Faith or Education?
A discussion of some ideas from *Faith in Education: A tribute to Terence McLaughlin*, edited by Graham Haydon (2009)

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My Aim

The subject of this paper is the book edited by Graham Haydon entitled *Faith in Education: A Tribute to Terence McLaughlin* (London: Institute of Education, 2009)[1]. It is not a *review* of the book as I make no attempt to summarise or critique all of the chapters, but rather, I aim to concentrate on what I see to be the central and most problematic of the ideas generated by Terry McLaughlin's work[2], and discussed by the contributors.

In the first chapter of *Faith in Education*, Gerald Grace[3] identifies in McLaughlin's work:

> "three major themes in the area of faith schooling. The first is a discourse on parental rights and the religious upbringing of children. The second is an analysis of the distinctiveness of Catholic education as a particular form of faith schooling, and the third is a defence of faith schools as a legitimate feature of liberal, pluralistic and democratic societies" (p.1) [4]

Each of the contributors to *Faith in Education* - Gerald Grace, Eamonn Callan, Hanan Alexander, Mark Halstead, Richard Pring, Harry Brighouse and Michael Hand - shed a little more light on his wisdom as they grapple with some of the tensions and conflicts which such matters as these bring with them. They help us to see more clearly that Terry McLaughlin was a man of faith (as a committed Catholic), was interested in the place of religious faith in education, and had an unshakeable faith *in*

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[1] In preparing this presentation, I have drawn on my review of this book for the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* (in press), and an earlier presentation to the Roehampton branch of PESGB, co-hosted by the Centre for Research in Beliefs, Rights and Values in Education (BRaVE), on 26th October, 2010.

[2] For an excellent representation of McLaughlin's work, see *Liberalism, Education and Schooling: Essays by T. H. McLaughlin*, edited by David Carr, Mark Halstead and Richard Pring (2008).

[3] Professor Grace is the Director of the Centre for Research and Development in Catholic Education at the University of London Institute of Education. I find the title of this Centre perplexing. In explicitly aiming to *develop* Catholic education (as opposed to simply studying or researching it), it is partisan. My reaction to it exemplifies the kinds of tension which are discussed later in this paper, i.e. between educating about a religion and *promoting* it. I cannot help but wonder: Would a Centre for Research and *Development* in Shi'a or Sunni Islam (not to mention Scientology or Paganism) be equally acceptable at the Institute?

[4] Unless otherwise indicated, all page references are to chapters in *Faith in Education*.

education as a means by which a person might flourish, find enrichment and fulfilment, or (as the psychotherapist have it) to 'self-actualize'[5].

The contributors are not all equally comfortable with McLaughlin's attempts to reconcile his religious beliefs on the one hand and his commitment to rational argument and evidence (or 'warrant') on the other. Nor are they equally happy about his accommodation to the tensions between the rights of parents, the rights of children and the rights of the state when it comes to decisions regarding the upbringing of children. What is for some an entitlement to socialise and acculturate new entrants into a faith community is for others wilful and unacceptable indoctrination.

There is no question that McLaughlin was engaged in an ongoing struggle to 'square' some very large 'circles', and the tolerance entailed in his faith in the liberal society, and his respect for evidence and for rational argument, were such that he would not have considered the matter to be settled while ever there was someone prepared to raise a question or offer an alternative. This is something he has in common with those of his colleagues who contributed to this book. And here I would mention particularly, Richard Pring. For Pring, so long the admirer of Dewey and a defender of the common school, finds it impossible not to concede the argument that in a plural society there are communit*ies* with a democratic right to follow and maintain the complex social, spiritual and moral dimensions of their cultures, and that it is impossible to develop fully as a member of such a community unless one can be initiated into that culture and so experience it 'from the inside'[6].

It is this tension between autonomy and democracy on the one hand, and initiation into faith communities on the other, which lies at the core of this book, and which I now go on to examine.

Faith Schools in a Liberal Society

I begin with what Graham Haydon describes as "the pressing practical question of the place of faith schools within a liberal society" (p. x). I imagine that this has been more or less of a 'pressing practical problem' in England at least since 1833 (if I remember rightly), when the British Government first voted a sum of money for the support of Anglican and non-Conformist schools, to be distributed via the (Anglican) National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church in England and Wales and the (non-conformist) British and Foreign Schools Society. If not so early, then definitely by the Parliamentary debates of the late 1860s, culminating in the 1870 Act when a national system of elementary education was devised which would accommodate and supplement, but definitely not *replace*,

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[5] This concept is usually associated with Carl Rogers who "maintains that the human 'organism' has an underlying 'actualizing tendency', which aims to develop all capacities in ways that maintain or enhance the organism as it moves towards autonomy. The tendency is directional, constructive and present in all living things…… It encompasses all motivations,: tension, need, or drive reductions; and creative as well as pleasure-seeking tendencies…" Pesticelli (2007, p.1).

[6] I was also surprised to find Harry Brighouse, a self-confessed atheist, setting out "to show why someone who is committed to liberal values should make an accommodation for religious schooling in a liberal society" (p.79), and I look at his attempts to do so in the next section.

existing Church schools. It reared its head again in 1944, of course, when the 'dual system' of local authority and voluntary schools was confirmed and extended.

However it was the Blair Government's policies for the encouragement of diversity in school provision which made this a hot issue in the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st Century. As Halstead summarises:

> "Since 1998 England has had significant changes in policy towards faith schools in the maintained sector. Not only have new Anglican, Catholic and Jewish schools been approved, but a small number of Hindu, Greek Orthodox and Seventh Day Adventist schools have also received public funding for the first time… In 2001 the British Government expressed its intention to continue and extend this policy towards faith schools in four ways: by welcoming independent faith schools into the maintained sector (subject to local agreement); by allowing voluntary and faith groups to sponsor new schools within the City Academy programme; by encouraging the establishment of new faith schools, especially where these have an inclusive intake; and by encouraging new partnerships which would, for example, allow faith groups to 'help build a school's ethos' …" (p.47)

Despite being avowedly a defence of faith schools, Halstead's paper is a measured, comprehensive and dispassionate evaluation of the evidence and policy arguments for and against faith schools and their maintenance by the state. In it, he cites a paper by Best (2003) in support of the view that there is not one debate about faith schools, but in fact, "four distinct debates". These have to do with:

- the compatibility or incompatibility between religious belief and the process and content of an education;

- whether the quality of provision in faith schools justifies their existence or whether they so privilege some groups at the expense of others, or are so indoctrinatory, that they are in principle unacceptable at any cost;

- whether the injustice of allowing some faith groups to have their own schools and others not, can balance the claims that separate schools are divisive and militate against social cohesion;

- whether or not faith schools, whatever their justification, should be publicly funded (p. 49)

Halstead goes on to look at six claims which are made by those involved in these debates. I do not want to re-run these debates here, but I do want to make three points at this juncture.

The first is that there is a strong *utilitarian* flavour to a fair amount of the debate(s) which Halstead summarises: do the consequences of faith schooling (such as high academic standards; possible indoctrination; social divisiveness etc) make a net positive or negative contribution to the sum total of human well-being? Second, because these arguments are utilitarian, there is an appeal to empirical evidence which is not always visible in philosophy but is here a welcome corrective to some of the

wild broadsides of politicians and journalists (e.g., what *is* the evidence to link religion or faith to specific instances of social unrest such as those in the north of England in 2001? (p.53)). Third, it is not at all clear what we mean by 'faith schools', for as Halstead shows, they are very diverse indeed, not least in the degree to which they are actively or nominally 'religious'; whether their links to religions are largely historical or anachronistic; whether their intakes are more or less inclusive/exclusive or even bear any resemblance to the clientele for which they were originally set up, and so on. Halstead has suggested a distinction between what he calls 'old religious' and 'new religious' schools as a possible way of narrowing the definition, and I am aware that the simple slide from 'faith schools' to 'faith-based' schools (which is Michael Hand's preferred label later in the book) is indicative of an enduring uncertainty about the nature of the beast.

That philosophers should contribute to the clarification and critique of educational policy is as it should be, and there are implications for policy in all the chapters of this book. This is most clearly so in the chapters by Pring (who sets the case for faith schools against that for the common school in a liberal democracy), and Brighouse (who looks comparatively at the systems in the UK and the US).

I want to look now specifically at the chapter by Brighouse. His argument is in three parts:

First: That the desirability or otherwise of faith schools (or *religious* schools, for that is what I think he's talking about) is to be measured in terms of their capacity to produce persons who are autonomous and democratically competent.

Second: That, when compared with the kinds of values that are tacitly or explicitly promoted and instilled in state schools in the US (and, for that matter, in schools under the cultural hegemony of any other capitalist society), the capacity of faith schools to produce autonomous and democratically competent persons appears to be at least as great as that of secular schools. He supports this argument with anecdotal evidence from his daughter's experiences in both countries to demonstrate that opportunities to experience diversity and develop tolerance are not by any means the preserve of secular schools.

Third: That such empirical comparisons alone are not adequate to resolve the debate for and against faith schools, since they do not take into account of the 'knock-on' effects of getting rid of faith schools. Faith schools cannot be treated as though they are in a social, economic and cultural vacuum: on the contrary, their relationship with other aspects of the communities they serve, including the real and anticipated reactions to government policy of those belonging to one or another faith group (or none), is crucial to deciding whether a move against faith schools would be desirable or not. He uses the example of the celebrated (in the US, at any rate) legal case of Mozert v. Hawkins (p. 86), in which a group of Christian fundamentalist parents sought exemption for their children from some parts of the Civics curriculum on the basis that some of the content the set books was contrary to their religious beliefs[7].

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[7] "In Mozert a group of fundamentalist parents in Tennessee sued the local public school district to demand that their grade school level children be exempted, not from schools, but from a civic education programme which used readers including readings which, the parents claimed, conflicted with their religious beliefs. The offending passages included a comment from Anne Frank's *Diary of a*

The case was lost, but the results were not good for the promotion of autonomy, democratic competence and a capacity for reasonableness: the children were removed from the state school and sent to a fundamentalist religious school. Moreover, the publishers of the key text excised the 'offending' passages from subsequent editions, so that all children were henceforth denied the opportunity to learn from them.

Now the second part of the argument - the comparison of what is currently available by way of faith and non-faith schools - seems reasonable enough, as far as it goes. Indeed, those of us who can remember the work of Ivan Illich and other 'de-schoolers' will be familiar with the idea that the structure and processes of state schooling re-produce the conditions of the market, in which children learn to be good little consumers in a market place where 'knowledge' is packaged, commodified, exchanged and cashed-in like anything else. By this 'hidden curriculum' also are the assumptions and morality of the capitalist system confirmed and reproduced. Brighouse is right that a direct comparison of faith and non-faith schools on these terms is inadequate on its own, but not quite for the reason he gives. Supposing even that his comparative evaluation of faith and non-faith schools is correct, and that faith schools may, indeed, offer much that is as good or better than secular schools, this would have no more force than an argument for supporting schools which beat children with a stick because the alternative schools beat them at least as hard with a belt! Neither makes beating 'okay', and neither is a good school. Comparing faith with non-faith schools in the way Brighouse does, fails to get us very far because we lose sight of first principles. In limiting his consideration to just two aims (however important) for schooling - personal autonomy and democratic competence - he begs the questions of what education as a process is, and what constitutes the education of the *whole* person. Surely it is against such an ideal, rather than against examples of other imperfect systems of schooling, that faith schools should be judged. To do otherwise is no longer to be 'doing philosophy' but to be 'doing *policy*'[8]. This, I believe, is what is behind Michael Hand's criticism of Brighouse's position in the final chapter of the book to the effect that "to conflate the question of whether faith schools should exist with the question of whether the state should prohibit them" (p. 105) is a mistake.

In any case, the moral calculus of such a utilitarian position as that advocated in the third part of his argument, is a tall order. The existence (and one might add, encouragement) of faith schools cannot be justified by the measurement of all the intended and unintended consequences of a government policy to support or to prohibit them, for we cannot ever know what all the consequences of enacting a policy might be. Such judgments must always be retrospective, and this, it seems, is an inescapable weakness of the utilitarian position. Now of course, it is better for politicians to consider the likely outcomes of a course of action before embarking on it - think of the invasion of Iraq - and the teaching of History is supposed to be justified by helping us to be able to predict such consequences on the basis of past

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Young Girl that perhaps unorthodox belief in God is better than no belief at all, and a picture showing a boy making toast for a girl which contradicted the traditional sex roles the parents claimed were demanded from the bible". (Brighouse, p.86).

[8] In discussion elsewhere, Lorella Terzi has rightly suggested that I need to distinguish what I have called "doing policy" from political philosophy, which is, of course, a legitimate pursuit. I suspect there's another distinction to be made between "doing policy" and "doing politics", where a blatant disregard for the truth and an embrace of the 'principle' of expediency seem to come into play.

experience. But to base a case for or against faith schools on such an exercise seems to me to be unlikely to succeed. That such schools are about beliefs and values rather than causes and effects, feelings of destiny and identity rather than the transmission of facts, seems to me to put the argument into a different arena altogether. Just how different this is can be seen from the chapter by Alexander which I shall come to presently.

The 'Initiation Thesis'

The second key issue I wish to address is that which, in the second chapter of the book, Eamonn Callan calls 'the initiation thesis'. He says that Terry McLaughlin "never developed the thesis into a full-blown argument; it was [he says] really just an interesting conjecture" and later, that it is "obscure" (p. 11). However that may be, as (re-) constructed by Callan, it is central to much that follows in the book. It is essentially about the capacity of a child to develop into an autonomous person with the ability to make a free choice about whether or not to accept and follow a particular faith. The thesis boils down to three propositions:

- That autonomous choice requires understanding of that about which the choice is to be exercised;

- That proper understanding ('appreciative' understanding) of something is much more than simply knowing a set of factual propositions about it;

- That appreciative understanding of a religion requires that one is initiated into it.

Such initiation is therefore not necessarily the unacceptable indoctrination and proselytising that critics of faith schools fear, but on the contrary, an essential prerequisite for the exercise of personal autonomy. Put bluntly: how can one rationally choose something about which one lacks the kind of appreciative understanding that comes from a full-bodied initiation into its beliefs, traditions and practices?

He uses an anecdote re-counted by the Catholic philosopher, Elizabeth Anscombe, in an essay on the doctrine of transubstantiation (that is: the belief that the wine and bread of the Eucharist become the blood and body of Christ when consecrated by the officiating priest). The anecdote concerns a three year-old boy, who has had the procedure of the Eucharist explained to him and is at a Communion service with his mother. When she returns to her seat after receiving the bread and wine, the child asks "Is He in you?" When told that He is, the child prostrates himself in front of her, apparently in adoration of the Christ within. Anscombe considers this to be evidence for her belief that initiation into faith can best be accomplished through explanation in the context of participation in the practices of the faith. It also serves to distinguish those who have faith from those who frown upon the child's actions because they have not the faith or are in the process of losing it. All this is, I think, as good a way as any of illustrating the conflict between believers and un-believers in regard to the status of religious teaching as either education or indoctrination.

Callan believes he has refuted the initiation thesis by testing it against two objections which he calls the "believer's objection" and the "unbeliever's objection". The believer, he says, will object to the thesis on the basis that it reduces faith to a mere *means* by which understanding of religion may be achieved, whereas faith (which carries with it revelation and salvation) is an end in itself. If anything, it is faith that makes understanding possible and not the other way around. The un-believer will object to the thesis on a quite different ground: in essence that not only does initiation into religious doctrines involve teaching falsehoods, it involves inculcating them in ways which make it particularly hard to discard them later. This is indoctrination and

unacceptable. Moreover, the thesis put thus raises other awkward questions, such as whether what one learns within one faith is a 'transferable' capacity for appreciative understanding of others; and which or how many of the available faiths one would have to be initiated into in order to achieve the understanding necessary for autonomous choice among them. In any case, even if one accepts that understanding might be achieved by such initiation, this is outweighed by the harm done (in teaching falsehoods etc) in the process. Callan can find no counter arguments to refute either of these objections and so, he says, the initiation thesis must fall.

Hanan Alexander who had in recent years collaborated with McLaughlin and with him had, in 2003, co-authored a paper entitled 'Education in religion and spirituality'[9], challenges Callan's claim that both the believer's and the unbeliever's objections are watertight on the grounds that Callan's particular "brand of liberalism is far too intolerant of 'belief in' dynamic faiths, which it reduces to logically or empirically assessable 'beliefs that' something is the case" (p.28). He presents the McLaughlin-Callan debate as something of a paradigm clash. In one corner, there is McLaughlin who believes in 'autonomy-via-faith' and in the other, Callan who believes in 'autonomy-via-reason'; that is to say: "Reason not religion should guide life choices… including those about whether or not to be religious…." (p. 29). In carefully analysing and evaluating Callan's argument, Alexander develops what to my mind is the most thoughtful and penetrating paper in the book.

Key to Alexander's discussion is the distinction he takes from Martin Buber between two kinds of faith: faith as 'belief that' and faith as 'belief in' (p.31). For those who accept the idea of faith-via-reason, issues of religious belief reduce to questionning the truth of synthetic propositions (such as those which make up the Creation story). Those who describe religious upbringing as 'indoctrination' are often objecting precisely to the teaching of such beliefs which are empirically untestable or, against what is currently known by science, could not reasonably be held to be true. By contrast, faith as 'belief in' is about trust in relationships with others, and with traditions and attitudes. Thus, there are two aspects to faith:

> "One aspect stresses ways of talking across cultures about a thin life we might share in common, grounded in rational, subject-object knowledge; the other emphasises thicker local practices grounded in interpersonal subject-subject experiences that are linguistically idiomatic, culturally particular and historically situated" (p. 31).

When we believe *in* something, we are in something like Buber's *I-Thou* relationship with it. In such relationships, one lets go of self, allows the other to fill one's world and in a sense (I think) to be 'completed' by the other. The kind of understanding which is achieved in such a relationship "is achieved by letting go, at least in part, in order to receive another subject …. [I]n a subject-subject encounter, we set aside interest in order to receive the other with no end in view other than the meeting itself" (p. 39). If I have understood Alexander correctly, to properly understand a faith requires that one is immersed in it, open to it, and setting aside all interest in order to be 'completed' by it. Thus, faith requires an initiation into the tradition, beliefs, history and practices of the faith group, such that it is grasped and lived 'from the

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[9] See Alexander and McLaughlin (2003)

inside'. Nothing could be much further from the idea of understanding via reason nor of the idea that empirical demonstration of truth is the basis for a justifiable faith.

Once one admits of the structuring and procedures of knowing and understanding as a matter of different paradigms, the idea that there is some objective, rational and culturally neutral position from which claims to knowledge and understanding such as those involved in religious faith recedes into the distance. While Callan goes so far as to say "relativism is simply very bad philosophy" (p.17), Alexander argues (following Halevy), that

> "(t)radition is a more reliable source of truth than reason. Intelligent religion is grounded in historically situated beliefs. This is not to say that reason is to be rejected altogether, for example it is useful in explaining particular faiths across cultures. Rather, it ought it be contextualised and its limitations acknowledged" (p.32).

If knowing and understanding a faith are essential to the education of a whole person - and I concede that that's a big 'if' - and if the argument is correct that understanding a *faith* is different in type from knowing or reasoning *about* religion and requires an initiation which can happen only from *living within the faith*, then one who is not educated in something like a faith school may hardly be said to have been educated at all.

So where does all this leave me?

I am glad that Graham Haydon decided to organise the series of lectures which led to this book and for bringing the book to fruition. It is certainly a recognition of the work of an important and much loved philosopher of education. It has made me think and it has been the motivation for some personally rewarding conversations with a colleague who shares an interest in the field[10], but it has also left me with a sense of unease, a certain disappointment, a feeling of something missing. Some of my unease is shared by Michael Hand in his comments in the final chapter, but some of it is not, and I need to get it off my chest.

What is missing, I think, is a proper consideration of that which we call 'the *spiritual*'. Alexander's chapter is the *only* one in which I felt I was being drawn into the more fundamental questions of what it is to be fully human and by what means one's humanity may be most fully developed. His use of Buber's I-Thou relationship reminded me of the work of David Hay and Rebecca Nye in *The Spirit of the Child* (1998). Using photographs and other stimuli, they entered into conversations with 38 primary school children about experiences which might be described as 'spiritual', taking care not to use the word 'God' unless the child did so first. The passages which stood out as about what we might call the 'spiritual', were characterized by 'a single compound property' which Hay and Nye came to call *relational consciousness*. This had two ingredients: "an unusual level of *consciousness* or perceptiveness, relative to other passages of conversation spoken by the child", and the fact that the

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[10] I am indebted to David Lambourn for helping me to sharpen my perception of the issues raised in this book, and to clarify some of my thoughts about them.

"conversation [was] expressed in a context of how the child *related* to things, other people, him/herself, and God" (Hay and Nye, 1998, p.113). As has been shown elsewhere (e.g. Best, 2005, pp. 73-75), the idea of being-in-relation is a common one in theology, and it is central to at least some attempts to define or articulate the concept of the 'spiritual' in discussing the curriculum.

In *Faith in Education*, however, the concept of the spiritual is largely neglected. It seems to me to be implicit throughout Hanan Alexander's paper, and may, perhaps, be taken for granted in some of the others, but it is worth asking why no chapter gives the concept of *spiritual* education a more focused and explicit consideration. If we consider spiritual development to be an important aspect of the education of the whole person (and I concede that that's another big 'if'), then a consideration of the educational effectiveness of faith schools which does not begin with an idea of what spiritual development is is strictly limited.

This neglect has, I think, further unfortunate consequences. If uninterrogated, the concept of the spiritual is elided with 'the religious', and this will not do. I can think of no good reason for insisting that spiritual experience, awareness and motivation can only occur within the confines of an institutionalised set of beliefs, practices and traditions, i.e. within a religion. While I am the first to admit that defining spirituality and spiritual development is far from easy, that is no excuse for ignoring it, which is, by and large, what these authors do.

A second concern is the doubtful validity of some of the arguments which are employed in debating the desirability of faith schools.

I have already indicated a problem with Brighouse's comparison of faith and secular schools as a justification for retaining (and, perhaps, supporting) faith schools. You will remember that he argues (a) that to allow faith schools to exist is, when all the consequences are known and weighed, the least of evils, and (b) that they are no less imperfect than state schools. These are a pretty dubious arguments. I have argued that in regard to (a), all the consequences are never known, and certainly not in advance of the policy decision, and in regard to (b), that the prior existence of some imperfect schools is a poor justification for creating others which are poor in comparable ways.

Another problem has to do with the evidence for personal autonomy amongst those who have been brought up as believers. According to Gerald Grace, one of the arguments used by McLaughlin in responding to Callan in their original debate in 1985[11] was that to accuse faith schools of indoctrination or of hindering the development of personal autonomy runs counter to empirical evidence, since "'very many children who are reared within a religious belief system eventually become adults who are not at all disinclined to question seriously the grounds of the faith'" (p.3). What is this supposed to prove? If there are a great many people who fail to maintain beliefs instilled in them in childhood by an institution (such as a church or school), might this not perhaps indicate that the teachings of that institution are of doubtful truth or utility? In which case: should children be subject to those teachings? Does the fact that there are some 'lapsed believers' wandering around mean that the

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[11] I heard this argument rehearsed last year at a seminar with Grace in Digby Stuart College, Roehampton.

institution is benign, or simply that it is not as effective in its indoctrination as it might have been? I may be missing something here, but isn't the logic here the same as arguing that concentration camps are not all that bad because some people survive them?

My third concern is with the whole concept of the 'faith school'. As I have already indicated in reference to Mark Halstead's paper, there is no, clear, shared and unambiguous concept of a 'faith school'. Some 'faith schools' are religious in practice; others only nominally. As a historical quirk of demography, some schools have a minority of pupils (in some cases possibly *none*) who are from the faith groups which founded them; some are more or less financed by the State and some are fully independent. The degree to which they deliver a curriculum common to secular schools, and the degree to which they follow a curriculum of their own devising varies enormously. As I have already suggested, talking about 'faith-based' schools rather than 'faith schools', or adopting Halstead's distinction between 'old' and 'new' religious schools, seems only to demonstrate the underlying problem with the concept. It does not seem to me to be a helpful category to use at all, and we may wonder why it has become so used, and to be the focus of such attention.

The answer is, I think, historical and political. As I indicated at the beginning, the controversy surrounding state resourcing of religious (i.e. Christian, church) schools has run since at least the middle of the 19th Century. Successive waves of immigration and the idea of Britain as a multi-cultural society in which different ethnic groups are aligned with different religions, has made the old category of 'church' schools untenable. 'Faith schools' is an inclusive concept which recognizes cultural and religious diversity. The use of this label so extensively by Blair and his Government in a general policy of privatizing individual schools and encouraging a diversity of provision under the (often empty) rhetoric of 'parental choice' - a policy now being extended by the Cameron-Clegg coalition Government - has made it especially topical.

That so-called 'faith schools' happen to be exemplars of a range of issues: parental rights v. children's rights v. the rights of the state; selective v. common schooling; religious education v. indoctrination and so on, is clear enough. They therefore provide a focus for rehearsing and extending debates about these issues. This is what the contributors to *Faith in Education* do. But this does not mean that the concept of 'faith schools' as a category, has any validity or explanatory potential in regard to these dabates at all.

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