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Anglican Church school education: moving beyond the first two hundred years

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Part V 'Mission into Practice' contains some interesting reflections from Williams on styles of learning and teaching in the Catholic tradition. However, his use of the term 'Catholic curriculum' and his subsequent discussions are frustratingly imprecise. He tries to cover too much ground in too short a space.

In the final chapter, Sullivan and McKinney draw together many of the strands running through the book. They identify some of the challenges for Catholic education presented by materialism, secularism, pluralism, scientism and managerialism. However, for this head teacher of a Catholic school, the rich resources within the Catholic intellectual heritage, presented in this collection, provide some antidote to the corrosive utilitarian forces present in the current educational climate in England.

Well done to Sullivan, McKinney et al. for their contributions and ideas on possible ways forward in meeting a multitude of challenges faced by leaders in Catholic educational institutions.

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Anglican Church school education: moving beyond the first two hundred years, edited by H. Worsley, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, 297 pp., £75 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-4411-2513-2

In 2001, I was involved in discussion and dissemination events in the lead up to and following the publication of the Dearing Review of Church Schools, *The Way Ahead*. This single 'moment' in the history of Anglican Church schools launched an ambitious expansion plan capitalising upon the political goodwill of the time in favour of Church schooling, which in turn led to the opening of a number of 'new' Church secondary schools nationally. Since then, an ill-wind against the erroneously titled 'faith schools' has arisen (which clumsily lumps all types of schools of religious character together, including the Church of England's). Opponents of 'faith schooling' critique them for their social divisiveness on the one hand and their privileging of middle-class parents in admissions' requirements on the other. Additionally, the less favourable political climate of the present has led the Bishop of Oxford, John Pritchard, to recently declare an end to the partnership between Church and State in education (*The Church Times*, 10

May 2013). Hasty words perhaps, for whilst the dual-system is gradually morphing into a multiple-type-of-school system in the maintained sector, the Church has in reality been able to steer a course which capitalises upon recent policy reform. However, the future for Church schooling remains challenging for the Church at all levels, not least in that responsibility for so much of schooling becomes increasingly devolved to the individual schools or consortia.

This is the situation in which this volume of essays is set (though the scene is so fast-moving one feels that it is already somewhat out-of-date). It explores both the history that has unfolded since the founding of the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church in 1811 (particularly celebrating the part played by Joshua Watson in its early history), describing some of the present challenges facing schools and projecting ahead to an imagined future. It succeeds in describing the past and articulating the present and the prospective future unevenly, it seems to me.

The papers are separated into four main sections: The Historical Story; Current Policy and Philosophy; Reflection on Current Practice, and Instrumental in Shaping the Future (blue-sky thinking) – the latter section somewhat oddly named. The editor provides an introduction and a fifth section, Reflections and Recommendations. Within these sections, Robert Whickham provides a chapter on Joshua Watson's political theology, which I found frustratingly lacking in detailed source work. Indeed, this 'historical' section I found to be the least satisfying of the volume for this very reason. The chapters in this section include Howard Worsley on High Church legacies, Priscilla Chadwick on the dual system and David Lankshear on Anglican education in Wales. There is clearly a dearth of work on this history of Church school education, especially from a structural and institutional perspective, and I think this was pointed up in this volume's over-reliance on secondary literature.

Of the subsequent chapters, those that stood out for me and were most satisfying were the chapters that brought new evidence to the fore, or which attempted to engage with the perennial question: what is unique and distinctive about the Church school. In this, Gemma Penny and Leslie Francis' chapter on 'pupil voice' stood out for me as describing the realities which schools encounter and live within and which therefore get beyond the rhetoric. Of the latter, Helen Everett's chapter on Church schools and the promotion of tolerance again used the empirical to move the debate on.

The other chapters of the volume, many of which are concerned to theologise aspects of church schooling, I found less satisfying because they seemed speculative and rhetorical. It is not that I am against ideals and the importance of defining them and restating them, I am not; it is that too much theology of Church school education – and there is still not enough

of this – is insider talk only, neglectful of the political and professional realities of Church schooling.

I am left wondering with this volume, to what extent are Church schools – if indeed they can be – Christian? Cooling's chapter seems to take this as read. The messy realities of religious, political and educational history would suggest an applied model of Christian practical theology somewhat lacking. Secondly, I am wondering about the motif of the 'poor' and its uncritical deployment here? I know of its theological and historical origins, but is this an apt metaphor in the contemporary scene?

Finally, one significant omission from this volume I felt was any in-depth comment on religious education (including collective worship). I am somewhat puzzled by this given that religious education is sometimes held up to be an area of excellence and distinctiveness in Church schools (perhaps more than in any other maintained school). In such a volume, I am surprised that there is not more than passing reference to it.

It is interesting to note how many of the authors here 'look over the fence' to the Roman Catholic model of schooling as one to emulate. In a climate of uncertainty, perhaps there is more room for dialogue and research on this very point. Is there anything that Christian schools can learn together from within their separate histories, trajectories, aims and purposes? This would not be in the spirit of the Hackney Phalanx, but it may better serve the purposes of Christian education in the present.

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New directions in Islamic education: pedagogy and identity formation, by Abdullah Sahin, Markfield, Kube Publishing, 2013, 294 pp., £22.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-84774-058-8

Though this is in many ways a difficult and complex book, it is nevertheless a timely and highly significant contribution to the ongoing debate about the nature and purpose of Islamic education. In wanting to devise a new