

*Positive*

**IMPROVEMENT**

*creating a conversation  
between theology and education*

*Rachel Nicholls*

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THE CHURCH SCHOOLS OF CAMBRIDGE TRUST



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*Cover illustration: Havell, Robert (junior) watercolour of the Anniversary Meeting of the Charity  
Children in the Cathedral of St. Paul, 1826.*

*All quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.*

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# *Foreward*

The impetus for this project is the desire to create an open space for an enriching future conversation between theology and educational thought and policy. At the present time, the agenda for effectiveness and improvement in UK schools is widespread, urgent and persuasive, a cornerstone of educational policy. A significant number of schools have a close connection to churches, particularly the Church of England.<sup>1</sup> The origin of this link is rooted in the British history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the same time, the relationship between all the layers of educational organisation (eg. Local Authorities, Diocesan Boards of Education, Roman Catholic Trustees, the Department for Education, the Secretary of State and even the school Governors) has radically changed. The conditions which shaped the relationship between the Church of England and its schools even in the mid-twentieth century, for instance, no longer exist - either as cultural norms or patterns of governance.

In the light of the rapid changes, it seemed prudent for a body such as the Church Schools of Cambridge Trust to draw breath and give some time to the kind of theological reflection that can open up a conversation. This will need more than one voice. It will also require a deep commitment to listen. For these reasons, this project can only be a starting point which signposts questions rather than delivering definitive answers. A document of this length can neither be a presentation of a well rounded theology of education, nor a detailed blueprint for educational action. But my hope is that, by attending to the voices and concerns of both theology and school improvement, an articulate area of enquiry can be opened up which will give others the opportunity to discuss the values and priorities of education.

Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley make a persuasive argument for an educational vision that connects the future to the past.<sup>2</sup> Theology is a

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<sup>1</sup> On the latest published government figures there were 4598 schools directly linked to the Church of England, and a further 45 that involve a collaboration with another denomination, eg. Roman Catholic or Methodist. These figures do not include the rising numbers of academies and free schools, which raises the number of Church Schools with a CofE link to nearer 4700. Figures from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maintained-faith-schools>

<sup>2</sup> Hargreaves & Shirley 2009:45.

particularly rich resource for such connections, since theology (at its best) makes this reflexive journey through time continually. In order to have some perspective on the past (and to introduce the stimulation of difference) this project includes an examination of the start of free primary education for the poor in England in the eighteenth century, through the provision of Charity Schools. I focus particularly on developments in Cambridge, because these were early and innovative, and also because this is the origin of the Church Schools of Cambridge Trust. The early eighteenth century was also a particularly exciting period when theological concerns were at the cutting edge of educational vision and practice. It is my hope that they may be so again, in a form that brings benefit to twenty-first century schools.

When I was in my twenties, I served for a period at a church in Sheffield. I have always remembered the comment of one of the members there. He said that he felt that they needed a full time minister ‘- not to do the services, nor to run the church - we can organise those things,’ but in order that someone in their community would have time to think. I am very grateful to the Church Schools of Cambridge Trust for the opportunity to pursue this research of ideas, and hope that it will complement the valuable practical research in schools already being undertaken on behalf of the Trust.

July 2015.

# Chapter One Introduction

When bringing together two disparate areas of thought, it is tempting to forge some kind of pleasing pattern by emphasizing either their essential harmony or their irreconcilable differences. This is often done by deconstructing both topics down to their bare bones. Although some deconstruction can aid critical engagement, such clearcut outlines are often artificial. It is true that Biblical Theology and School Improvement are not obvious conversation partners (they continue to develop in different contexts, under different pressures and for different purposes). Nevertheless, I am convinced that a conversation between these two areas is timely, because School Improvement is a significant discourse in education and Christians involved in education need to reflect theologically on these themes, or risk an unhealthy division between their professional practice and their faith. More than this, however, I remain hopeful that such a conversation can prove fruitful for education, too, reaching a point where those working in both areas can pool their resources for the continuing benefit of pupils.

Augustine writes of ‘the movement of the mind’<sup>3</sup> and it is important to remember that areas of thought are also ‘in motion’ and cannot be adequately represented by a static examination of their vocabulary and themes. Those who develop an area of thought are pushing (consciously or unconsciously) towards a particular goal or goals. It is necessary, then, not simply to look at individual words like ‘zeal’ or ‘excellence’ in both contexts, but to look at what might be termed ‘conceptual syntax’<sup>4</sup> - the way that ideas are explained and expressed; the direction in which discourse is travelling and the habits and practices it generates. I want to suggest two analytical tools to help with this process: ‘systems of thought’ and ‘time perspectives’.

Interestingly, both School Improvement and Biblical Theology can have a tendency to operate within sealed systems of thought. Rowan Williams offers this critique of certain styles of theology but he could just as easily be referring to some styles of educational theory:

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<sup>3</sup> See Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, Book 3.1.2.10. Edited and translated by King 2010.

<sup>4</sup> See Hasan, 1999:14.

“[They] risk becoming a merely theoretical or ideological reconciliation of human conflict, locating, once again, a centre of achieved, privileged, non-ambiguous language and practice in the midst of a fragmented reality - an area of heteronomy, occupied by those whose task is defined as applying or bestowing what they possess, transmitting the fruits of this ‘achieved’ status to those who do not possess it.”<sup>5</sup>

And here is Gerald Grace commenting on the effect of some of the present-day limits placed on educational research:

“This form of analytical reductionism arises wherever research is closely tied to policy prescription, wherever a ‘bidding culture’ for government controlled research funds is dominant and wherever relatively anonymous sources of research money for ‘fundamental’ research are limited.”<sup>6</sup>

As both these quotations suggest, power and money often side with certainty. And certainty within a system of thought can be shiny and impervious, elegant in its purity and simplicity, but tyrannical in its relationships with others.

Hasan, in his work on rival linguistic theories, coins two terms for different styles of theory: ‘endotropic’ and ‘exotropic’.<sup>7</sup> He defines an *endotropic* theory as one that studies isolated phenomena, is self-generating and self-renewing, and sees the avoidance of other sources of knowledge as a virtue. An *exotropic* theory, on the other hand, is willing to interact with others, and takes the risk of contamination, confusion and ambiguity in order to gain new insights and address new questions. Both *endotropic* and *exotropic* approaches are evident in biblical theology and in school improvement. Since the enclosed nature of *entrotropic* theories makes genuine dialogue difficult, the intention here is to work with the *exotropic* texts within each area.

Another hidden aspect of the way theories work is the perspective on time embedded within the thinking. It can be argued that one of the distinctive characteristics of being human is to have an awareness of time: we can remember the past, look forward to the future and be aware of time passing in the present. This past-present-future triad can be perceived in

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<sup>5</sup> Williams, 1986:198.

<sup>6</sup> Grace, 1998:119.

<sup>7</sup> See Hasan, 1999:13.

different ways, however. Some people live very much in the present moment, while others nearly always take decisions based on what they feel that the future outcome will be. Present-orientated people tend to take less account of the consequences of their actions, future-orientated people tend to be more willing to postpone gratification; these are commonplace observable characteristics, partly based on chronological age and life experiences.

Philip Zimbardo has developed a theory that how an individual views time (their 'time perspective' or TP) is much more fundamental to their psychology than has previously been recognised. He and his fellow researcher John Boyd have isolated five common Time Perspectives: Past-Negative, Past-Positive, Present-Hedonistic, Present-Fatalistic and Future. They have undertaken extensive research to test the validity of these categories and have concluded that a person's TP has a major effect on many of their attitudes and decisions:

"TP was related to such diverse behaviors and dispositions as wearing a watch, choice of food based on taste or nutrition, how long individuals want to live, sexual experiences, parental marital state, desire to spend more or less time with friends, risk taking, goal focus, grades, stress, perceived time pressures, shyness and spirituality."<sup>8</sup>

They go on to discuss the ways in which TP highlights the need for victims of trauma to be carefully treated, for instance, and also that TP should be a significant factor in the way that health warnings are communicated to whole populations (not everyone will find the same kind of message persuasive).

What does this contribute to a discussion of Biblical Theology or School Improvement? I would argue that systems of thought, just like individuals, have their own dominant TP. This is especially true of systems or models which are trying to elicit change: we need to identify the motive being commended within the discourse - is it a negative view of the past, or perhaps a strongly felt need to control the present, or an open expectation about the future?

Biblical Theology has a lot to say about time, encompassing as it does a meta-narrative from the creation of all things to the conclusion of all things. A passage such as 1 Corinthians 15 illustrates this point. The

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<sup>8</sup> Zimbardo, 1999:1282.

Apostle Paul is discussing the idea of the resurrection of the dead and mentions: the immediate past (verses 3-8), the distant past (verses 21-22), the distant, ultimate, future (verses 24-26), and the present (verses 29-32). He then repeats a succinct summary of a Present-Fatalistic (and possibly Present-Hedonistic) TP on life: if what he is saying about resurrection is not true, then:

“ ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’ ”<sup>9</sup>

It is disappointing that Zimbardo and Boyd did not identify religious belief as having a particularly positive effect on a person’s TP. They have considered adding a sixth category to their scheme: ‘Future-Transcendental’ TP - to allow for those who believe in some form of existence after the death of the body. Participants in the research mainly expressed this as the view that they would be rewarded or punished in the next life for their present behaviour. On personality traits and decision-making, this TP seems to relate most closely to Past-Positive and Past-Negative and Present-Fatalistic TP’s. It therefore does not seem to be very motivating for present action (a far cry from St Paul’s assertion that his faith motivates him to ‘die’ every day and makes sense of the fact that he fought with wild animals at Ephesus - 1 Corinthians 15:31-32).

It will be fruitful to keep the category of time perspective in mind as we look at both Biblical Theology and School Improvement. This will supplement the examination of *exotropic* texts in both areas, so that there will be an openness to conversation and mutual enrichment.

The third aspect of this study is an examination of the development of charity schools in eighteenth century England. In its openness to a range of sources of information, and in its description of the thoughts and plans of another time, this historical view is a helpful third point of reference. The main current conversation partners in this project are Biblical Theology and School Improvement, but the introduction of a third ‘voice’ from a different time can bring new understanding through the challenge of different ideas and the insights gleaned from another situation. We begin with a discussion of this exciting period, when theology was at the heart of the motivation for setting up primary schools for the poor where there had been none at all.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:32.

## *Chapter Two 'Charity Schools'*

The 1700's in England, like almost any other period in history, could be described both as 'the best of times' yet also 'the worst of times'. It was a time of major unrest between England and Scotland, with a succession of Jacobite claims to royal power (1715-16 saw the uprising to place the son of James II on the throne of Scotland, 1745 the movement to make 'bonnie Prince Charlie' (James II's grandson) into Charles III and so restore the Stuart dynasty, this ended with the savage battle of Culloden in 1746). It was also the boom time of the slave trade on a multinational scale, with slave ships from London, Bristol and Liverpool making over seventy trips a year. In 1720, the 'South Sea Bubble' burst, causing a major financial crash in the city of London. Tensions with Scotland, questions over international trade and a major financial crash - we can see faint correlations with our own times! But it is important to note some of the significant differences: most of the approximately only five million people of England were employed in agriculture and small scale craft and supply businesses. There was no large scale industry, since the technology did not yet exist to support it, and most large consignments of freight travelled by water, since there was no rail system yet.

In fact, the importance of waterways - both inland and coastal - had a direct effect on the development of Cambridge. The waterway from Cambridge to the Wash put it on one of the main routes for trade for the whole Eastern Midlands. It assisted with the movement of agricultural products (particularly corn) from a wide area inland, out to Lynn and round the coast to be sold in London. Fish, coal and salt were brought inland by the same route. After the draining of the Fens in the seventeenth century, produce from the surrounding area was even more plentiful, as described in 'The Foreigners' Companion' 1748:

"The purest wine they receive by the Way of Lynn: Flesh, Fish, Wild-Fowl, Poultry, Butter, Cheese, and all Manner of Provisions, from the adjacent Country: Living is cheap: Coals from seven-pence to nine-pence a Bushel; Turf, or rather Peat, four shillings a thousand; Sedge, with which the Bakers heat their Ovens, four shillings per hundred sheaves: These, together with Osiers, Reeds, and Rushes used in several Trades, are daily imported by the River Cam. Great quantities of Oil, made of Flax-seed, Cole-seed, Hemp and other Seeds, ground or press'd by the numerous Mills in the Isle of Ely, are brought up by

this River also: and the Cakes, after the Oil is press'd out, afford the Farmer an excellent Manure to improve his Grounds. By the River they also receive 1500 or 2000 Firkins of Butter every week, which is sent by waggon to London. Besides which, great quantities are made in the neighbouring villages, for the use of the University and Town and brought in new every Morning almost.”<sup>10</sup>

The fact that Cambridge was a hub for trade had a significant effect on the number of people living in central Cambridge and on the populations of parishes such as St Bene't's, St Botolph's, St Giles' and St Clement's. Many poor people lived in cramped and insanitary conditions in these parishes in order to take up jobs connected to the market and to the supply of goods and services. The vicars of these parishes mostly also held University posts,<sup>11</sup> which placed them at the intersection of academic excellence and extreme urban poverty. One can imagine that some mornings they were teaching students at the pinnacle of academic achievement, privilege and excellence, and perhaps later the same day they were presiding at baptisms, weddings and funerals for those mostly unable to read or to comprehend the words of the liturgy and unlikely to enter the doors of the churches at other times or to connect with the worship that happened within. Challenged to pursue Christian ministry in this place of contrast, they developed a new vision for their mission, focussing their energies on providing free education for the children of the poor. At a time when the law that every child should have some schooling was still some 162 years away from implementation, William Whiston was preaching a vision of universal education paid for through taxation:

“It being, I think, very demonstrable that one Twentieth part of what we now annually Tax ourselves for the Publick Occasions of War and Defence, if once settled, and rightly and prudently managed, would provide education for all the poorest children of this Nation, and do somewhat considerable towards the clothing of a great part of them.”<sup>12</sup>

Whiston did not only focus on such 'blue sky' thinking, however. In 1703, he came up with a plan to establish 'charity schools' in Cambridge, so that poor children<sup>13</sup> aged

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<sup>10</sup> 'The city of Cambridge: Economic history', in *A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely: Volume 3, the City and University of Cambridge*, ed. J P C Roach (London, 1959), p86-101 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/cambs/vol3/pp86-101> [accessed 21 July 2015].

<sup>11</sup> eg. Henry Wood, a fellow of Queen's College and Rector of St Botolph's during this period. William Whiston, was Lucasian Professor of Mathematics and, although he was not an incumbent of one of these parishes, he regularly preached and conducted services in city centre churches, eg. at St Clement's.

<sup>12</sup> Whiston 1708:14.

<sup>13</sup> defined as those with parents who were exempted from the Parish rate (Roderick 1953:5)

between six and fourteen could receive religious instruction, learn to read and write, and the boys learn to cast accounts while the girls were learning to sew. He was helped by Thomas Harrison and others to draw up a 'design' for the schools and to begin a process of raising funds by public subscription. Progress was very rapid: within six months they had recruited teachers, identified premises and begun education for some 260 children. The original version of the Church Schools of Cambridge Trust began its work from this date, overseeing the funding, organisation and rudimentary inspection of its schools. As time went on, there were adaptations to the schools to allow for changes in population; for instance, Barnwell school was opened in 1836, when that area of Cambridge had grown from a population of 251 (1801) to 6 651 (1831). At times, there were dips in funding (in 1754 the Old Schools had problems even funding the teachers' pay) but renewed efforts to gather subscriptions, particularly through 'charity sermons' restored the working capital.

This vision and project was by no means unique to Cambridge in this period, but it began particularly early in this location and was particularly successful.<sup>14</sup> In 1718, a review of charity schools<sup>15</sup> identified a total of 1358 schools in England and Scotland. There was a concentration in Greater London (127 schools), perhaps partly encouraged by the vision of the SPCK. The next largest cluster was Cambridge with 12 schools (this compares with 3 schools in Lincoln, 4 in Oxford and 5 in Edinburgh). Most other participating locations had one or perhaps two schools.<sup>16</sup> The compiler, Joseph Downing, reports that 'the Account generally given' by the schools themselves was that, where there was a charity school, there were sufficient places for the poor children of that area. This partly reflects the dispersed rural population of the period, but was perhaps an overly optimistic summary.<sup>17</sup> Cambridge was one of the few centres of population of its size to be consistently offering such complete provision from the early 1700's right through to the passing of the 1870 Education Act, when some initial education for children became universal by law.

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<sup>14</sup> After the 1870 Education Act, local Boards were set up to ensure the provision of education for all children. Cambridge did not require a Board until 1902, because all the places and accommodation needed were being supplied by public subscription (Roderick, 1953:11).

<sup>15</sup> Downing, 1718.

<sup>16</sup> See Downing, 1718:19-28.

<sup>17</sup> cf. Sarah Trimmer's account at the end of the century: she estimates that Charity schools educate 40 000 and that something like another 500 000 attend Sunday Schools, " - and even this is greatly short of the total number of poor children in the nation." Trimmer 1792:13.

## *The ‘charity school’ vision*

There are aspects of the eighteenth century vision for charity schools which, in the present day, appear condescending and unappealing. The ‘do-gooding’ tone of some of the documents and sermons and the frequent references to the ‘ignorance and vice of the poorer sort’<sup>18</sup> can be off-putting, yet we must not allow these surface characteristics to blind us to the brilliance of the vision of education and mission that was being developed. Preachers like William Whiston were not content with the status quo, either for the Church of England or for society in general. Their aims were both for the individual benefit of children and for society as a whole. Together they achieved something which had never been done before.

They planned their schools with the aim of opening up realistic and viable access to Christianity for poor children, since the structures of organised religion at that time were such that, when poor people came to church they were both ‘uncatechized’ (had not been taught the faith) and ‘uninstructed’ (did not have basic education). Whiston perceived that the result of this was that they could not begin to understand or engage with the faith because they could not understand the ‘meaning of a great number of those ordinary and common words, which are made use of by us in all our discourses of divers matters.’<sup>19</sup> As Thomas Bennet commented:

“For whatever some may imagin, [sic] everlasting Preaching in public will never make People good, unless their private Application crown our public Endeavors [sic].”

These preachers and ministers were willing to face the uncomfortable fact that, at a time when the Christian faith was assumed to be the default moral and philosophical framework for public and private life, whole swathes of the population had been effectively excluded from it. They were prepared to face this fact, and do something totally new to address it and to create a bridge. The aim was not to surreptitiously evangelise children through the Trojan Horse of education (as some fear is the aim of

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<sup>18</sup> eg. Bennet, 1710:11.

<sup>19</sup> quoted in Roderick, 1953:3.

Church and Faith Schools today<sup>20</sup>), but to restore to them what was perceived by all as their Christian birthright and heritage.<sup>21</sup> Objections to the project of charity schools in this period were not on the basis that it was too Christian, but rather that it was too educational, and would be too successful at educating the poor ‘above their station’ and would ferment social unrest.<sup>22</sup>

Those who organised charity schools and those who supported them through annual subscriptions, then, did so in order to remedy the mission and ministry of the Church of England: to create proper access to the faith for the poor. The aim was, in Whiston’s words:

“- to take more care of the education of the growing generation, then was taken of that already grown.”<sup>23</sup>

To face outwards in mission in this way and to ‘take more care’ was always going to lead to a deeper engagement with people’s lives, however. It was impossible to notice that the poor were ‘uncatechized’, without noticing that they could not read and write, and it was impossible to notice this without becoming aware that they could not do arithmetic either and so had no access to a whole range of comparatively menial jobs. As soon as Church men and women faced the fact that many of the poor were socially as well as religiously excluded, the solutions and opportunities offered by charity schools were always going to be broader than simple access to the Catechism would suggest.

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<sup>20</sup> I think it is a peculiarly English fear that any form of religious teaching runs an immediate risk of becoming indoctrination. German educators, who can still remember what political indoctrination looked and sounded like, take a different view: “Faith in God as ‘the Lord’ with Jesus Christ as his ‘son’ (in the language of the Bible) makes possible a fundamental critique of all other ‘lords’ who attempt to suppress human beings. The danger of becoming systematically indoctrinated in our societies by open or hidden persuasions is great. A Christian education that locates the issue of God at its centre confronts young people with the diversity of truth-claims and invites them to learn to distinguish between what destroys or what promotes freedom and reconciliation.” Nipkow 2006:112.

<sup>21</sup> Whiston suggests that this vision was shared even by Dissenters, who might have been expected to object to the Church of England character of this religious education. See Whiston 1708:12.

<sup>22</sup> It is noticeable that most ‘charity sermons’ preached to appeal for funds for schools contain a reassuring statement to the effect that this education will not give the poor ideas above their station in life, also books and pamphlets on establishing charity schools give advice such as, “- that their minds be not tinctured with any new and singular Notions, either in Religion or Government; and that they be restrained diligently from unnecessary Speculations of all kinds.” Downing 1718:9. The concern persists even a century later - Montagu Burgoyne berates the Governors and Directors of public charity schools, uttering this stern warning about the curriculum (behind which one can perhaps detect the shadow of the French Revolution): “If a good direction be not given to the Knowledge afforded by the few to the many; if the foundation of it be not Religion and Industry - if it be not the Wisdom of the Bible, which we convey to our inferiors; then our Altars, our Throne, and the just property of individuals will soon be trampled upon.” Burgoyne, 1829.

<sup>23</sup> Whiston, quoted in Roderick, 1953:3.

The founding document ('the design') for the schools of Cambridge contains two main aims: firstly, to train poor children in the Christian religion, and secondly, to teach them '- to read, write and the boys to cast accounts, and the girls to sew, that they may be rendered more useful in their several stations in the world.'<sup>24</sup> These twin aims were typical,<sup>25</sup> though the wording of the first aim is different in the Cambridge document from many others of the period. There seemed to be a shared assumption in this period that 'the Christian religion' and the 'principles of the established Church' were essentially one and the same, and so there was no need to distinguish between the two in these school 'designs' or to allow for the possibility of conflict between them. In other words, to nurture a child in 'the principles of the established church'<sup>26</sup> was to provide all that child needed to know of the Christian faith, and to give them enough religion to be a responsible adult. I would imagine that this was also the understanding in Cambridge,<sup>27</sup> but it is interesting that the Governors chose a much more open and dynamic form of words:

"- to train poor children *in the knowledge of God*, and in the Christian Religion." [italics mine]<sup>28</sup>

Cambridge schools were also distinguished by their policy on 'clothing' the poor. Many charity schools provided free clothing as a perk, and as a means of identifying pupils in the street (an early form of school uniform). The Cambridge schools Governors clothed pupils who would not otherwise have enough decent clothing to come to school in - a grant to meet a social need, not to create a school identity. In 1705, grants totalling £40 were made to clothe fifty children.<sup>29</sup>

There was a zeal behind the establishment of these schools. It suddenly seemed possible for individuals acting together to bring about a change. It was a zeal to bring the poor back within the orbit of the church, to remedy this neglected area of mission, but it was also a concern for the children's own welfare and happiness, that they might have 'a comfortable and creditable way of living ever afterward.'<sup>30</sup> Charity

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<sup>24</sup> quoted in Roderick, 1953:5.

<sup>25</sup> they are very similar to the pro forma for setting up a charity school supplied by Downing. See Downing 1718:36-37.

<sup>26</sup> This phrase was picked up in the founding objective of the National Society in 1811.

<sup>27</sup> see Whiston, 1708:12 "Our charity-schools are designed for the education of all poor Children in the Christian Religion, as it is profess'd and taught in this Church of England."

<sup>28</sup> quoted in Roderick, 1953:5.

<sup>29</sup> see Roderick, 1953:5-6.

<sup>30</sup> Whiston, 1708:7.

schools continued to work on their teaching methods and to be self-critical and flexible in their approach to education.<sup>31</sup> Although some took a very mechanical approach to reciting the catechism and learning basic skills, many others developed resources - stories, explanations of first principles and talks - to enable the children to learn with understanding.

Were some charity schools founded with less generous motives - with a concern for control rather than empowerment? Undoubtedly. Some schools in the area surrounding Spofforth in North Yorkshire were founded with the express intention of preventing poor children from being won over to the Roman Catholic Church (with all the attendant danger of Jacobite sympathies).<sup>32</sup> Some educators were probably more concerned to lower crime and increase obedience and diligence (economic productivity) than to improve the life experiences of the poor.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, some aspects of the vision for education in this period continue to shine. Sarah Trimmer argues that, far from raising the poor individually 'above their station', if the poor can be raised collectively, every other class will rise too, benefitting the whole of society.<sup>34</sup> She seems to be arguing that nobody needs to be in such a debased position as some find themselves in at this period for the whole of society to prosper (or even for social differentiation to be maintained). For an eighteenth century person (when social station could be seen as ordained by God and keeping to one's station was certainly part of a godly and stable society), she also comes very close to proposing a meritocracy:

“And if there be others whose bright genius breaks through the thick clouds of ignorance and poverty, reason and humanity plead in their behalf, that they should be indulged with such tuition as may enable them to advance themselves, by the exertion of their abilities, to a higher station, and fill it with

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<sup>31</sup> See particularly the comments of Sarah Trimmer on the practice of using the Bible as a text for 'barking at print': "On the contrary, is it not a kind of profanation of the Word of God, to make the sacred volume a mere teaching book, over which learners are to stammer and blunder to no good purpose?" Trimmer 1792:41. She wrote more than 28 books resourcing Charity and Sunday School teaching, beginning with first principles and stories for children so that they should not have a learning by rote experience of the catechism.

<sup>32</sup> See Unwin, 1984:29, "- it was hoped that children armed with the Bible, the Anglican Catechism and 'The Whole Duty of Man' would come to know their place in society and would form 'frontier garrisons against Popery.'"

<sup>33</sup> eg. Burgoyne even argues that it is dangerous to over-educate the poor, as it leads to crime and unemployment. He clearly commends a particular type of education as being suitable (obedience, fear of God and keeping to your station) which suggests social control rather than personal development. See Burgoyne, 1829.

<sup>34</sup> Trimmer 1792:4.

propriety. It certainly would be very unjustified to deny such children a chance of bettering their condition.”<sup>35</sup>

While teaching was perhaps generally viewed as a straight forward process of passing on skills and imparting information, there was a focus on recruiting the right people. The standard handbook for teachers in this period stresses the character of the teacher, mentioning it before his skill:

“That he be of meek Temper and humble behaviour. That he have a good Government of himself and his passions, and keep good Orders. That he frequent the Holy Communion. That he have a Genius for Teaching, write a good Hand, and understand Arithmetick [sic].”<sup>36</sup>

When the National Society was founded in 1811, its original aim was “the education of the poor in the principles of the established church,” reflecting the founding designs of many of the individual charity schools. As a continuing presence and influence in education, the society has had to re-interpret and re-express its commitment to education down the years. As a strap line, this original statement rings with patronising, patriarchal and even imperial overtones when it is read outside of its eighteenth century context. How could Christian educationalists keep alive the shining vision of generous provision while losing the apparent smug sense of right? The publication of the Durham Report in 1970 (*The Fourth R*) marked something of a turning point for the way this original aim was interpreted and expressed:

“The church should *for the present* see its continued involvement in the Dual System [Church Schools and County Schools] principally as a way of expressing its concern for the general education of all children and young people rather than as a means for giving ‘denominational instruction’.”<sup>37</sup> [italics mine]

It would be a mistake to say that this was the National Society committing to the first word of its aim, ‘education’ and more or less forgetting the rest,<sup>38</sup> because *The*

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<sup>35</sup> Trimmer, 1792:10.

<sup>36</sup> quoted in Downing, 1718:7, from Talbot, 1707. Talbot’s text remained the standard manual on teaching in a charity school for more than a 100 years - a new edition was produced by the National Society in its inaugural year, 1811. See Unwin, 1984:32.

<sup>37</sup> *The Fourth R*, 1970:281, recommendation 31. This assertion was repeated in the National Society’s Green Paper, *A Future in Partnership*, 1984.

<sup>38</sup> Pace Leslie Francis in Francis 1993:53-54.

*Fourth R* is a careful and subtle theological document with a vision for religious education in an increasingly secular age. There was some feeling, however, that the best way for the Church of England to serve a dual system and help it to function as one, was not to impose an imperious claim on hearts and minds (one that would have been considered virtuous in the eighteenth century) but to join in the common task of education. This ethos of service rather than proselytism has rightly continued to the present day.

But we no longer live with a dual system aspiring to work as one. We now have a mixed economy of schools - church, faith, county, academy and free - with a much higher government tolerance of distinctiveness, provided results and outcomes conform to the required levels. This gives Church Schools of today a different set of questions and opportunities to work with, including the opportunity to become more overtly linked to faith. What will this faith look like? Certainly not the catechism of the eighteenth century churches. Will it involve a renewed focus on those already within church communities as our 'target' market? Whom will this serve? Certainly not 'the poor', alienated from the church, who were the reason that charity schools were founded.

I think that it is time to reach back into those founding designs of the eighteenth century, and come up with a renewed vision of what it means to give 'the poor' access to education, and just what 'the principles of the established church' might be in the twenty-first century.

As Thomas Bennet put it, when preaching for donations:

“- yet really the Education you afford them, is so unspeakable an Advantage, that if every one of you cou'd bestow upon every one of these Children Estates equal to your own, the kindness would not be comparable to the Charity of their Education.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Bennet, 1710:13.

## *Chapter Three School Improvement*

The 1988 Education Reform Act specified the introduction of the National Curriculum, delineated four key stages for primary and secondary education, and focussed many more powers in the hands of the Secretary of State for Education, lessening the control of the Local Education Authorities.<sup>40</sup> It was a top-down reform, designed to bring cohesion to schools through goals and performance targets and also, to some extent, to release market forces through parental choice and inter-school competition. This appeal to market forces was increased with the introduction of League Tables in 1992 in order to reinforce the parents' 'right to know' about school performance as part of the Citizen's Charter,<sup>41</sup> and through the creation of OFSTED in that same year. Part of the implicit thinking here is that choice is good for standards, because it gives rise to competition. Parents should be given choice, partly because this is an unquestioned 'good' in a free society, but also because the competitive wisdom of the free market would ensure that good schools thrived while unsatisfactory schools would go 'out of business' or be put under 'new management'.<sup>42</sup>

It is also interesting to note that this shift of ideas leads to the parents becoming 'customers'. As Morley and Rassool comment, the designation 'customer' may have given some parents a voice who were previously unheard,<sup>43</sup> but it also had another marked effect: the parents are the customers, not the children. By the time the 1997 White Paper of the new Labour government was issued, one can note that the educational discourse barely mentions children themselves, except as a means to the

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<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, the large proportion of the legislation given over to the arrangements for a school to become Grant Maintained and the dismantling of the ILEA. The full text of the Act is viewable at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/40/contents>

<sup>41</sup> The briefing document for the full Citizen's Charter is available at: [researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/RP95-66/RP95-66.pdf](http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/RP95-66/RP95-66.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> This approach assumes that the provision of school places can be made to function as a marketplace, which seems unlikely, given the legal requirement to educate every child (apart from those whose parents choose to home-educate them). There can be no quick transformations here similar to those seen in the retail market when unsuccessful businesses simply fold - children needing school places are, in this sense, a captive market.

<sup>43</sup> See Morley and Rassool, 1999:68.

future economic health of the nation.<sup>44</sup> There is no mention, for instance, of the need to consider their welfare under a regime of intense testing. It is assumed that excellence in education corresponds with internationally competitive standards of literacy and numeracy, and that when this outcome is demonstrated through test results, this will serve both child and nation without any conceivable conflict of interest.

Shirley and Hargreaves suggest that this early phase of educational reform yielded benefits because it brought a sense of urgency and it began to address the huge variations in focus and quality between schools.<sup>45</sup> It also began a systematic and comprehensive approach to data-gathering and to grading, building on the removal of the 'quota' system from the highest grades at GCSE and GCE Advanced Level.<sup>46</sup> There was a commitment to measurable quality in education and a real desire to pursue improvement.

The will was there, but was this the way? This top-down approach began to show some limits and drawbacks. For instance, gains in achievement often plateaued in a few years, which suggested that other tools and approaches were also needed to create sustainable improvement.<sup>47</sup> The pressure for teachers in responding to successive directives from central government was also considerable. Some of this pressure no doubt legitimately arose from the need for reform, but other parts of it felt arbitrary, ill thought out and remote from schools' actual situations. The rise in the stress experienced by teachers, the loss of job satisfaction and the increasing problems in teacher retention can be dated from this period.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>White Paper: Excellence in Schools 1997. Eg. p.3, the Foreword by the Secretary of State, "We are talking about investing in human capital in the age of knowledge. To compete in the global economy, to live in a civilised society and to develop the talents of each and every one of us, we will have to unlock the potential of every young person." Also, p.15: "Investment in learning in the 21st century is the equivalent of investment in the machinery and technical innovation that was essential to the first great industrial revolution. Then it was physical capital; now it is human capital."

<sup>45</sup> See Hargreaves & Shirley 2009:9.

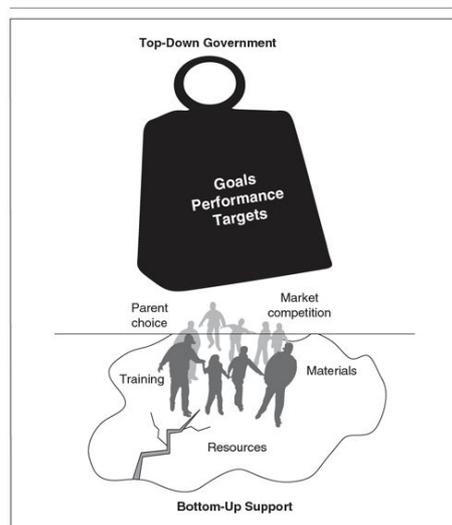
<sup>46</sup> See *Education: historical statistics*, 2012:11, "Before the mid-1980's there were more or less fixed percentages of students who were awarded each grade and these proportions changed little year by year. This 'norm-referencing' method meant that most improvements in national performance had to come from increases in entry rates. This method was replaced with 'criteria referencing' which attempts to set each grade boundary at a constant standard over time and hence if the performance of candidates improves then a higher proportion can gain top grades."

<sup>47</sup> See Hargreaves & Shirley 2009:11.

<sup>48</sup> This problem continues: see a recent ATL survey where 73% of trainee, student and newly qualified teachers have considered leaving the profession. *Report: the magazine from ATL*, March 2015:5.

Hargreaves and Shirley characterize the effect of this phase of reform with this diagram.<sup>49</sup>

**Figure 1.2** The Second Way



The heavy weight of goals and performance targets was not, they suggest, matched by the provision of training, materials and resources to meet the challenge.

According to Hargreaves and Shirley's model, we are now experiencing the 'third way' of educational reform.<sup>50</sup> There is less emphasis on top down prescriptions and more investment in networks, co-operation and creative local solutions. Their reference to this phase as the 'third way' is a clear allusion to the political 'Third Way' championed by Tony Blair and New Labour and President Clinton in the USA. This was an attempt to make the best of both sets of priorities which had surfaced earlier in the twentieth century - state support and the welfare state plus the responsiveness and flexibility of market forces. This was the time of public/private partnerships, the

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<sup>49</sup> Hargreaves' and Shirley's account is divided into 'four ways' of seeking school improvement: the first way describes local types of reform and development, pioneered by individual schools and sometimes individual teachers (in the UK this was happening in the 1960's-70's); the second way describes top down reform with centralised targets and controls (of which the 1988 Act was typical). The third way is a more lateral approach with networks and sharing of best practice, the fourth way (their vision of the future) is a sustainable blend of a lighter government touch, a renewal of professional respect for teachers and a newly empowered community with an active stake in the life of their schools. See Hargreaves & Shirley 2009.

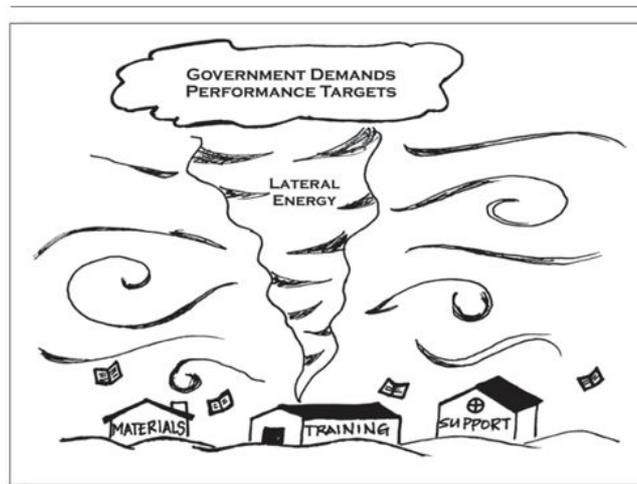
<sup>50</sup> Though recent government pronouncements about 'coasting' schools suggest that the second way of reform is still a factor in UK policy.

eschewal of nationalisation and the attempt to foster new types of enterprise. In schools, it was (and, to some extent, still is) a phase of development marked by:

“A blend of top-down control, bottom-up initiative, and sophisticated lateral learning.”<sup>51</sup>

They represent this third way of reform by this next diagram, which includes a lot of lateral movement and energy.<sup>52</sup>

**Figure 1.3** The Third Way



They suggest that there are still drawbacks in the ‘third way’, however, in that the nature of government demands and performance targets militate against the most innovative and creative developments. They make the interesting point that targets do not simply exert external pressure, they alter the culture of schools and, because we are essentially social beings, alter the mindset of teachers and leaders. A mindset of quick lifts in results can prevail. Hargreaves and Shirley go so far as to call this ‘addictive’. Over time, this can be shown, on results alone, to hamper school improvement.<sup>53</sup> Even David Hopkins, the prime mover in many of Labour’s top-

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<sup>51</sup> Hargreaves & Shirley 2009:19.

<sup>52</sup> For instance, see the methods commended for creating networks of innovation in Hargreaves, 2003.

<sup>53</sup> See Hale 2013:182, “We know that children learn in different ways and patterns and frequently in random spurts. Yet we have persisted in pursuing the one-track ‘escalator model’ despite the pretty static national picture of English and Mathematics results for the primary phase for much of the past decade.”

down educational initiatives, asserts that outstanding schools emerge when national prescription is locally adapted and adopted.<sup>54</sup>

One of the encouraging signs of development within this third way is the growth of groups and networks that focus on learning itself and aim to give pupils a measure of autonomy, self awareness and joy in learning.<sup>55</sup> While not neglecting outcomes, they focus on process - looking to improve learning rather than to improve performance. Research in 12 Leeds Primary Schools showed that -

“- students whose teachers concentrated on improving their learning obtained better results than those who concentrated on improving their performance. The average point score of pupils in the first groups doubled.”<sup>56</sup>

Not only does this approach seem to yield an improvement in results, it is a framework in which the pupil reappears as an individual - first, as someone with a particular learning style to be respected and valued, and then as a lifelong learner, whose creativity, energy and resilience will continue to transform society through innovation and problem-solving.<sup>57</sup> With the re-appearance of the child comes the re-appearance of social context, even if it is only in flashes and glimpses - witness the comments on learning to learn put forward by Toby Greany and Jill Rodd:

“There is plenty of evidence that you cannot learn if you are not emotionally and psychologically ready for it. Put crudely, you cannot learn on an empty stomach or with your self esteem in tatters.”<sup>58</sup>

There is also something akin to a latent revolution inherent in their emphasis on ‘flat structures’ in learning organisations and the stress that they put on character over knowledge.<sup>59</sup> They conclude with this perspective on educational reform since 1988:

“ In the last two decades of the twentieth century, following the introduction of the National Curriculum, success has increasingly been defined by subject

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<sup>54</sup> See Hopkins 2007:20.

<sup>55</sup> Examples would be: Whole Education ([www.wholeeducation.org](http://www.wholeeducation.org)) The Campaign for Learning ([campaign-for-learning.org.uk](http://campaign-for-learning.org.uk)) the Centre for Real World Learning (<http://www.winchester.ac.uk/aboutus/lifelonglearning/CentreforRealWorldLearning/Pages/CentreforRealWorldLearning.aspx>) etc.

<sup>56</sup> See Judd & Dunford 2013:67. See also the approach in Finland, which has produced the best results in the world, Hargreaves & Shirley 2009:51-55.

<sup>57</sup> See Judd & Dunford 2013:66, quoting Karine George, Head of Westfields Junior School, Yateley, Hants. “We all want the accolade of OFSTED but we know it’s a narrow output. You have to have a moral purpose.”

<sup>58</sup> Greany & Rodd, 2003:49.

<sup>59</sup> See Greany & Rodd, 2003:67.

knowledge (measured through exam performance tables). Skills are seen as important and Attitudes to learning less so. This is the KSA world that dominates formal schooling.

If you believe in 'learning to learn' then you are likely to want to reverse these priorities. You will prefer an ASK approach, where attitudes - we might even say Attributes - are most important, then skills, and last of all knowledge."<sup>60</sup>

## *Looking to Improve*

What can we conclude from all this? It would be fair to say that everyone involved in education and in the running of schools welcomes the idea of improvement. No one goes into education with the express intention of making a school perform less well or to limit the life chances of an individual child. At this level of the discussion, being in favour of 'improvement' resembles being in favour of Christmas (or some other big celebration) - something probably no one would disagree with. It is a vision based in future possibilities that refuses to rest content with the status quo. It has a quality of 'can do' about it - problems can be surmounted, processes leading to educational attainment can be improved, and thus inequalities of opportunity can be addressed. It is possible to have better schools and better education for everyone.

It is only as the elements of this vision coalesce into strategies for action that differences and disagreements begin to appear. Contrary to the received wisdom that there can be a straight-forward progression from an articulate vision statement to an applied strategy, I would suggest that the true dimensions and priorities of a vision only become visible in the actions and choices that follow from it. One must enter into a reflexive process in order to understand what was meant and implied by the original vision.<sup>61</sup> Improvement is important - but which improvements do we want? Which improvements will be considered most important? What information is most significant in pinpointing the need for improvement? How do we identify and

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<sup>60</sup> Greany & Rodd, 2003:78.

<sup>61</sup> cf. Matthew 7:16 "You will know them by their fruits."

prioritize practical possibilities for improvement? What are the best ways to make improvement happen? When these questions are considered, the underlying epistemology given to the umbrella term ‘improvement’ begins to surface. I am using ‘epistemology’ here in the sense of the methods, validity and scope that are accepted as truthful and significant within a particular area of knowledge. Epistemology is always a difficult area of thought to touch upon (rather like trying to watch yourself thinking), because it mostly lies within the area of ‘what everybody knows’ - the framework of common sense axioms that appear so self-evident that they are invisible (until one is confronted with an alternative).

In spite of the variations and progressions in the improvement agenda over time,<sup>62</sup> there are some significant elements that shape the epistemology of school improvement as it is currently practiced: the perspective on time, the approach to measurement and data, and its decontextualization.

As I suggested in the Introduction, the effects of having one perspective on time rather than another can be more profound and far-reaching than one might expect. Hargreaves and Shirley characterize the time perspective of much school improvement as ‘addictive presentism’.<sup>63</sup> It is marked by a desire to manage and control the present and to produce (under pressure from the Inspection system) quick, effervescent gains in data to demonstrate the achievement of measurable improvement. Although there is a lot of talk about planning for the future, it is actually based on short term demonstrable gains and, in that sense, is not about planning for a sustainable future or planning a worthwhile inheritance or legacy for future generations. There is no big thinking here. A typical time frame for ‘addictive presentism’ might be of the order of five years, but the period for active future plans may be a lot shorter than this, perhaps twelve months. In this way, the immediate future is used to validate the management decisions of the present. The past is also largely absent from decision-making. Tradition is seen as a dead weight, and any narrative of the past tends to centre on the failures and inadequacies of past actions that have made the current management interventions necessary and urgent. There is certainly no history in the sense of any contextual analysis of the past which might be used to reflect upon or to resource the present. The catch phrase of addictive presentism could be: ‘If we don’t act now ..’ Both the future and the past are sucked into a supporting role where they justify the present.

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<sup>62</sup> Perhaps most clearly from school effectiveness research in the 1990’s, looking for student achievement indicators and value for money, to present school improvement research and networks which celebrate the exceptional and outstanding.

<sup>63</sup> Hargreaves & Shirley 2009:45.

The lack of an analytical and reflective view of the past fits with the range of knowledge that is held to be significant. Quantitative data which can be given a number value, converted into a percentage and/or plotted on a graph is preferred to qualitative data, which involves description and narrative.<sup>64</sup> There is a desire to remove ambiguity from data so that there are clear points of comparison, clear measures to evaluate success and clear evidence to commend certain strategies and actions. This is entirely appropriate (and very useful) within the epistemology of scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge is based on hypothesis, experimentation and results. It is formally ahistorical and, as far as possible non-contextual - scientists want to establish, as clearly as possible, what happens, for instance, when substance A is added to substance B - and they will be looking to rule out any incidental factors (with the use of controls, etc.) to come as close as possible to a result which holds true because it is repeatable. Much of the technological progress in our world has been made through the epistemology of scientific knowledge, including the surprisingly small but amazingly powerful computer on which I am writing this paper. But is this epistemology sufficient for analysing the behaviour and progress of groups of people, even when that group is organised into a system called a school?

Some factors are obviously open to a type of scientific analysis, but perhaps other factors are much more contingent, making it more difficult to discern their significance. Those who want their data cut and dried will be impatient with anecdotes, and resistant to the polyvalent meanings and thick descriptions generated by a study of history, sociology, psychology, anthropology or politics but this does not mean that these alternative sources of knowledge would be irrelevant to the task of understanding how groups of people are functioning, what motivates them and what might help them to make progress and so improve.

Hand in hand with an unexamined scientific epistemology goes a process of decontextualization. If I am to study a school as a system characterized by quantifiable data, then most of the anomalous details of its situation must be excluded. I can factor in how many pupils are entitled to free school meals, but not a local history of racism and inter-racial hostility. I can monitor baseline assessments and value-added achievements, but not the effect that continual anxiety about street crime and the pressures of local gang culture have on educational attainment. I can examine GCSE results, but not pinpoint to what extent the middle class culture of a catchment area (including a future-orientated work ethic and the employment of private tutors) actually shores up results. I can look at the gender balance within

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<sup>64</sup> Hargreaves & Shirley 2009:31 "Technocrats value what they can measure instead of measuring what they value."

examination results but not the effect that violent pornography, sexting and cyber-bullying have on self-perception.<sup>65</sup> The point here is not about excuses for poor performance, or even about reasons produced in mitigation - it is about an epistemology that does not consider these realities (or even these questions) to be relevant and therefore mostly does not address them.<sup>66</sup> It is a system of thought where I can ask questions about improvement, but not about power. I can ask a lot of “What?” questions, a few “How?” questions, but almost no “Why?” questions at all.<sup>67</sup> It is an epistemology that rules out what one might call ‘contextual knowledge’ (knowledge of community, local history, personal experience, etc.) and regards it as an obstacle to be overcome, rather than a source of understanding which might lead to effective action.

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<sup>65</sup> See Morley and Rassool, 1999:65 “Teachers and learners are deracialized, declassed, degendered and disembodied.”

<sup>66</sup> See Lingard et al. 1998:97 “The school effectiveness literature here creates yet another sociological binarism, namely between questions of institutional performativity, effectiveness and efficacy on the one hand, and those ‘soft’ pedagogical issues of identity, subjectivity and pedagogical ‘experience’ on the other.”

<sup>67</sup> See James Park, *Approaches to Accountability in Sustainable School Transformation*, p189 “This argues for a system that monitors the performance of schools against a clear definition of education’s purpose, rather than a system that directs the energy of leaders, teachers and students towards achieving things that are easy to measure.”

## Chapter Four *Faith, Hope, Love*

*“Christians must be alert to what is going on in education and thoughtful about its implications. We do not ask for our important old place in the educational system. We do not demand a special new place. We ask how we may best serve these .. new developments.”*

*The Fourth R, 1970:205.*

Here is the challenge: does Christian theology have anything to offer to school improvement? Are there ideas within it which can enrich the epistemology? Are there theological values and priorities which can resource thinking about school improvement in a new way? The intention here is not to discuss RE or collective worship (the explicitly religious parts of school life) but to dip a bucket down into the deep wellsprings of thought from which all visions and motivation and actions arise, to see whether theology has some fresh insights to offer.

So what is theology? Theology can be seen primarily as a fixed framework of confessional doctrine or as an ongoing process of engagement. Theology as a fixed framework provides certain set understandings against which to measure contemporary culture; from this perspective the important question to ask when faced with a new idea becomes, ‘Is this Christian or not?’ The expectation is that the answer to this will be fairly clear-cut, because the value being examined either fits (or does not fit) within the existing framework. Problems arise when the belief or practice lies right outside the parameters of the framework. Such an *endotropic* structure of theology, elegant in its purity, (see Introduction for an explanation of *endotropic/exotropic* in this context) risks finding that it simply has nothing to say about certain matters because their relationship to the existing confessional framework is not clear. Within a school (or indeed a church) this might lead to a strong concern about what is explicitly said about God, for instance, but a corresponding blindness as to how power is exercised or with what values priorities are set.

For those for whom theology is something that you do,<sup>68</sup> rather than something that you possess, the important questions change. The crucial question is not now ‘Does this fit?’ but ‘How can I engage with this?’ The focus is outward-going, and, while doctrine is still seen as important, it is less like the girders of a scaffolding, and more like the teeth of a comb. It is constantly and closely in touch with the tangles of other areas of thought, moving through them and cooperating with them, not simply looking for opportunities to guide them towards a pre-set structure of religious thought.<sup>69</sup> To put it another way, theology becomes less of an umbrella, more of a walking stick. There will be agreements with other areas of thought but also tensions (perhaps amounting to prophetic denouncements) but there will also be a willingness to engage fully with the agendas of others and to think contextually. After all, for Christians (and for all who believe in God as the Creator):

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it;”<sup>70</sup>

So the area that is relevant for theological reflection and engagement encompasses the whole of creation.

With this process in mind, I want to outline some theological ideas which may connect with the agenda of improvement and provide some support and challenge. These ideas centre on the area of theology known as eschatology. After a brief explanation of what I mean by eschatology, I intend to offer some ideas which encourage openness to improvement (FAITH), a time perspective with forward confidence (HOPE), and a renewed and contextual motivation for action (LOVE).

The term ‘eschatology’ comes from the Greek word ‘eschaton’ meaning ‘last’ or ‘final’. Eschatology, then, is the study of or knowledge about the ‘last things’, often interpreted as the end of the world and including topics such as death, judgment, heaven and hell (the four last things). Not surprisingly, such a heading is usually the last chapter in a book of systematic theology, the one that rounds everything off and brings an ending, both to the book and to the discussion. So why am I so keen to introduce an -ology that sounds so esoteric and sombre? I think that eschatology has been misconstrued. As Jürgen Moltmann puts it:

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Green, 1990.

<sup>69</sup> See Hull 1984:250 “- theology is always made up of many layers of previous insights and revisions resulting from attempted applications. In other words, there is an intimate connection between historical theology, systematic theology and applied theology.”

<sup>70</sup> Psalm 24:1.

“- Christian expectation of the future has nothing whatsoever to do with the end, whether it be the end of this life, the end of history or the end of the world. Christian expectation is about the beginning: the beginning of true life, the beginning of God’s kingdom, and the beginning of the creation of all things into their enduring form.”<sup>71</sup>

Eschatology, then, properly understood, is not fundamentally about events at the end of time which simply call a halt to life and history as we know it. Its essence lies in promise - a vision of the promise God gives of the way all things will be when they come to fruition. It is a vision, not so much of ‘last things’ as of ‘ultimate things’, yet it is neither an idealistic future fantasy that detaches us from caring about present imperfections, nor a do-it-yourself agenda for action. Its prime currency is hope, a hope so powerfully intertwined with all Christian thought that it changes self-perception, encourages action and prompts a self-giving commitment which is so extreme that, should the hope prove to be groundless, Christians would merit pity as the most self-deluded of people.<sup>72</sup>

Eschatological hope prevents Christianity from being reduced to a few ethical guidelines in an otherwise undisturbed life, or an individualised spiritual experience focussed on prayer, serenity and personal wellbeing.<sup>73</sup> The vision ignited by eschatological hope is wide (it includes the whole of creation, both seen and unseen) and high (it looks for the renewal of all things). This hope is not simply a utopian ideal, a dream that Christians sign up to, but an expectation that finds its rationale in the past as well as in the future. It finds its focus in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the future implications of these events. Christian faith:

“- strains after the future. To believe does in fact mean to cross and transcend bounds, to be engaged in an exodus. Yet this happens in a way that does not suppress or skip the unpleasant realities. Death is real death, and decay is putrefying decay. Guilt remains guilt and suffering remains, even for the believer, a cry to which there is no ready-made answer. Faith does not overstep these realities into a heavenly utopia, does not dream itself into a reality of a

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<sup>71</sup> Moltmann, 2004. Introduction, paragraph 3. [Accessed via Kindle, 22.7.2015].

<sup>72</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:19 “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

<sup>73</sup> Christianity has sometimes been its own worst enemy in developing a privatization of faith; see Moltmann, 1967:310 “This process was furthered by many revivalist and pietist movements within Christianity. There prevailed within it a pious individualism, which for its own part was romanticist in form and withdrew itself from the material entanglements of society.” See also John Hull’s comment: “This is made all the more important because Christ-mysticism, when it takes an exclusively vertical form or is preoccupied with Jesus as with an imaginary friend, is in danger today of becoming a kind of erotic spirituality in which it is easier to adore Jesus than to follow him.” Hull 2014:222.

different kind. It can overstep the bounds of life, with their closed wall of suffering, guilt and death, only at the point where they have in actual fact been broken through. It is only in following the Christ who was raised from suffering, from a god-forsaken death and from the grave that it gains an open prospect in which there is nothing more to oppress us, a view of the realm of freedom and of joy. Where the bounds that mark the end of all human hopes are broken through in the raising of the crucified one, there faith can and must expand into hope. There its hope becomes a 'passion for what is possible' (Kierkegaard), because it can be a passion for what has been made possible."<sup>74</sup>

A proper consideration of eschatology, then, has to begin with a reflection on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. If this theological vision is to offer anything of value to the nitty-gritty issues of school improvement, it will begin here.

## *Faith*

Christian faith, at its heart, is the adoption of a view about who Jesus is and what he has done. The conviction that Jesus is fully God and fully became a human being 'and went about among us' is bonded to the belief that this was for our benefit, to rescue us from wrongdoing, from everything that falls short of God's new creation, and, ultimately, from death in all its forms.<sup>75</sup> A number of conclusions flow from this: we are saying something about the character of God in terms of God's motive of love and kindness, and something about human beings, that we are essentially inadequate, or, at least, incomplete or flawed. As I expressed it once in a conversation about faith, "The thing about me is that I don't just need telling about how to live a good life, I don't even just need to have an example of a good life shown to me, I need something more - I need rescuing." Sadly, this narrative of divine beneficence and human inadequacy has been used many times as an abusive instrument of control, persuading people, through guilt and fear, to be compliant to a particular authority (which has somehow identified itself with God rather than with inadequate humanity). In fact, when Morley and Rassool were reaching for a metaphor to describe coercive top-down authority in schools, the one that came to mind was exactly this area of religious thought:

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<sup>74</sup> Moltmann, 1965?:9.

<sup>75</sup> See John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

“The language and ethos of both school effectiveness and improvement often appear to have quasi religious connotations, implying lack, deficit or original sin.”<sup>76</sup> Also:

“There is a reinvention thesis in which failing schools can be reborn. They may be sinners, but they can confess, purge and renew themselves.”<sup>77</sup>

The allusion is not intended to be complimentary.

The question arises, then, as to whether such levels of control are inherent to this narrative of rescue, or whether it can offer some more wholesome insights.

It is possible to see the narrative of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the interpretation of it as bringing about our rescue, as pointing to the ultimate commitment to ‘improvement’. God so longs for our improvement, our journey to excellence as human beings, that God is willing to pay the ultimate price (crucifixion within God’s own creation) to bring this about. If we link these ideas of improvement with redemption in this way, it does not have to imply a rubbishing of people as somehow lacking: it could primarily point to the incredibly high value that God places on all people. In fact, I would argue that no Christian view of education can be developed that is not predicated on this extraordinarily high estimation of the value of each human being. And it is an estimate that is ‘cashed out’ in action; as the Apostle Paul puts it:

“But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”<sup>78</sup>

This is a path to improvement that begins in gift, and it is a gift given before there is any realistic way of forecasting the outcome of the process. This gift comes with no tag of accountability and measurable improvement attached. Far from being draconian, it could be read as an absurd and extravagant expression of confidence, a ‘do or die’ strategy that is already committed to a path which includes the death of the protagonist. It is at this point that the plan becomes toughly realistic, accepting that the death, destruction and even god-forsakenness of Jesus is the price that will have to be paid. This is not a kind of ‘sky hook’ redemption, but a “I will go lower than where you are and pick you up and carry you” kind of redemption.

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<sup>76</sup> Morley & Rassool, 1999:5.

<sup>77</sup> Morley & Rassool, 1999:6.

<sup>78</sup> Romans 5:8.

It is not possible to discuss the many ramifications of the phrase ‘Christ died for us’ in a chapter of this length, nor to develop a detailed theology of redemption. But we can ask - what are some of the implications of believing such a narrative, and what everyday values and attitudes might flow from this belief?

Faith, a wholehearted openness to this redemption, should bring with it an openness to improvement that goes beyond any narrow measures and brings with it a continuing expectation that this is both possible and desirable. The assertion that ‘Christ died for us’ is swiftly followed by the assertion that ‘he was raised for our justification’<sup>79</sup>, meaning that the cross was not the endpoint, but was only the beginning of a new unfolding process in which people are transformed and relationships are renewed. At the very least, to be active in education as a Christian is to believe that God is on the side of learning, growth, discovery and wellbeing - in fact that the universe is geared in the direction of this ultimate good, and that every time we cooperate with this process, we are cooperating with the God who created us and plans to bring all things to a new creation.<sup>80</sup> This remains true, even if the grasping of this vision of improvement makes us all the more alert to the present suffering of people and the occasions when growth is stifled.<sup>81</sup> The universality of this vision does not allow us to limit our expectations as only being valid for some people some of the time.

On the other hand, the generosity and flexibility of this vision (God entering God’s own creation to rescue us) should warn us against the mentality that would impose an inflexible pattern of requirements ‘from above’ without giving generous and personal care ‘from below’. The very story of God rescuing us, not because we deserved it but because God wanted to make us safe, is a narrative of overwhelming generosity, of stooping down to lift us up. It is a story that reveals a scandal of particularity, vulnerability and astonishingly accommodating contextualization - the story of God being born a human being (a baby growing up in a particular place and time, with a particular language and culture) could be nothing less. Yet it is also a story with a universal application, styling itself ‘good news’ for everyone, setting the same high value on all people, not simply on its adherents. Far from legitimating self-aggrandizing power structures, Christian faith in its essential form has always been seen as a threat to such structures, not simply turning them upside down but even inside out as it affirms the extravagant unconditional nature of God’s love for

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<sup>79</sup> See Romans 5:25.

<sup>80</sup> See Revelation 21:5 “And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ “

<sup>81</sup> See Romans 8:22, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now.”

everyone and asserts human rights and a call for justice in the light of this.<sup>82</sup> There is a principle here, then, within the vision of faith, that is active at both a micro (individually applied) level and a macro (community/world/whole creation) level. Holding the two in faithful balance within educational policy is surely a dynamic and dialectical process - it cannot simply be a trade-off between the needs of the pupil and the requirements of the system. The heart of faith shows itself in a high-risk for high-stakes bespoke strategy, aiming for a vision of ultimate transformation and willing to pay the price to bring it about.

## *Hope*

To believe is one thing, to keep on believing and to keep on engaging positively with our broken world is quite another. Faith without hope is a broken record, an isolated narrative that becomes more and more strange in the telling. For hope is the heartbeat of faith. Hope is an attitude of openness to the future, an eagerness to look to the horizon for the fulfilment of God's promise to restore all things. Yet hope, interestingly, is also the quality that keeps faith actively engaged with the present, looking for signs of restoration and co-operating with the processes of renewal.

Hope has a strong element of trust in it, and trust suggests reaching beyond myself and beyond my own resources. Someone who hopes in God is someone who is aware of their own finitude (their own limits, both of capacity and perception, which arise, fundamentally, from their own mortality). To hope in God is to refuse to be my own God. This means a refusal to trim reality (philosophically, ethically or perceptually) to facilitate the illusion that I am without limits and without context: the refusal to frame my life and work in a way that makes me appear more knowledgeable and more powerful than I really am. To be people of hope, then, is to reach beyond ourselves, energized for positive action, while at the same time giving us the freedom to be self-critical. John Hull describes this quality as 'critical openness' and suggests that it should be fundamental to Christianity:

“People sometimes ask whether we are to be critically open at the expense of our loyalty to Christ. The question arises because critical openness is not one of

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<sup>82</sup> In fact, many times Christian believers have followed the example of their Master and been executed or assassinated for holding to such views and making them known: eg. Martin Luther King, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Oscar Romero, Maximilian Kolbe, Esther John, Janani Luwum, Elizabeth of Russia - “- the world was not worthy of them” Hebrews 11:38.

the traditional Christian virtues but is preconceived as being in potential hostility to Christian commitment. No Christian ever asks whether we should be loving at the expense of our loyalty to Christ. To be loving is to be Christian.”<sup>83</sup>

To be Christian should also imply a willingness to question and to learn, an openness to a future in which the promises of God will be fulfilled, almost certainly with a profile and appearance that will both exceed and confound expectation.

Hope is, by its nature, forward-looking. As I suggest in the Introduction, time perspective has a major effect on the approach taken to understanding and planning. An eschatological perspective privileges development and transformation over maintenance and quality control. To be data-driven is to plan the future while looking over one shoulder at the immediate past (because data can only be viewed for what has already happened). To be eschatologically-minded is to believe that the future will primarily unfold out of purpose (fundamentally God’s purposes brought to us through the fulfilment of God’s promises) rather than unfolding solely out of process (our management processes delivering expected outcomes). An eschatologically-minded manager may believe that s/he has less essential control than a manager who operates out of ‘addictive presentism’ (see Chapter Three); on the other hand, an eschatologically-minded manager will probably be more positive and less risk averse.

To be future-orientated should have a specific effect on how we view children. If our hope rests in the fullness of God’s promises coming towards us from the future, we should have a preferential commitment to children and young people, expecting them to be part of God’s plan as their potential unfolds. This means, for instance, that it would be a mistake to see them simply as passive recipients of religious tradition taught to them by adults.<sup>84</sup> Being at such a growth point in their lives, they are far more likely to be the originators of new insights than adults are. They need tradition to work with, but sharing with them should be seen less as a responsibility, more as a privilege; less as an educational obligation than as a laboratory for theology. After all, as Jesus put it, if we do not become like children, we will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Hull, 1984:218.

<sup>84</sup> See Hull 1993:xiii, “Church schools are not so much carriers of a tradition. Their task is not so much to transmit the past as to empower the past, to release it for the task of future-creation. In church schools the Christian tradition is not so much reflected as rejuvenated.”

<sup>85</sup> See Matthew 18:3.

The complaint could be voiced at this point that all this sounds too ‘pie in the sky’ and hopelessly rosy in outlook. Is the perspective I am proposing simply a smiley form of optimism that refuses to face facts and keeps waiting around for God to do something? It could be read in that way by those for whom all references to the activity or plans of God indicate fantasy or pathology: there is no way to defend a spiritual perspective as if it has nothing to do with faith, no way to suggest that looking for signs of God’s activity in the world is not predicated on a particular view of the divine. However, for Christians, ‘facing facts’ must also mean ‘facing the fact’ of the resurrection of Jesus and all its implications for what is still unfolding in the world. There are the facts that we can see before us (eg. certain deficits of resources or achievements) and the facts which are unseen (the indestructibly loving purposes of God) and, for those who are followers of Jesus Christ, the unseen predominate.<sup>86</sup> We cannot allow a limited range of measurements to either intimidate us, seduce us or distract us away from the wholehearted pursuit of goodness in a pattern indicated by the character of Jesus and the multivalent promises of God, open to the future.

To hold to this open and positive future vision (in which we still hold a provisional view of ourselves and our perceptions) does not cut us off from the present arena of life. We look, not to some static future (which we will reach simply by the passing of time) but to the promises of God, which come towards us from the fullness of the future and are foreshadowed and hinted at in every instance of justice, beauty and joy.<sup>87</sup>

The Greek word often translated ‘righteousness’ in the New Testament, δικαιοσυνη (dikaisune) is often assumed in English to be a technical, almost forensic term for moral and spiritual uprightness, but it actually takes its primary meaning from ‘the quality, state or practice of judicial responsibility with a focus on fairness, justice, equitableness.’<sup>88</sup> In other words, the New Testament does not separate my relationship with God from my relationship with other people. I am challenged every bit as much to ‘thirst after justice’ as I am to ‘thirst after righteousness’<sup>89</sup> since the Greek word implies both of these ideas simultaneously. Dominic Crossan suggests that the life and example of Jesus call us into what he terms a ‘collaborative

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<sup>86</sup> See 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 “So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.”

<sup>87</sup> This is a view of time focused on *kairos*, (the appointed time) rather than *chronos* (the passing of time).

<sup>88</sup> See the entry in Danker’s Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament. 2000:247.

<sup>89</sup> See Matthew 5:6.

eschaton'<sup>90</sup> in other words, we need to discern what God is doing and join in, with all the energy and the power that hope can give us.

## *Love*

If eschatology has its basis in faith and finds its energy through hope, then it becomes real in love. The apostle Paul describes love in eschatological terms when he asserts that love will remain when every other source of knowledge and perception about God's will has become defunct.<sup>91</sup> Love is vital within every choice or decision made now, to the extent that, even an action that appears admirable, powerful or effective, is devoid of meaning or significance without love. He goes so far as to say that if I “- do not have love, I am nothing.”<sup>92</sup> There is no Christian vision without love. There is no meaning or significance to our endeavours without love. If I plan and manage and act without love, not only do I gain nothing, I actually am nothing - I lose all existential meaning. So love is not a preferred option ('It would be better if we were kind while we did this') still less a sentimental gloss ('Above all, be nice and don't have an argument'). When the Apostle Paul writes about love, he is describing something that is indispensable to effective action, at the centre of relating to others and the true guideline for personal maturity. In fact, when all other contingent motivations and decisions cease to have any function because all things are 'made new' in the fullness of God's promises, it is love that will remain and never end.

How can love be ascribed this eternal quality? The letter of 1 John puts it like this:

“God is love.”<sup>93</sup>

This is an astonishing statement, almost unparalleled in biblical language; it is never asserted that 'God is holiness' or 'God is power' or even that 'God is goodness', for instance. God has many qualities and consequently is described through many

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<sup>90</sup> Stewart, 2006:26. See also Crossan's contribution to the dialogue with N.T. Wright in Stewart, 2006:29, "I'm saying that I don't want any longer to just argue about the beginning and the end, the past and the future. I want to think about the present, I want to know how we are going to take back God's world from the thugs."

<sup>91</sup> See 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 "Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end."

<sup>92</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:2.

<sup>93</sup> 1 John 4:8.

metaphors and titles, but only this noun is sufficient to convey the totality of God's being - "God is love."<sup>94</sup>

So what is this love? The writer of this letter puts a heavy stress on the revelatory force of actions over words; he describes the actions of God:

"God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him."<sup>95</sup>

He also describes the actions expected of us:

"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."<sup>96</sup> Also:

"Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."<sup>97</sup>

So the nature of the love being advocated in this text is clarified by reference to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus - both the love expressed in becoming incarnate and his self-giving love in laying down his life. To say that this love 'puts itself out' for the sake of others is to reduce it to a banality, but is nevertheless crucial: this love is expressed in a commitment to action, and the actions that follow from it are for the sake of others and in response to their contextual needs and even their understanding. What is being recommended is far from a safe level of benign kindness operating within a framework of reasonable expectation; it is much closer to a free fall jump with only the love of God as a parachute!

And so we have come full circle: an acceptance of the narratives about Jesus of Nazareth leads to a vision of God's love for everyone, a self-critical openness to the horizon of the future, and a commitment to unreserved love. It is a vision that only makes sense 'from the inside' (if one takes the risk of believing it) but which has implications that constantly reach 'outside' and are not simply about our own inner spirituality, or even the life of believing communities, but spill over into a vision of what God intends for the whole of God's creation. It begins and will come to fruition

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<sup>94</sup> The writer of 1John does also use the phrase "God is light," but this is immediately followed by the assertion "and in him there is no darkness at all", suggesting that the primary function here is to indicate that there is no patchwork of light and dark within God - in other words, that there is no accommodation between good and evil. The images of light and dark then become part of an extended metaphor of 'walking' - a frequent biblical metaphor for human actions and choices, eg. Genesis 17:1, 48:15; Deuteronomy 8:6, 10:12; 1 Kings 2:4; 2 Kings 20:3; Job 31:5; Psalm 86:11; Isaiah 33:15, etc. Only this phrase 'God is love' stands alone, without metaphorical extension.

<sup>95</sup> 1 John 4:9.

<sup>96</sup> 1 John 3:16.

<sup>97</sup> 1 John 3:18.

in the commitment of love that God has made. When we love in truth and action, we come into rhythm with the infinite pulse of love that God has initiated.

“And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:13.

## Chapter Five Conclusion

*“Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts; nothing else will ever be of any service to them.”*

*Charles Dickens, Hard Times.*

Facts are good, but wisdom is better. Words are important, but it is conversation that leads to progress. So how do these three areas of thought: eighteenth century charity schools, present-day approaches to school improvement and a theological perspective - come together to make something useful? I want to suggest some ways in which theological thinking affirms and enhances the improvement agenda, some areas in which Biblical Theology and some Improvement practices may be in tension, and finally some ways in which churches (particularly Church of England parishes and organisations) could fruitfully support schools.

The quotation above from Mr Gradgrind is not included entirely facetiously; data does allow us to see reality and be surprised by it. It was the patient plotting of data that facilitated the discovery that Typhoid fever is waterborne,<sup>99</sup> or that lack of folic acid during pregnancy is a major factor in spina bifida.<sup>100</sup> Data collection in schools is an important monitoring instrument which can supplement (and sometimes correct) instinct, intuition and prejudice. It is also a protection against the patchy provision in schools which existed in the past. On the other hand, data cannot generate principles and values from which to operate. Where data collection becomes an end in itself, the system moves towards a predominate culture of ‘quality control’. This kind of ‘floor level’ thinking combined with ‘addictive presentism’ (described in Chapter Three) can produce a flurry of activity around certain measurable points which is actually self-defeating of higher aims.

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<sup>99</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1854\\_Broad\\_Street\\_cholera\\_outbreak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1854_Broad_Street_cholera_outbreak)

<sup>100</sup> See [http://accessexcellence.org/WN/SUA04/spina\\_bifida\\_cause\\_disc.php](http://accessexcellence.org/WN/SUA04/spina_bifida_cause_disc.php)

Hargreaves and Shirley illustrate this by quoting a management decision made in football. Those in charge wanted to monitor whether every player was working hard and taking every opportunity to be on the ball. They decided to supplement the films made of each match by attaching a microchip to each player's boot to monitor the number of steps they took and to set a required level of physical activity. This would, after all, provide hard, quantifiable and comparable data. Within a short period of time, footballers were observed jogging up and down taking extra steps to 'up their stats' when the ball was out of play.<sup>101</sup> Their priority had become to register enough paces to satisfy the management, not to take risks to play their best. They were not inspired, they were intimidated - and the outcome was far from the original aim.<sup>102</sup> Hargreaves and Shirley go so far as to suggest that:

“Perhaps the most disturbing characteristic of technocracies is how the top-down use of high-stakes performance data can slant the system towards trickery and treachery.”<sup>103</sup>

We constantly teach children that there is more to behaving well than not being caught behaving badly, yet we unwittingly unleash processes which relentlessly pressure professionals to 'keep under the radar' and to not get caught as a first priority.

Perhaps the contribution of theology here is to open up a debate about meta-narratives, or in the absence of articulated meta-narratives, the undercurrents of thought and practice. It is not actually possible to operate entirely at the level of small packages of data and micro-decisions, attractive though this is to the postmodern mind.<sup>104</sup> There will always be a bigger process going on because there will always be a direction of travel, intended or not. Christians have a focused vision for the world based in faith and energized by hope. It is not a monolithic imperialist vision, however, but a vision of transformation that is both organic (in the sense of contextual) and cooperative (in the sense of actively seeking partnerships).

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<sup>101</sup> See Hargreaves & Shirley 2009:36.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Matthew 6:21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We could paraphrase this: "For where your target is, there your heart will be also." The results of a misplaced target can be far more serious than this, however, eg. the alleged diversion of police resources from the investigation of sexual abuse in Sheffield and Rotherham to burglary and car crime because these were 'priority crimes' for Home Office targets. See: <http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/main-topics/general-news/police-ignored-rotherham-abuse-because-of-target-culture-says-home-secretary-1-7269940> and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-31872553>

<sup>103</sup> Hargreaves & Shirley 2009:39.

<sup>104</sup> See Lingard et al 1998:90, "Performativity then is a simultaneous expression of high modernity with its centralized attempts to control and the postmodern with its play of difference and dispersed, localized relations of power in a context of 'manufactured uncertainty' and doubt concerning meta-narratives."

Christians can at least contribute to a discussion about priorities and values in education, by pointing out that these bigger issues are always with us, whether they are acknowledged or not. They can perhaps also encourage the development of those local visions of excellence which help schools to become outstanding places to learn.<sup>105</sup>

Aspiration is surely a motivation common to both school improvement and to biblical theology. The love that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” longs for the best for every pupil. David Blunkett was surely right to point out in the 1997 White Paper that education in England had for too long been organised for the benefit of the small percentage who were going to university, with correspondingly large percentages of pupils being ‘processed’ and ‘shed’ with few qualifications at earlier stages.<sup>106</sup> Individual teachers did much to mitigate the effects of this,<sup>107</sup> but the system seemed predicated on the principle that excellence could only be demonstrated by the failure of the majority to attain it.<sup>108</sup> Perhaps we need to borrow Sarah Trimmer’s and William Whiston’s eighteenth century vision that the whole of society can be lifted and transformed by an improvement in the education of the many rather than the few.

The question of time perspective also comes into play here. I have tried to illustrate that a biblical perspective is essentially eschatological, and that this openness to the future is neither driven nor fatalistic, but characterized by faith, hope and love and a commitment to collaborate (both with God and with people of goodwill). This should contrast with the rather fearful, driven, competitive and even addictive atmosphere that can surround managerial thinking focussed on control in the present. TP is not the only issue here, but it is perhaps an under-discussed factor, because lifting our eyes to the horizon, with its change of perspective, widens vision and increases energy, hope and patience.<sup>109</sup>

It also makes it possible to aim much higher. Much school improvement literature aims at a level of overall attainment in which pupils achieve good grades and

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<sup>105</sup> See Hopkins 2007:20.

<sup>106</sup> White Paper 1997:10-11, paragraphs 10 and 11.

<sup>107</sup> Eg. the Art teacher who chose to give the young Norman Ackroyd (now RA) the keys to the Art Room and to the supply cupboard of art materials.

<sup>108</sup> This peculiarly British attitude re-surfaces each year when the GCSE and A level results are published, in the comments to the effect that, if more pupils obtain an ‘A’, an ‘A’ must be easier to obtain (completely ignoring the percentage cap on higher grades which operated before the mid-1980’s).

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Psalm 121:1-2 “I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

competencies with the aim of keeping the UK competitive in a world market. There seems to be an underlying assumption that if pupils achieve highly enough in maths, literacy and science, they will be able to compete in the technological world of the jobs of the future. While there is a truth in this, it all feels very market-driven. The transformation of schools could potentially transform lives so much more; not with an aim of sustaining the world but with an aim of transforming it. These could be the pupils who grow up to be scientists who tackle global warming, peacemakers who find new ways to do politics, doctors who find new ways to treat cancer, bankers who make global finance workable. These could be the artists who open our eyes to beauty, the entrepreneurs who start businesses not yet imagined, in other words, the leaders of the future.<sup>110</sup> As the *Fourth R* Report powerfully expressed it, back in 1970:

“Massively, often unconsciously, almost inescapably, in the various governments’ schools, personalities are being formed, values and ideals assigned, the whole shape of the future decided.”<sup>111</sup>

The stakes are very high. If we are committed to the best possible education for all, other commitments follow from this. If we are not content to write off a high percentage of pupils as lacking the essential aptitude to learn, we have to tackle the barriers to their learning. Some of these will be to do with the effectiveness of schools and their capacity to intervene early and correctly to identify problems, but other wider issues affecting pupils are much more intractable.

Now here there is a rub between school improvement thinking which isolates the school as an independent system and eschatological thinking which looks to the whole world as an interdependent whole. There is also a rub between the wideness of this eschatological thinking and a narrow imperialist kind religious of thinking (those who are primarily concerned with the preservation of their own religious identity might rather like the perception that their schools are enclosed systems). The rub can be summarized in one word: justice. There can be no eschatology without justice. Justice is closely linked to context, since there can be no fairness and equitableness without a careful examination of the detail of what is unfair (with a view to doing something about it).

Church schools in particular have a close link to their local context through a link to the parish in which they are situated. Although these links are not always as active as

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. the words of Pope Francis (addressing young people in Paraguay, reported July 12, 2015 in *The Huffington Post*) “Make a mess, but then also help to tidy it up. A mess which gives us a free heart, a mess which gives us solidarity, a mess which gives us hope.”

<sup>111</sup> *The Fourth R*, p.205.

might be hoped, the very existence of the Church of England parish ethos (this church is here for you, this church is open to you by right simply because you live here) gives this link a particularly open and durable character. By contrast, market loyalty is supposed to operate in an opportunistic manner, with commitment conditional on results. In an increasingly fragmented educational landscape where the distinctiveness of schools is not only permitted but encouraged, and where different kinds of provision are provided on an opt-in/opt-out basis, is it possible for Church schools to be distinctive in community cohesion and involvement, rather than distinctive in isolation and shifting loyalties? Can we show that improvement in schools can be energized by a theological vision that is inclusive for all and not narrowly religious?

Parishes vary greatly in the contextual support they can give to schools, but perhaps it is time to join with William Whiston in saying that we will “- take more care of the education of the growing generation,” and show that care as a central commitment of our faith. Parishes are ideally placed to engage with what could be termed the details of injustice. There was a string of messages on Twitter recently linked by the subject: ‘I wish my teacher knew ..’ Children had been asked to record in one sentence what they wished that their teacher knew about them. Two of the most poignant were, ‘I wish my teacher knew I dont have pencils [sic] at home to do my homework’ and ‘I wish my teacher knew sometimes my reading log is not signed because my mom is not around a lot.’ Very often individual teachers and staff put themselves out to fill these pastoral and social needs of children, supplying the materials from their own pockets and the time from their own free time.<sup>112</sup> While applauding this selfless commitment, I feel that the time has come for Christian communities to see this as an essential corporate expression of our commitment to the future, a way of living out the prayer, ‘Your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.’ We may not be able to change policies, but we may be able to change lives. It is important to speak up in the public square and discuss values for the common good, but it is also important to love in truth and action. How easy it would be for a parish, in cooperation and consultation with a school, to provide the level of funds needed to provide pencils at home or clear pencil cases for exams or handwriting pens - and perhaps to do this for all, as a gesture of generosity to protect the needs of the few.

Some church communities have more time, and some have more money. Some could be supplying funds while others might be offering volunteer help to support reading. Some could send in a tray of doughnuts for the staff, others could help to sponsor

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<sup>112</sup> According to the National Association of Headteachers, one in four schools wash clothes for pupils, for instance, and 84% schools report that they are offering more social care of this sort (washing, food, hot drinks, etc.) than they did five years ago. See [schoolsweek.co.uk/how-schools-are-becoming-mini-welfare-states](http://schoolsweek.co.uk/how-schools-are-becoming-mini-welfare-states)

non-contact time for training and networking. Some could offer chaplains, mentors and more governors. Some could run clubs with food which would help support hungry children. The Diocese of Ely is already encouraging parishes to consider paying the diocesan service level charge for their local church school as a sign of commitment and connection. The idea is not to create strain but to express solidarity. Where there are several schools within a united benefice, there could perhaps be twinning arrangements to parishes where there are resources but no schools.

The Christians of the eighteenth century had a vision to educate the poor and they created and funded their schools from scratch, doing what had never been done before. Can we create a new community-engaged model of education for the twenty-first century? We live in the shadow of their great vision and we benefit from their continuing educational legacy. Although our context is very different, we need to borrow from them a sense of the importance of education for those who are marginalised, and a sense of community solidarity that makes facilitating the best possible education for all a natural expression of faith, hope and love.

## *What Next?*

We are planning a series of blogs to provide bite-size access to some of the ideas in this research, and to develop resources that are useable in Governors' meetings or on Inset days.

It might be fruitful to take some of the broad brush stroke ideas presented here and bring them into direct conversation with day-to-day improvement requirements experienced in schools.

Future development of accessible theological resources for schools might be fruitful (not just for RE and collective worship, but to forge an even stronger link between Christian ethos and planning).

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And now faith,  
hope, and love  
abide, these three;  
and the greatest of  
these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13