



Dear Editor

I am writing in support of Penny Thompson whose research has recently been published in a book entitled *Whatever Happened to Religious Education?* and commented on by David Edgington in the Autumn 2004 edition of *ACT Now*.

I agree with Penny that teachers in schools have been wrongly persuaded to give up the faithful teaching of Christianity in favour of 'multi-faith' RE. She shows that the law is fully in favour of the committed presentation of the Christian traditions and we should now be thinking how we may take advantage of this situation.

At present, in the majority of schools, both primary and secondary, the spiritual aspect of education is largely ignored. Society changes, but the spiritual needs of children are as great as ever. Teaching about religions is not the answer, as if a religious veneer could suffice. I have observed that, in many schools, the pupils are taught about religions in RE and 'ethical' teaching is delivered through citizenship. Teachers hope that, from these lessons, some kind of innate goodness will help the child to reason wisely and choose the better course. Yet we know that it is not possible for anyone to select a lifestyle that is worthy in God's

sight. We do children an inestimable disservice if we lead them to think that heaven is inevitable or that there is no authority above us.

Amidst the plethora of fantastic opportunities furnished by new technology, children are starved of even the crumbs of spiritual education. The result is that they are growing up without any kind of moral guidance or spiritual security, without parameters or sound reasons for choosing the good life.

Endeavouring to set a Christian example is important but we must tell our pupils what the Bible is about and give reasons for believing it. We must show them who God is and what He is like and what He requires of us. Our pupils have to know, at their level, that Christian ethical teaching and action spring from, and are inspired by, faith in God. We also need to spell out that God, our Creator, has set boundaries and is offended by some of the things we do, but His love and forgiveness are there for us. These things are the heart of Christianity and they reveal the uniqueness of God that is the target of some of those who advocate the multi-faith approach.

Vera Conway

Dear Editor

I was disappointed with the review by David Edgington of Penny Thompson's book *Whatever Happened to Religious Education?* published in the Autumn 2004 edition of *ACT Now*.

I was disappointed because I think Penny Thompson's disquiet about what has happened in Religious Education over the past 40 years does not centre on whether or not other religions apart from Christianity should be taught. Rather it centres on the teaching of Christianity itself and here I am in agreement with Penny that this needs to be revisited as a matter of urgency.

Some, like David Edgington, believe that it is not possible to do this in our multi-faith society. I disagree. Indeed, I believe that there is still considerable respect for Christian teaching and morality within our society. I think the majority of parents would expect these teachings and morals to be taught in a way that gives credence and respect to them. Surely, this is the kernel of the question raised in *Whatever Happened to Religious Education?*

The question has to be asked: has the introduction of the teaching of other religions affected the way Christianity is now being taught itself? And, if so, what are we going to do about it?

It seems to me that the introduction of the teaching of other religions meant that a rationale was required. But has this rationale also been applied to the teaching of Christianity? I think it has, and I think it has considerably diminished the credence and respect with which Christian teachings and morals are now viewed within Religious Education programmes.

So, what are we going to do about this situation? Firstly, I should stress that I don't want to turn back the clock. Nor do I want to look back with a sense of regret. I simply want to be able to change the way RE is taught in the future so that Christianity is given the credence and respect it deserves.

I believe that such a change would actually benefit the teaching of other religions because they too would benefit from the credence and respect given to Christianity. Why? Because if Christianity is not given credence and respect there will be no basis for other religions to be given credence and respect either.

Bill Horton