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The Religious Education Dilemma

FORSTER'S Education Act—the foundation of our national system of education—received its first reading in the Commons on February 17th, 1870, and its third reading early the following August. It was one of the most important measures passed by Gladstone's first government—"its greatest constructive work"¹, some have said. Yet John Bright, the first Nonconformist to sit in a British Cabinet, described it as "the worst Act passed by any liberal parliament since 1832"². "Its birth was premature," says the biographer of R. W. Dale (1829-95), the great Congregationalist preacher of Birmingham³. The question should have been dealt with earlier, says Mr. Kitson Clark⁴.

At the time and subsequently, many believed that the government had thrown away a great opportunity. The provisions of the Act were the result of prolonged and bitter controversy. Many of the issues involved have continued to complicate, if not bedevil, English education ever since. They are again matters of argument and emotion in this centenary year. This fact and the intrinsic importance of the subject may be felt to justify devoting a lecture to some account of the circumstances which led to the passing of the Act, to the arrangements for religious instruction, in particular, to the subsequent controversies and to the present situation.

For centuries the instruction of the young had been regarded as the responsibility and prerogative of the Church. It was naturally chiefly in the hands of the Established Church. University education was directed mainly towards the training of the clergy. There was no widespread movement for elementary education for all children until the late 18th century. Among the influences then at work were the Wesleyan Revival, the Industrial Revolution and, most important, the rising birthrate and consequent increase in the child population.

Dissenting ministers had kept schools to eke out a living since the Great Ejection of 1662. Some of them gained some fame in the mid-eighteenth century; for example, that of John Collett Ryland, established in Warwick, moved to Northampton and then moved again to Enfield, and that of Doddridge, also in Northampton, which has a specially honourable place in the roll of Dissenting Academies. Towards the end of the 18th century, Dissenters began to do what they could to teach reading and

* A paper read to the Baptist Historical Society Summer School on July 4th, 1970.

writing to the poorer classes in urban areas through Sunday Schools, Raikes had begun this work in Gloucester in 1780. The Sunday School Union was formed in 1803 and by 1820 nearly half-a-million children were under instruction in this way. Dissenters also tried to improve the standard of their private schools and a number of new ones were formed, among them Mill Hill in 1807, Caterham in 1811 and Bootham in 1823. Almost all Nonconformists agreed with Anglicans that education should be in the hands of the Churches and should have a religious basis and framework. "Education is a branch of civil liberty," said Joseph Priestly, "which ought by no means to be surrendered into the hands of the magistrate."⁵ But model employers concerned for the education of the children they employed—like Robert Owen (1771-1858), who took over the New Lanark Mills in 1800—were few. The classes Owen started were partly in response to the fact that in the new urban and factory areas the old Scottish system of a schoolmaster in every parish had broken down. That system dated back to 1696 and resulted in greater general literacy in Scotland than in England. It should also be noted that in Wales village schools were not attached to the Established Church in the way that was usual in England.

When, early in the 19th century, it became clear that more must be done to instruct and train the increasing child population, two societies were formed. This was the great age of voluntary societies. The British and Foreign School Society was started in 1808 to propagate the teaching methods of Joseph Lancaster; it was a largely Nonconformist organisation. The reading of the Bible was obligatory in schools of this type, but no commentary or catechism was used. The National Society for promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Church of England was formed in 1811; its title sufficiently indicates its outlook and aim. Both societies depended on subscriptions from well-wishers and the fees (often no more than a pittance) paid by the parents. Public controversy began on whether schools might not be set up for work-house children under the Poor Law and therefore paid for out of local rates. Samuel Whitbread (1764-1815), the wealthy Whig M.P., in 1806 suggested two years education for all sometime between the ages of seven and fourteen, but the new Archbishop of Canterbury (Manners-Sutton) opposed the plan and it was defeated in the House of Lords. In the Commons, a future President of the Royal Society declared: "However specious in theory the project might be, of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life"⁶.

After the Reform Bill of 1832, J. A. Roebuck, a Radical of the school of Bentham, was bold enough to table a Bill for "the universal and national education of the whole people," but it was one still based on the voluntary principle. In his

Autobiography, John Stuart Mill declares: "In the case of Roebuck, it is his title to permanent remembrance, that in the very first year during which he sat in Parliament, he originated (or re-originated after the unsuccessful attempt of Mr. Brougham) the parliamentary movement for National Education"⁷. Roebuck's Bill was rejected, but from 1833 it was agreed to provide £20,000 a year from the public purse in building grants for new schools. It was intended that half go to the National Society and half to the British and Foreign School Society, but support for the latter was flagging. In practice it was the Anglicans who secured almost all the money. Between 1839 and 1850 over £400,000 went to Church of England schools, £50,000 to the British and Foreign School Society, £37,000 to Workhouse schools and £8,000 to the Methodists.

By the middle of the 19th century, Anglicans had roughly 1,000,000 children under instruction in some 17,000 schools, one in almost every parish. In 1849 the Congregational Union set out to raise £100,000 in order to establish more schools of their own. Shortly afterwards the Baptist Union attempted something similar. Neither Union had much success! It was clear, however, that the British and Foreign School Society could no longer be relied upon from the Nonconformist standpoint. A typical Nonconformist reaction is seen in a resolution passed by the Baptist Union in March, 1843: "That the Union feel it their duty to declare that they do not consider the education of the community to be the proper business of the State." Nonconformists had been alarmed by education proposals in Sir James Graham's Factory Bill. These would have made elementary education virtually an Anglican monopoly. Graham's proposals were dropped, but he had himself to admit that "Religion, the keystone of education, is in this country the bar to progress."⁸

Something had to be done on a bolder scale to cope with a growing problem. The conviction spread that continental nations were getting ahead of Britain because of their better school systems. A Commission on the Elementary Schools reported in 1861 that nine-tenths of the schools were in Anglican hands and three-quarters of the child population. But in the great cities—in Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester—less than one-fifth of the children were receiving regular instruction. By 1869 it was reckoned that roughly a quarter of the child population were in schools which received some State aid with building and maintenance costs, but which depended also on voluntary subscriptions and fees. A million children were in voluntary schools which had no grants, were uninspected and most of them grossly inefficient. Two million children were not in school at all.

Some years before, R. W. Dale had parted with many of his friends on the education issue. He had become convinced that the State must take up a task that was clearly beyond the re-

sources of the Churches, but he was not in favour of free education, as were many. A similar change had taken place in the views of F. D. Maurice (1805-72). In 1839 he had published a book entitled *Has the Church or the State the power to educate the Nation?* arguing that the State is not qualified to educate; it ought to provide freedom for the Church to do its work. By 1868 he recognised that the National Church could not do this and that the State must rally all the forces it could "to struggle against . . . ignorance and the crimes of which ignorance is the parent"⁹.

The Church of England continued to hope for an increase in denominational schools. A National Education Union was formed in Manchester to promote this and to counteract the activities of the National Education League of Birmingham, which began in 1869 to agitate for universal free, compulsory and unsectarian education, supported from the rates and under public management. Nonconformists and Liberals were becoming convinced that a national system was essential. At once the question of its religious basis came into dispute. If all schools became part of a state system, should the religious instruction in them become unsectarian? What kind of instruction could rightly be described as unsectarian? And if denominational teaching was allowed, how should this be given and with what safeguards, if any? Gradually, in the decade before 1870, Nonconformists came to favour unsectarian teaching. This was a reversal of their earlier attitude. It came partly from a desire to break the Anglican preponderance, partly from the growing rejection of dogmatic, credal religion.

Gladstone, convinced Christian and Anglican as he was, favoured single, secular teaching in a state system. He did not believe this need be damaging to religion. It would be a spur to the Churches to increase their Sunday Schools and their catechetical and evangelistic activities. Alternatively, Gladstone was ready to accept the Scottish system by which a popularly elected local school board prescribed whatever religious education pleased it best. How active a part Gladstone took in the preparation and passage of the Act of 1870 has been debated. Morley plays down the part he took. Sir Philip Magnus alleges that he "took only a lukewarm interest"¹⁰. Trevelyan calls the Act "Gladstone's gallant venture"¹¹. John Vincent thinks he had more to do with the matter than Morley suggests¹².

Gladstone came to power after the Second Reform Bill, Disraeli's so-called "leap in the dark" of 1867. Robert Blake describes the passage of this Bill, which granted household suffrage for the first time, as "one of the oddest histories of confusion, cross-purposes and muddle in British political history"¹³. Lord Derby and Benjamin Disraeli had yielded to the growing agitation for an extension of the vote, and in the hope of keeping in power in a House of Commons made up of several divergent groups,

went beyond what Gladstone himself favoured on this issue. However, the Liberals won the subsequent election. Their first concern was Ireland. The Irish Church was disestablished. An important Land Act was passed. It was then decided to turn to the delicate matter of the schools. Gladstone's Chancellor of the Exchequer, Robert Lowe, who had frequently clashed with Disraeli during the debates on the 1867 Reform Bill, is said to have declared: "We must educate our masters" or, according to Professor Asa Briggs, that it was essential "to compel our future masters to learn their letters"¹⁴.

The person placed in charge of the Education Bill was William Edward Forster (1818-86), Liberal M.P. for Bradford. By birth a Quaker, he had married a daughter of the famous Dr. Arnold of Rugby and was thus a brother-in-law of Matthew Arnold. He was not made a Cabinet Minister until July, 1870, that is, some five months after debates on the Bill had begun. Gladstone is said to have found him "an impracticable man"¹⁵. Dale's biographer says he was "in a hurry"¹⁶. Vincent says he was "obdurate"¹⁷. Whatever the reason, the Bill was soon in difficulties. The initial proposal was to double the parliamentary grant to the denominational schools, provided they came up to a certain standard and accepted a conscience clause regarding religious instruction, and to fill the gaps with schools supported out of the rates and under the control of local boards, elected by rural vestries and town councils. There was to be compulsion only where a board imposed it. There was to be such religious instruction as the local board decided. According to Halévy, of the 2,225 School Boards in existence in 1888, only seven in England and 50 in Wales dispensed entirely with religious instruction.

These proposals brought an immediate outcry from Nonconformists and from the political Radicals. The Anglican hold on elementary education would have been entrenched and extended. It became clear that by and large, public opinion was against exclusively secular education, though the Nonconformist bodies favoured this, but was opposed to dogmatic teaching in schools aided by local rates. In 1869 the Baptist Union had gone on record "that it can regard no system of Government education as satisfactory which is not confined to secular teaching." As a result of the general outcry, the proposal for building grants for denominational schools had to be withdrawn. It was agreed that the school boards be elected directly by the ratepayers, not by Anglican vestries. They could compel attendance up to the age of 13. The conscience clause was made more effective by stipulating that religious instruction could be given only at the beginning or end of the school day. In board schools, as they were called, the use of any "catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination" was prohibited.

This last amendment was the famous—indeed notorious—

Cowper-Temple clause. It was put forward by William Cowper-Temple (1811-88), who was at the time M.P. for South Hampshire. Later he became Baron Mount Temple. He was a churchman of Whig sympathies and President of the National Education Union. The clause was repudiated by Nonconformist spokesmen in the Commons on 20 June, 1870, and was criticised by a number of High Churchmen. Even Archbishop Tait was uneasy about it¹⁸. But Anglicans had secured a number of concessions for their schools. Half their maintenance costs were to be paid by the Exchequer. The Bill was eventually carried by votes from the opposition side of the House!

Lord Shaftesbury, the great Victorian philanthropist and a prominent Evangelical, would have been content to leave the education of the poor to the Ragged Schools, which since 1843 had been one of the causes nearest to his heart. "I dread, sadly dread, these schemes of national education," he said in 1848. By 1867 some 26,000 London children were under instruction in the Ragged Schools. Shaftesbury's comment on Forster's Education Bill, when it reached the Lords, was: "I do not expect much from it. Idleness is ten times more dangerous than ignorance." He moved—fortunately unsuccessfully—to change the age limits in the Bill from 5-13 to 4-10 and wrote in his diary after the annual Ragged School prize-giving that year: "Never was I more touched; never more sorrowful. It is, probably, the close of these Christian and heart-moving spectacles. The godless non-Bible system is at hand; and the Ragged Schools . . . must perish under this all-conquering march of intellectual power." The Hammonds, in their life of Shaftesbury, contrast his attitude with that of William Lovett, the leader of the London Chartists, also a deeply religious man, determined in his demand for and faith in larger educational opportunities for his children. Shaftesbury, say the Hammonds, believed in "the philanthropy of patronage . . . in the pious and dutiful twilight of the Ragged Schools." Lovett believed that "science would make the world free and just and humane"¹⁹. For all their sincerity both were wrong.

The effect of Forster's Act was to give the country at last a national system of elementary education. But it was one with a dual basis. There were to be in future denominational schools, publicly recognised and aided, and board schools, the one with religious instruction of a denominational kind, the other with non-sectarian instruction of a simple biblical kind. G. M. Young says the Act "satisfied neither the Church nor the Dissenters"²⁰, but the National Society was able to take full advantage of the opportunity given it to start new Anglican schools. Within the statutory six months allowed by the Act, between 1,200 and 1,300 new Church schools were established.

Nonconformists and Radicals felt that they had been out-manoeuvred. Most Nonconformists still wanted religious instruc-

tion to be supplied by voluntary effort and not out of public funds. Dale contended that under the Cowper-Temple clause, though the formulary was forbidden, "the dogma of the formulary" might and would still find a place. There were many areas where there were only likely to be Church schools. Moreover, Clause 25 of the Act allowed the new school boards to pay out of the rates, fees at denominational schools in cases of poverty. Both the Congregational Union and the Baptist Union went on record against the Act. Dale led a vigorous agitation against it and strong efforts were made to get him to stand for Parliament. In 1871 the Liberals lost six by-elections and in 1872 seven, without any gains to offset them. In 1874 no fewer than 300 of the 425 Liberal candidates were pledged to vote for the repeal of Clause 25. The withdrawal of Nonconformist support in many constituencies brought the Conservatives under Disraeli back to power. Gladstone withdrew from the Liberal leadership. But for the objections to his handling of the 1870 Bill, W. E. Forster would almost certainly have succeeded Gladstone. Large elements in the middle classes had been alienated from the Liberal party by the Education Act and the disestablishment of the Irish Church.

The objectionable Clause 25, which allowed fees to denominational schools to be paid from the rates, was repealed in Lord Sandon's Education Act of 1876, which Robert Blake says "can be interpreted largely as an attempt to prevent the incursion of rate-aided 'boards' into the counties, and at the same time to preserve as far as possible the position of the voluntary denominational schools"²¹. The Act also made welcome moves towards a compulsory system, though many still resented this. It was agreed that undenominational instruction did not exclude the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer.

Whatever the defects of the system, between 1870 and 1890, school attendance rose from 1½ million to 4½ million. But there was some truth in the remark of H. G. Wells, quoted by Professor Asa Briggs, that the purpose of elementary education remained "to educate the lower classes for employment on lower-class lines, with specially trained inferior teachers"²². When Gladstone returned to power in 1880 another Education Act was passed, which at last established the compulsory principle and by raising somewhat the required standards, forced a number of voluntary schools into the hands of the school boards. There were still more than 2,000,000 children in Church schools and the National Society was spending £500,000 a year on them. Gladstone and his party had no more intention of ending the Dual System than they had of making the disestablishment of the Church of England part of their programme. The recent verdict of Dr. P. T. Marsh, of Syracuse University, New York, has substance, however: "Rate-financed board schools had robbed the Church of England of some of the substance and much of the lustre of being England's

schoolmaster; they had left voluntary schools dominant only in the countryside, and had made the Church an opponent of advancing standards"²³.

Those who know that delightful classic *Larkrise to Candleford* may remember the chapters which give a picture of schooling in North Oxfordshire and South Warwickshire in the 1880s. M. K. Ashby is probably right that "church schools were resented as having a bias rather social and political than religious"²⁴.

That Nonconformists remained deeply dissatisfied with the situation is shown by the fact that critical resolutions were passed at the annual meetings of the Northants Baptist Association in 1888, 1891, 1896-7 and 1901²⁵. At an international congress in 1890 a vague promise to raise the school-leaving age to 12 was made on behalf of the Conservative Government, but no alteration was made in the Factory Acts which controlled the employment of children. In 1893 it was stated that 5 per cent of men and 5.7 per cent of women could not sign their names in the marriage register. In 1896 Lord Salisbury's second government brought in an Education Bill, "Its object," says Halévy, "was to replace the religious compromise established in 1870, by a compromise more favourable to the Anglican Church"²⁶. It was withdrawn and another presented the following year. This exempted the voluntary schools from rates and therefore accentuated the injustice felt by Nonconformists. Feeling was particularly strong in Wales.

Hard upon this came the Balfour Education Act of 1902. It is right to recognise that this was an educational landmark and that Sir Robert Morant and Sidney Webb deserve credit for the advance in secondary education which the Act made possible. "That the Bill favoured the Anglican, and even the Catholic Church, would not displease the Webbs. For, faithful in this to the old tradition of the Saint Simonians, they have always regarded the Catholic type of Christianity as more in harmony with the Socialist ideal than Protestant individualism"²⁷. A number of administrative defects in the 1870 Act were put right. The control of primary education was transferred from local boards to urban and county councils, a change favoured by the Fabians. But denominational elementary schools were put on the rates. The case against single school areas, against schools with poor buildings and standards, against the use of public money without full public control, and against the appointment of teachers by denominational managers rather than education authorities was thereby greatly strengthened. Nonconformists were much disturbed and on 12 June, 1902, Dr. Fairbairn, of Mansfield College, led a deputation to the Prime Minister, which included P. T. Forsyth, Rendel Harris, J. H. Shakespeare and Lloyd George. Balfour later replied in print to a pamphlet which Dr. Clifford had prepared.

The deputation got no satisfaction. The Act was passed. It was

then that, though some Free Church leaders questioned the wisdom of what was done, Clifford, Silvester Horne and R. J. Campbell launched a Passive Resistance Campaign against the payment of education rate. It was speedily mounted and quickly gained impetus. Thomas Jones in his life of Lloyd George says: "It is not true to say that the fight against the measure was engineered by the politicians or forced upon them by the Nonconformists. The disturbance was spontaneous"²⁸. Hostility to the Act of 1902 played a considerable part in securing the remarkable triumph of the Liberal Party at the polls in 1906. Righting what was widely regarded as a religious and educational wrong, was expected to be one of the first tasks of Campbell Bannerman's government. To this they were in effect pledged.

That this was not accomplished between 1906 and 1910 must seem surprising, even more surprising when some of the details of what took place are known! There were three attempts, led by three prominent Liberal politicians, each of them of Nonconformist background—first Augustine Birrell, son of a Baptist minister, then Reginald McKenna, and finally, after H. H. Asquith had succeeded Campbell Bannerman as Prime Minister, Walter Runciman, a Methodist. But more interesting than the names of those responsible for the attempts at a new education settlement are the details of the provisional agreements made by some of those involved in the discussions.

Birrell favoured complete popular control with religious instruction given out of school hours but on school premises. The Bill he tabled in April, 1906, would have ended the Dual System, brought the 14,000 church schools fully into the State system, abolished religious tests for teachers, but allowed denominational teaching on two days a week. Bishop Knox, of Manchester, led Anglican opposition with great energy, but the Archbishop of Canterbury (Randall Davidson) was ready to accept the Bill, provided certain amendments were adopted. These amendments passed the Lords and Lord Crewe, the leader of the Liberal peers, as well as Birrell himself, would have agreed to most of them. But there was a rising tide of feeling against the House of Lords interfering with Commons legislation. This was connected, of course, with the attack on Lloyd George's financial proposals. The Commons rejected the Lords' amendments to the Education *en bloc*. This action had been demanded by a special meeting of the National Free Church Council in November, 1906. The Lords decided to insist on their amendments. Deadlock resulted and the Bill had to be abandoned. Poor Birrell was moved to the Irish secretaryship. The Irish rebellion of 1916 terminated his political career.

Birrell's successor at the Ministry of Education, Reginald McKenna (1863-1943), tabled a new Bill in February, 1907, withdrew it in May and presented another rather bolder one in

February, 1908. Denominational schools were to be allowed to contract out of the national system, but not if they were in single school areas. If they did, they might qualify for a Parliamentary grant. The Bishop of St. Asaph put forward counter-proposals, which Lloyd George showed interest in, but Balfour opposed them and the reconstruction of the government led to the whole matter being dropped for a time.

The next Minister of Education was Walter Runciman (1870-1949). He used McKenna's Bill as the basis of another attempt. There should be religious instruction of the Cowper-Temple kind in all L.E.A. schools for any children whose parents demanded it. Again the Archbishop favoured the Bill, if amended in certain particulars, but the National Society on the one hand and Dr. Clifford on the other, remained dissatisfied. Dr. Clifford claimed that some of his friends regarded him as "a weak-kneed Moderate"²⁹. On 19th November, 1908, it was announced that agreement had at last been reached. Then suddenly, unexpected difficulties arose over the financial arrangements. The Anglican representatives withdrew their support and the Bill was thereupon withdrawn. Mr. Asquith seems already to have recognised that his next election manifesto might have to contain proposals for curtailing the powers of the House of Lords. The rejection of the budget in 1909 gave him strong ground for doing this. So came the Parliament Bill, the two General Elections of 1910 and, accompanying them, the agitation for votes for women and the question of Home Rule for Ireland. These were the issues which held the stage amid mounting excitement when war broke out in August, 1914.

The next Education Act was passed in 1918. It was the work of H. A. L. Fisher. It did not attempt to deal with the Dual System or with religious instruction, though it abolished fees in all elementary schools. Its regulations about the employment of children of school age resulted in the disappearance from the streets of boys selling papers and of boy shoeblacks and crossing-sweepers. Fisher arranged a private conference about church schools in 1919. Six Anglicans and six Free Churchmen were brought together by the Archbishop of Canterbury and Dr. Scott Lidgett, who had not supported the Passive Resistance movement. The company included Bishop Knox, Mr. Athelstan Riley, Dr. Clifford and Dr. W. B. Selbie—all doughty fighters. Agreement appeared to be possible on three fundamentals. First, religious teaching was essential; second, it must be given conscientiously by competent teachers; third, there must be some specific statement of doctrine³⁰. Again, it looked as if the Dual System would end. Then Dr. Clifford—in his 80's, but still indomitable—withdrew his support. So did Roman Catholics, whose stake in the problem had grown considerably since 1870. They made clear that they were not party to the proposals. Lloyd George's post-

war Coalition was not disposed to involve itself in so controversial a matter without far more assurance of support. A year or so later, the Congregational Union took the lead in trying to get the Fisher proposals accepted, but by then there was more serious opposition from certain Anglicans. The annual meeting of the National Society in 1923 adopted a resolution calling for the abandonment of negotiations for the surrender of church schools.

George Bell, in his life of Randall Davidson, claims that at this time the official educational spokesmen of the Church of England were ready to accept "a single national organisation of elementary schools in the place of the present dual arrangement of 'provided' and 'non-provided' schools"³¹. "But once again the hope of agreement was dashed to the ground by the action of these same stalwart champions of the dual system, who, the Archbishop felt, were so blindly devoted to the maintenance of Church Schools at all costs as to forget that the majority of the total children attend Council schools, and that it is an increasing majority, and to fail to notice the danger, as he put it more than once, of 'drifting into secular education by a side wind' "³².

Spencer Leeson, later Bishop of Peterborough, was an outspoken supporter of the Archbishop on this matter. But A. C. Headlam, who became Bishop of Gloucester early in 1923, had been an enthusiastic supporter of Balfour's 1902 Act and in his Primary Charge attacked the Cowper-Temple clause of 1870. It should go. Even in Council schools, in his view, religious instruction should be "dogmatic and denominational, given by teachers who were sincere and knowledgeable Christians, who had been properly trained and who had a respect for those whose religious beliefs differed from their own"³³. Though an Anglican Commission on Religious Education, with Sir Henry Hadow as chairman, reported in 1930 against any repeal of the Cowper-Temple clause, Headlam did not abate his opposition.

Because of its continuing difficulty and because of other pressing matters, the problem was once more left aside. In 1936, however, building grants of up to 75 per cent were offered to denominational senior schools in an effort to get them to make better and more up-to-date provision for the children in their care.

Then, during World War II, R. A. (now Lord) Butler, while President of the Board of Education, began, with the assistance of Mr. Chuter Ede, to prepare a new and substantial Education Bill. The problems created by two types of elementary schools and divergent views about religious instruction, had inevitably to be faced. The leaders of the Churches and the community at large had had their eyes opened to the inadequacy of much of the current education by the difficulties that had arisen within the large-scale evacuation schemes which had proved necessary. The National Society arranged for a new series of conferences with a group of Free Churchmen. The Durham Report, *The Fourth*

R, gives credit in this connection to Dr. John Whale, then President of Cheshunt College, Cambridge, and in 1942-43 Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council, but it was Dr. Scott Lidgett who almost certainly played the major rôle on the Free Church side³⁴.

A five-point agreement was worked out. There should be, it was felt:

1. Religious teaching in *all* schools, primary and secondary.
2. Schools should be opened daily by an act of corporate worship.
3. The religious teaching might be at any hour of the school day, not necessarily at the beginning.
4. Religious knowledge should be a subject qualifying for Teachers' Certificates at Training Colleges.
5. Religious teaching should be subject to inspection by H.M. Inspectors.

These five points were endorsed by the Archbishops of Canterbury, York and Wales and were conveyed to Mr. Butler by a joint deputation led by Archbishop Lang on 15th August, 1941. The measure of unity, said Lang, "reflected the new attitude forced on people by the wideness of widespread ignorance of the Christian Faith and the challenge of Nazi Germany to any sort of Christian civilisation"³⁵. Mr. Butler was guarded in his comments to this deputation, but at the close of the interview he asked the Archbishop to offer prayer—an unusual and probably unprecedented act.

With some minor expressions of opposition, chiefly to the continuance of the Cowper-Temple clause, the five points were accepted by the National Society and the Church Assembly. They appeared in the White Paper "Educational Reconstruction", issued by the Government in July, 1943, and passed thence into the Bill which in August, 1944, became the Butler Education Act. William Temple, by then Archbishop of Canterbury, welcomed the proposals as presenting the Church of England with "a glorious opportunity". He drew attention to the fact that the Government had agreed to provide 50 per cent of the cost of readjusting and maintaining Church schools. Of 753 schools on the then Board of Education black-list, no less than 541 were Church of England voluntary schools³⁶. "I am quite sure," said Temple, "that the raising of the school age will of itself do more to make permanent the religious influence of the school than anything that can be done with directly denominational purpose"³⁷. One of the chief glories of the 1944 Act was, of course, that it offered free Secondary Education "for the million".

Free Churchmen were being asked to accept the continuance of the Dual System. But they were assured privately, if not publicly, that the Church of England, while anxious to maintain and improve many of their schools, had no intention of attempting to

maintain all of them. Anglicans realised that they could not. Attention must be turned to the improvement of those that were continued, to the drafting of more satisfactory agreed syllabuses for use in state schools and to the proper leadership of the daily act of worship. Publicly and privately, Anglicans recognised that Free Churchmen could legitimately object to single school areas. They promised to do what they could to improve relations and to make the conscience clause known.

Roman Catholics were not party to the discussions and agreements of 1941-44, but there was general recognition of the attitude they had traditionally taken to the necessary instruction of Roman Catholic children in Roman Catholic schools.

It is not easy to discover the details of the conferences which led to the 1941 Concordat, nor to find out how much was disclosed and accepted by the individual Free Churches. By and large, however, it became clear that public opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of the Butler Act. Public figures like Sir William Beveridge and Sir Richard Livingstone spoke out strongly in favour of it. So far as the religious clauses were concerned, most people agreed with the *Times*: "The time for a settlement is now or never"³⁸. The Act was accepted and hailed as a great achievement and brought considerable kudos to Mr. Butler. But Bishop Headlam, still on the warpath, called it "this megalomaniacal Education Bill" and "a very evil thing"³⁹.

The 1944 Act made a two-fold offer to the voluntary schools. Each alternative was generous. If diminished powers of management were accepted, they could become "controlled". The cost of bringing buildings up to standard would then be borne wholly by the community. If complete denominational control was retained, then the schools could become "aided" with a grant from public funds of half the cost of reconstruction. In either case, full maintenance costs were borne by the community. The agreement was based on the expectation that a considerable number of voluntary schools would accept controlled status and this is what happened. The Anglicans carefully surveyed their schools and, in the spirit of the Concordat, accepted controlled status for a very large number, concentrating their efforts on bringing selected schools up to standard under the "aided" arrangement. By 1959 there were only half as many "aided" schools as there were in 1944. But there were still nearly 8,000.

Roman Catholics had become an increasingly important element in the situation. They had increased in numbers and in certain parts of the country were a sizeable proportion of the population. They refused to allow any of their schools to become "controlled", undertook a very ambitious programme of new schools and began to agitate for larger building grants, an agitation in which they soon received sympathetic support from the Anglicans. Building costs had indeed begun to rise alarmingly.

In 1959 building grants for denominational schools were increased from 50 per cent to 75 per cent by the Conservative Government, in spite of the protests of many Free Churchmen, who felt that the new proposals would give a further lease of life to the Dual System; that they strengthened the position of Roman Catholics in the community; and that they did little or nothing—save in vague promises—to deal with the single school areas, which still existed. The Conservative leaders at the time—Geoffrey Lloyd, Sir Edward Boyle, Lord Hailsham and Mr. Butler—all claimed that the increase in building grants did not really involve any departure from the basis of the 1944 Act. The change guaranteed the continuance of a denominational base within the educational system, they said, but it did not really extend the base. On the other hand, to yield to the Roman Catholic suggestion that the grant ought to be 100 per cent would, declared Lord Hailsham in the House of Lords on 14th July, 1959, be “a radical departure disastrous to education, damaging to the public interest and probably unedifying for religion”⁴⁰. The substantial raising of the building grant awakened, however, no violent opposition either among Free Churchmen or agnostics. There was a general feeling that this was no longer a matter of great significance.

Six years later, in 1965, the question of the amount of the grant was raised again. This time one new factor was brought forward. The Government—this time a Labour one—had committed itself to the abolition of the 11-plus examination and to the establishment of Comprehensive Schools. This meant that many of the plans, which Anglicans and Romans had been making, became more difficult and expensive to carry out. In any case, building costs had continued to rise. A request was therefore made for a still further increase in the building grant. Representatives of the Church of England, the Free Churches and the Roman Church had been meeting privately—perhaps better said, semi-officially—since 1963. They recognised that before long a new and probably substantial Education Bill would be necessary; that no political party would willingly provoke religious controversy; that the Churches had less influence than before; and that religious instruction, as formerly accepted, had begun to be questioned. Following the Second Vatican Council, tri-partite discussions were possible in a way that had not been earlier. In these circumstances there was little disposition in any quarter to object to some addition to the building grant figure.

In February, 1966, the percentage was increased from 75 per cent to 80 per cent, with the hope expressed that this would help the Churches to co-operate in the increased building which would be necessary if the school-leaving age was to be raised to 16 in 1970, as had already been announced. It had reached 15 in 1947. That it should be raised to 16 had been urged by Lloyd George in 1934. It was declared to be the aim by Mr. Butler in 1944 and it

was then that Archbishop Temple said to a friend: "I am putting (this very crudely, but I believe that our Lord is much more interested in raising the school-leaving age to 16 than in acquiring an agreed Religious Syllabus"⁴¹. Sir Edward Boyle, while Conservative Minister of Education in 1964, fixed 1970 as the date and one of his several Labour successors, Mr. Antony Crossland, confirmed the decision. Subsequently, however, delay until 1972 was announced.

It was stated that there were in 1965 some 10,000 voluntary aided schools, accommodating in all 900,000 children. Archbishop Beck, the chairman of the Catholic Education Council, admitted publicly that "the Churches must continue to pay a substantial proportion of the total cost, if they are to retain the powers over their schools which they believe to be necessary"⁴². He would have liked an 85 per cent grant, however!

And so we reach the present year, and the centenary of Forster's Act and the Cowper-Temple clause. A number of points must be made:

1. Of the 1870 Act, G. M. Trevelyan said: "It has produced a vast population able to read but unable to distinguish what is worth reading, an easy prey to sensation and cheap appeals"⁴³. It cannot be said that the 1944 Act has fulfilled the hopes of Temple, Butler, Beveridge, Scott Lidgett and the others who promoted it, so far as the religious provisions are concerned. There has not been, during the last 25 years, an enlargement of Christian understanding and influence. Nor has the Dual System wasted away to the extent expected. The number of Church of England schools has declined, but there are still several thousand. The number of Roman Catholic schools has increased. In both Anglican and Free Church circles there is probably today a greater sympathy with denominational schools than was the case in 1944. In his important survey of the general developments that have taken place this century, *Religion and Change*, David Edwards says:

"History may well judge that the decisive defeat of Christianity in England was the failure of the English churches to agree about religious instruction in the nation's schools. Not until 1870 was it fully recognised that the Church of England could not educate the people in schools under its own control. Not until 1944 did the Church of England and the Free Churches agree on arrangements for the religious life of state schools, and even then, the syllabus of religious instruction, by concentrating on the Bible as the common bond of the denominations, was dangerously remote from the real interests of the children"⁴⁴.

2. The Churches are no longer in a position either within their

own schools or in an attempt from their church buildings to instruct the bulk of the children of this country. This is increasingly recognised by Roman Catholics so far as their own children are concerned.

3. There is no evidence either from this country or from the U.S.A. that if religious instruction had been stopped in the state schools and any religious instruction left to the churches outside school hours, the situation would be better.
4. Religious instruction in the state schools is far from satisfactory, but there is little evidence that it is more enduringly effective in church schools. The weakness in all schools has clearly relation to the poor quality of much of the teaching and to the lack in so many cases of parental and church influence. There is ground for some of the criticism offered on this matter by Secularists and Humanists.
5. The new rapprochement between Anglican, Free Church and Roman leadership is a welcome development as it may lead to an improvement in the standard of teaching by an increase in real "vocations" for teaching this subject and by improved syllabuses, which all can approve.
6. The unexpected development in so many urban areas of a multi-racial society poses new problems in the sphere of religious instruction and worship and these need careful examination and working at.
7. Educational theory raises new points regarding the current syllabuses and, even more emphatically, about the possibility of satisfactory daily worship for a single group of children of very varied ages.
8. Educational theory also questions whether older children should or can now be compelled to attend a period of daily worship.
9. Humanists and agnostics have begun to mount a determined agitation against the continuance of religious instruction in state schools.
10. The need for "moral education" is generally recognised. Its relation to "religious instruction" is a matter of debate. As long ago as 1926 Halévy wrote (E.T. 1926): "Was an efficient moral education conceivable without any sanction drawn from traditional religion? How many Europeans, even agnostics, dared return an affirmative answer? In England very few indeed. So few that the problem in this radical form never arose".⁴⁵

These are some of the matters which have to be in the minds of those who are preparing for, drafting and will ultimately debate a new Education Bill. The story of the past century shows that there is not likely to be any easy solution of the problems old and new. The Church groups have taken varied stances during the hundred years. They cannot claim to have been proved right when

they have criticised the Cowper-Temple clause or when they have accepted it; when they have tried to maintain and increase the number of church schools or when they have decided that the time has come when they must be surrendered.

NOTES

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4. G. Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England*, 1962, p.44.
5. Quoted by G. Kitson Clark, *op. cit.*, pp.193-4.
6. Quoted in *The Methodist Bedside Book*, p.270.
7. J. S. Mill, *Autobiography*, World's Classics edition, p.168.
8. G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History*, p.518.
9. Alec Vidler, *F. D. Maurice & Company*, pp.173-4.
10. Philip Magnus, *Gladstone*, p.203.
11. G. M. Trevelyan, *op. cit.*, p.580.
12. John Vincent, *The Birth of the Liberal Party*, p.223.
13. Robert Blake, *Disraeli*, p.456.
14. Asa Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.262.
15. G. M. Young, *Victorian England, Portrait of an Age*, 1960 edtn., p.116.
16. A. W. W. Dale, *op. cit.*, p.274.
17. John Vincent, *op. cit.*, p.38.
18. P. T. Marsh, *The Victorian Church in Decline*, 1969, p.77.
19. J. L. and B. Hammond, *Lord Shaftesbury*, 1923, pp.252, 257-8, 259, 260.
20. G. M. Young, *op. cit.*, p.106.
21. Robert Blake, *op. cit.*, p.554.
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23. P. T. Marsh, *op. cit.*, p.81.
24. M. K. Ashby, *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe*, 1961, p.228.
25. T. S. H. Elwyn, *The Northamptonshire Baptist Association*, pp.67-68.
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27. *Ibid.*, p.123.
28. Thomas Jones, *Lloyd George*, 1951, p.30.
29. G. K. A. Bell, *Randall Davidson*, p.534.
30. *Ibid.*, p.1127.
31. *Ibid.*, p.1132.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Ronald Jasper, *Arthur Cayley Headlam*, p.325.
34. *The fourth R.*, 1970., p.11.
35. J. G. Lockhart, *Cosmo Gordon Lang*, p.368.
36. *The fourth R.*, p.12.
37. F. A. Iremonger, *William Temple*, p.573.
38. *Ibid.*, p.571.
39. Jasper, *op. cit.*, p.331.
40. *Hansard*, 14th July, 1959.
41. Iremonger, *op. cit.*, p.575.
42. *Times*, 20 February, 1966.
43. *English Social History*, 1944, p.582.
44. David Edwards, *Religion and Change*, 1969, p.279.
45. *Op. cit.*, p.51.

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