education, the Consultative Committee and the wider educational establishment became able to equate it with education for

citizenship. Instead of the traditional view of religion as denominationally divisive, religious education could now be interpreted as nationally cohesive. Through learning about non-denominational Christianity in Religious Instruction and by connecting it with a living Christian community in worship, Christian educationists believed that pupils could be shaped by the common Christianity which undergirded personal, social and political life in Britain. The growing acceptance of this message resulted in statutory ecumenical Religious Instruction and worship for LEA schools in the 1944 Education Act.

In the two decades after the Second World War, Religious Instruction in LEA schools pertained to a form of non-denominational Christian education for citizenship. It was based on the Bible, as the common denominator of the Christian faith, and the supposedly objective study of church history. For instance, the *Middlesex County Council Agreed Syllabus of Religious Instruction for Middlesex Schools* (1948) provided a course in Christian Civics which promoted the Christianisation of social, economic and political life (e.g. human rights, economic reform and international co-operation), so as to develop individuals towards physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual perfection (Michell, 1985: 163-4). A broader approach was evident in *The Cambridgeshire Agreed Syllabus of Religious Teaching for*

Schools (1949) which provided headteachers with a checklist of questions by which to assess whether their schools embody a moral conception of Christian citizenship, such as 'Is the school so organised as to encourage co-operation as well as proper forms of competition?', 'What does the child do for his school?' and 'What does the school do for the village or town?' (Copley, 1997: 34-5). Meanwhile, school worship provided Christian moral education for citizenship as evident in the emphasis placed on community values and paradigmatic moral stories of Christian heroes (Copley, 2000: 87-8).

(5) The professionalisation of Christian education and the 'official response'

The increasingly positive response which Christian educationists received from the Board of Education and the Consultative Committee, in regard to their proposals for religious education (Bates, 1976: 84), was another factor which allowed Christian and traditional forms of education for citizenship to triumph over secular, progressive and overtly political forms. This increasingly positive response can be demonstrated with reference to a Board of Education conference on the *Provision of Improved Opportunities for Teachers to Equip themselves for giving Religious Instruction* (1933-34), Board of Education publications (e.g. the *Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers*, 1937), numerous Consultative Committee reports (e.g. the

Spens Report, 1938), Secondary Schools Examination Council reports (e.g. the Norwood Report, 1943) and acts of parliament (e.g. the Butler Education Act, 1944) (Michell, 1985: 94). It was caused not only by changing conceptions within the Board of Education and the Consultative Committee, but also by the greater coherence with which Christian educationists conceived the nature and purpose of religious education in LEA schools. This had been made possible as a result of the provision of ecumenical, rather than denominational, teacher training in Religious Instruction (e.g. Westhill College, 1907), the production of Agreed Syllabuses (e.g. West Riding, 1922 and Cambridgeshire, 1924), the creation of a professional journal (e.g. *Religion in Education*, 1934) and the establishment of subject organisations (e.g. the Institute of Christian Education, 1935). These developments enabled Christian educationists to professionalise because they stimulated the synthesis of theories pertaining to the nature and purpose of religious education and enabled their dissemination to the wider professional body. Moreover, the clarity with which they promoted non-denominational Christian education for spiritual and moral citizenship made it possible for the Board of Education, the Consultative Committee and the wider educational establishment to realise that Christian educationists' demands cohered with their own political, social and educational conservatism.

(6) The dual system and the religious settlement agreed in the 1944 Education Act

The final major factor which allowed Christian and traditional forms of education of citizenship to triumph over secular and progressive forms was the religious settlement made in regard to the dual system of voluntary and maintained schools in the 1944 Education Act. This was significant because, in order to secure the co-operation of the churches in post-war educational re-construction and to retain their financial contribution to the education system, a deal had to be struck which provided the churches with re-assurance that Christianity would not lose its privileged place in English education (Cruickshank, 1963: 147). However, advocates of denominational education continued to defend the dual system against the encroachment of state schools on the basis that denominational schooling could provide pupils with an opportunity to become active and participatory 'citizens' of mini-societies in which their faith was nurtured by teachers, parents and peers and given practical expression in the local worshipping community. For this reason, the Roman Catholic Church in particular, resisted collaboration with the state in furthering the advance of secondary education for all.

However, for the politically and financially powerful Church of England, under the guidance of William Temple, collaboration rather

than conflict with the state education system became possible. Temple's Christian socialist beliefs led him to support any enterprise that would further the spiritual and moral development of the nation especially in regard to social welfare reform for the working class (Temple, 1956). Therefore, he prioritised wider educational reform and the inclusion of compulsory Religious Instruction and worship in the 1944 Education Act rather than blocking government initiatives by solely defending denominational schools (Cruickshank, 1963: vii). Moreover, he considered that Church involvement in state education would act as a bulwark against state absolutism, which had developed elsewhere in Europe, because it acted as a powerful intermediary association between the individual and the state (Suggate, 1980: 157). Therefore, although the government's positive response to voluntary schools in the 1944 Education Act was partly due to the economic or political prudence of placating the churches to expedite educational reform, it was also facilitated by the broad churchmanship and ecumenism of Christians like Temple.

(7) Conclusion

In conclusion, the above analysis is important because it identifies the ecclesiastical and religious factors between 1934 and 1944 which preserved the Christian and traditional form of education for citizenship in English schools. These factors included the revival of

the Christian foundations of British national identity and citizenship, the political power of the Anglican Church within the dual system of church and state schools, the professionalisation of a liberal, ecumenical Protestant form of religious education in LEA schools as taught through Arnoldian public school traditions, and the increasingly favourable response which this provision received from the Board of Education, the Consultative Committee and the wider educational establishment. The liberal, ecumenical Protestant rationale for religious education accorded with the non-specific form of Christianity which the establishment accepted formed a part of English cultural identity and which many maintained undergirded British political institutions and processes. The public school tradition through which religion was to be 'caught' accorded with the preferred educational practices of the establishment since it was the means by which most of them had been educated. It also embodied the methods which they believed were most likely to adhere the masses to the existing social, political and religious order. Furthermore, the increasingly positive response made by the Board of Education and the Consultative Committee to the place of religious education in the education system helped to secure the co-operation of the churches in post-war educational re-construction and to retain their financial contribution. The co-operation of the Church of England in this process was further facilitated by the broad churchmanship and

ecumenism of William Temple, who was willing to support the settlement of the 1944 Education Act as a means of promoting the spiritual and moral development of the nation.

Together, the above represent the much-neglected ecclesiastical and religious factors which ensured that a Christian and traditional form of education for citizenship triumphed in securing its position in the English education system in the 1940s over and against the secular, progressive and political form of education for citizenship promoted by the founder members of the Association for Education in Citizenship. Further research into the relationship between religious education and education for citizenship in other countries is needed before this historical analysis can be located within its international context. For instance, it will be important to investigate the extent to which the conservative campaign for re-Christianisation through religious education for citizenship in the Arnoldian mould constituted an English particularity, possibly arising from Anglican Establishment, or whether comparable examples of practice arose in other countries before, during and after the war, in response to the Communist, Fascist and Nazi threat. International comparative studies will also enable an examination in comparison to England of the extent to which the culture of Christian nation-states, the involvement of Christian churches in their national education systems and the place

afforded to religion in the curricula of their state schools are factors which since the mid-twentieth century prevented or postponed the development of political education with a national civic purpose.

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