

Teachers and the Marriage Act

ACT received a reply to Clive Ireson's email expressing concern about Christians in education, and teaching on marriage.



Clive Ireson, ACT's Director of Strategy

Dear Mr Ireson,

Thank you for your email addressed to the Minister of State for Sport and Tourism, about the Marriage Bill. As you may be aware, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill became an Act on 17 July 2013.

Teachers should not use the classroom to promote particular views when teaching. School teachers are in a very influential position. Their actions and responsibilities are bound by much wider duties, including their duty of care to their pupils. They are required to ensure that their teaching is balanced, and that they take care to ensure that there is no stigmatisation of children based on their home circumstances. The department does recognise that faith schools, for example, may wish to apply a particular ethos in their teaching and the current legal framework already recognises this, provided such teaching is age-appropriate and balanced.

The issue of freedom of conscience for teachers (and other public servants) was the subject of detailed scrutiny and debate during the passage of the Bill. I can reassure you that nothing in the Bill inhibits freedom of conscience; there is already strong protection in law for this. Religion or belief is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and in Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which

guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Teachers in any school (academy or otherwise) are therefore already protected from being discriminated against or harassed because of their religion or belief. To discriminate against a teacher simply because they hold or express a belief that marriage should be of one man with one woman, whether it is for religious or philosophical reasons, is unlawful under the Equality Act.

The department is committed to working with faith groups to ensure that guidance issued by those groups to schools with a religious designation emphasises that religious views can be properly taken into account when teaching about marriage. We have also committed to working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission on updating their guidance in relation to marriage of same sex couples, including their guidance to schools, which will include specific practical examples.

Thank you once again for writing with your views.

Yours sincerely
Debra Wind, Ministerial and Public Communications Division

Clive Ireson notes, 'Hopefully none of our members will come into conflict in their schools in the autumn around the Same Sex Marriage teaching. If anyone does, please be in touch, as we now have access into government to look at any individual cases if needed.'



ACT exists for Christians in education, sharing encouragement and support, and providing the Christian perspective with government and the media.

The Association of Christian Teachers' annual meeting

ACT Day

Saturday 16th November 2013

Education: Knowledge? Action?*

coffee at 9.30 for 10 a.m.
close at 12.30 p.m.

Upper Hall, Church House, Lancing Street

LONDON, NW1 1NA

Adjacent to Euston station

An exploration of the current education scene from a Christian perspective;

both the challenges and joys.

Also a prayer workshop for our nation's education.

ACT's formal annual general meeting will also take place.

Admission free. Please book places by ringing Stephanie on

01604 632046 or

stephanie@actforhim.org.uk

*Herbert Spencer, 1820 – 1903

Although an agnostic, Spencer insisted that he was not concerned to undermine religion in the name of science, but to bring about a reconciliation of the two.

Teachers, sex education and law

from the DfE website:

'When teaching sex education, schools including academies through their funding agreements must have regard to the Secretary of State's Sex and Relationship Education Guidance, 2000. The guidance is very clear about not promoting any particular sexual orientation whilst providing all pupils with accurate information to enable them to understand their developing sexuality, whatever it may be.'

ACT members are welcome to contact the ACT office for guidance in the event of a potential difficulty in the design, planning or delivery of the curriculum.

The Prayer Diary

is central to our work, and we offer a prayer for every day of the year, designed to offer intercessions and a personal prayer focus. Members are invited to contribute requests in forty words or fewer. Issued monthly, the prayer diary is available to download from the website, or paper versions can be mailed to members on request to Stephanie at the ACT office 01604 632046

Sunday 'Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.'

Deuteronomy 4.9 NIV UK

Monday Yesterday's verse is a signature verse for Christians in education. Our work lasts longer than our lifetime. 'LORD, help us in our mission to stay vigilant, remembering with passion what you have entrusted to us. Assist us to teach effectively.'

Tuesday 'Lord, upset my mindset if it is too set, to accept your purposes in my life. Enlarge my concept of you to accept your precepts and keep in step with you today!'

Wednesday Pray for wisdom for Christians in education who are confronting difficult situations with challenging students. See Luke chapter 8 verse 35. 'and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.'

Thursday When a teacher walks into a classroom the atmosphere changes. 'LORD come into my life today and bring order, purpose, discipline and good government.'

Friday Pray for Holy Spirit wisdom for teachers who teach relationships education, especially in the area of same-sex marriage. Pray that they will not be caught in cunning traps set by mischievous students, and be able to maintain their Christian integrity.

Saturday 'All you need to say is simply "Yes," or "No"; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.' Matthew 5.37 'Lord, help us to mind the gap, the difference between what we say and what we do, so that we present a faithful image of you to those amongst whom we teach.'

Prayer Diary Extra Members and friends who would like to pray specifically for ACT, its work, staff and members with specific needs, can ask to receive this one-sided A4 sheet either by email or printed copy.

Which story? Whose story?



Teachers are basically story tellers. In this article, Arthur Jones asks, "Whose story are we telling?"

The ultimate goal of Christian education and mission is life-long disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, who disciple others. To be a disciple is to be a participant in the unfolding big story, which centres in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

These big stories matter because there is no neutral area of life – every aspect of our school or college's life and curriculum is embedded in one or another, or some mixture, of these big stories.

We will call them *worldview stories*, because, in common usage, 'faith' is often limited to religious people whereas *everyone* is governed by these stories, even those who claim to be 'secular'.

Professor Kieran Egan points out that stories are a cultural universal, "everyone everywhere enjoys stories." He argues that in Western societies, and in all other societies influenced by the West, teachers are, today, the main professional story-tellers and the school curriculum as a whole is the big story they tell. The problem is that most teachers are not aware that their school or college is telling a big story and that everything they teach is like a 'little story' – a part, or contribution to the big story.

One of the most important questions teachers and school leaders must face is, *Which big story is being absorbed by the children in our school? In whose story are they being trained to be participants?*

It doesn't matter which subject we teach. What we are teaching, and how we are teaching, will be reinforcing one worldview story and undermining others. This is the key issue. Children come to school already equipped to understand and use stories. They may struggle with maths, or history, and forget most of it as soon as the exams are over, but they will have absorbed the underlying story. Since that story will rarely, if ever, have been identified for them – and thereby been brought into the open for questioning – they will have been indoctrinated.

"Which big story are we teaching? Which big story are the children absorbing in our school? Is it a Christian story, a Hindu story, a Muslim story or a modern secular story?"

Most students go through school and college without ever being asked to consider the beliefs and assumptions – the worldviews – that undergird the teaching they receive and the learning they undertake. This is fundamentally a dereliction of proper educational duty. If they have never been shown the relationship between worldviews and their curriculum – never been taught to recognise and critique those worldviews – then they are fundamentally uneducated.

The dominant worldview is a person's or community's 'default setting', their 'common sense'. If you are immersed in one, it is very difficult to recognise it, let alone replace it.

It is the over-arching worldview story that makes sense of life for our students. It is that big story, which puts their own life story and that of their family and community into context and gives them meaning. It is the big story that gives coherence and integrity to the whole curriculum. If that framework of meaningfulness is absent, or if the big story implicitly present is not capable of making sense of life, then that, more than anything else, will account for the great inefficiency and ineffectiveness of Western-style education.

Without the big stories we cannot think or act at all. Worldviews are like 'spectacles behind our eyes' – we look at the world through them, not at them. But those 'spectacles' give a particular colour to everything we see. It is crucially important to have the right spectacles!

But, as already noted, people today are generally unaware of their worldview story. Their worldview is often not a matter of what they say they believe – and maybe not even what they think they believe! Their worldview is revealed in how they actually live and in how their community actually functions.

Big stories embody our worldview

“To hold a doctrine or an opinion with the intellect alone is not to believe it. A man’s real belief is that which he lives by. ... What a man believes is the thing he does, not the thing he thinks.” George MacDonald, 1885

Very few, even Christian teachers and educational leaders could correctly identify their school’s big story. In our society today, most people go through education without ever considering the relationship between faith and life. Consequently most people do not even know that they have a worldview story – they have simply absorbed theirs unawares from their environment – from family, peers, teachers, media etc. Unsurprisingly, therefore, many Christians absorb secular perspectives and most churches provide no tools for discernment.

If our students cannot identify and articulate the dominant worldviews then can we really claim that they have received a Christian education? Are we actually indoctrinating them into another faith? Sadly, we are doing just that in Britain

How the big stories work

Worldview stories operate by giving us the answers to the big questions of life and society:

1. What is ultimate reality? What is really real? Is there a God?
2. Where are we? What is this world we are in?
3. Who are we? What are human beings?
4. What are we here for? What is the human task/role?
5. What’s wrong? Why is there evil, hardship, suffering, oppression?
6. What’s the remedy? What can be done to put matters right?
7. Where are we going? What happens after death?
8. What time is it? Where are we at in the story? Where do we belong in it?

How do we know? How do we know what is true?

What we teach, and how we teach, are like little stories that provide our students with answers to those questions. Those answers are weaving for them a big worldview story. They may soon forget the history and geography, the science and mathematics, but they will absorb the big story and many will live by its values for the rest of their lives. We’ll look at how this actually works in society and schools in the next two papers.

Christian big stories

Two big stories compete in the Western world today, the Christian story and the Western secular story. The Christian worldview can be summarised in the traditional Creation → fall (into sin) → redemption (salvation) → new creation storyline. If we use the image of spectacles, then, “To look at the world through Scripture is, in fact, to look at the world through three lenses at the same time: as something created by God, twisted by sin, and being redeemed by the work of Christ. Remove any one of these lenses and the biblical worldview is distorted.” (Goheen & Bartholomew, 2008:63)

The story itself is much, much richer. In order to do the story justice we must soak (marinate) ourselves in the biblical story and in our Christian history so that we can truly own it as our story, and be continually discovering more and more about its events, characters and lessons.

In the Bible story, Christ is central. To understand the work of Christ we need to see his place in the story as it has developed (Genesis to Malachi) to his incarnation in human history (Matthew to John) and has then developed since (Acts to Revelation and in Christian history). But we also need to see the whole story in the light of Christ – as God, He is before the story and over the story as well as in the story.

Secular big stories

Secularism is rather like vegetarianism. If someone tells us that they are vegetarian, it tells us at least some of what they don’t eat, yet we need to know what kind of vegetarian they are. Similarly with secularism, and atheism for that matter, it tells us some of what people don’t believe, but not what they do believe. What kind of secularist are they? That is what we need to know.

Of course, they may claim that secularism is neutral – that secularists don’t

privilege any worldview, ideology, philosophy or religion. But neutrality is a myth. Even maths or science is always embedded in a worldview. And that worldview will be the expression of a philosophical view of reality.

Today, the dominant secular philosophy is materialism, with a close linking of the two meanings of that key word, (1) physical nature is all there is; and (2) enjoying material possessions is all that matters.

If the material world is all there is, then the enjoyment of material things is about the best that anyone can hope for in this fleeting life. Consumerism is a social expression of scientific materialism.

In human life there is no worldview neutrality. As we grow up we all absorb a worldview story or, most likely today, fragments of big stories. That big story, or mixture of stories, is learnt and nurtured through lots of little stories. These little stories transmit the priorities and beliefs of the big story to the next generation.

What can we do?

1. We must – in home, church, school and work – identify and challenge the dominant secular worldview stories, evaluating their implications and consequences.
2. We must identify all the little stories in the syllabi, textbooks and resources that reflect and nurture secular worldviews.
3. We must work to embed the Christian worldview in every aspect of the life of our school or college.
4. We must ensure that – throughout the curriculum and the whole life of the school – we weave little stories that nurture the Christian story and transmit it to the next generation.
5. Throughout, we must explain to the children what we are doing and why it is important.

It is a hard and difficult road. May God give us the strength and grace to reach the goal. “Teaching Christianly may well be the hardest job in the universe”. John Van Dyk

© Dr Arthur Jones March 2013 This is an edited version of Dr. Jones’ “Christian education part 1: Which story, Whose story?” which you can download from the allofliferedeemed.co.uk website. Arthur Jones was, for many years, a trustee and chair of trustees at ACT.

Book review

Reassessing the Culture of Assessment: Weighing Pigs Does Not Make Them Heavier

Adrian Brown Grove Books 978-1-85174-790-0 28pp softback £3.95

If you want to evaluate received wisdom or scrutinise your personal assumptions about our current system of assessment, then this is the book for you. It won't give you answers. It won't present a pre-packaged, neatly ordered assessment protocol, complete with Christian perspective to slot comfortably into your thinking. What it will do is present a lucid analysis of current practice, encouraging you to question whether such a paradigm is consistent with a Christian worldview and is in the best interests of the unique individuals whom we teach, each one made in the image of God.

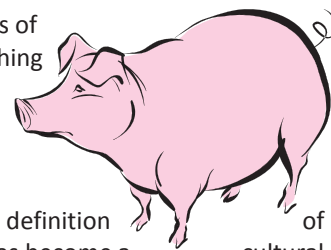
The strength of the Grove titles is their limited length; each book totals no more than 10,000 words. As a result, ideas come thick and fast, with arguments posited but not developed. It's left to the reader to think each idea through for

themselves, so in that sense for a very small book it packs a very big punch.

The text is structured in 5 chapters with an additional brief conclusion. After setting out his stall in the Introduction (you may have thought that Torchwood is sci-fi, but think again!) the author takes you through the current culture of measurement which relies solely on standard linear notions of progress by which to define success. This is followed by an analysis of the blame game which results from such a narrow view, and the common fallacies on which our current system is built – ATs and ALIS among them. The final chapter, Strengthening the Things That Remain, explores 'a number of things that might feature in education marked by perennial insights from the Christian worldview'.

This is a balanced book. It deftly avoids the risk of dystopia by encouraging us to find ways to redress the balance through a thoughtful analysis of what we do, and why and how we do it. As a reader you are left with a significant conflict to resolve. An obsession with making

judgments of your teaching and your pupils' learning using a narrowed definition of success has become a cultural imperative. For Christian teachers there is also a moral imperative -- to support each student to maximise not just their earning potential but also their potential as a whole, rounded person.



If you wonder how, as a Christian teacher, you can have any impact in a secular context in which you may often feel marginalised, read this book and engage in the debate. We are called to be 'salt and light' in our world, Matthew 5:13–16). Seeing beyond the 'one-size-fits-all' paradigm and helping to develop the God-given character of your pupils because God loves them, is doing just that.

Gill Robins

Available post free on 01223 464748, sales@grovesbooks.co.uk or by visiting grovebooks.co.uk

A wow moment

in the ACTuality office

Occasionally you might hear a 'wow' in the ACTuality editorial office.

Working in the ACTuality office is a great privilege, because, from what kind members tell me, they appreciate what we do. However, much of the time the work is fairly lonely and requires concentration and determination to get things done. The work can be humdrum and challenging, especially when trying to get two different computer systems to talk to each other. It's as if their designers were determined not to let this happen; the Montagues and Capulets of information technology.

So, here I reside with a couple of telephones and computer screens, a keyboard and a mouse for company. And life trundles along quite nicely. Occasionally an ACT member drops by, by telephone or email, and then a Christian agency partner will pop along and we have a chat about this and that, and things move gently forward.

Earlier this week, a gentleman involved in medical mission work in Asia rang to see if we could help. He was looking for expertise in training medical practitioners from a Christian value system.

Someone had suggested ACT. After an exploratory conversation, it quickly became clear that long-time ACT members Arthur Jones and John Shortt were two people ideally suited to meeting this need. Within twenty-four hours, Arthur and John were in touch with our enquirer, and with a fair wind his need will be on the way to being satisfied.

Now, that gives me quite a wow moment, to be a single link in the chain, enabling Christ's people to work together, using the gifts God has given them to further His work.

I believe this is what ACT should be doing: members contributing expertise, supporting each other, and sharing one other's burdens.

God, of course, has a plan - a great working engineering drawing involving not just complex mechanisms but His people, all playing their part. I see ACT as an integral part of that drawing.

Fellow ACT members, let's enjoy observing, and being part of, the plan, as the various parts are brought together, aligned and set in motion. And not a Monague or Capulet in sight. Wow!

Robert Hall

Godly pedagogy

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding – indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Proverbs 2.1-6 NIV UK

Every Teacher Matters

If you are looking for a stimulating and encouraging event for your local group of Christians in education, either school or church based, then you can invite the ACT roadshow to visit. Each programme is tailored to your needs. You provide the venue and refreshments and ACT provides the materials for an interactive and refreshing look at how Christians can survive and thrive in the education industry. To discuss the possibilities, contact robert@actforhim.org.uk

'Teach science, not secular dogma'

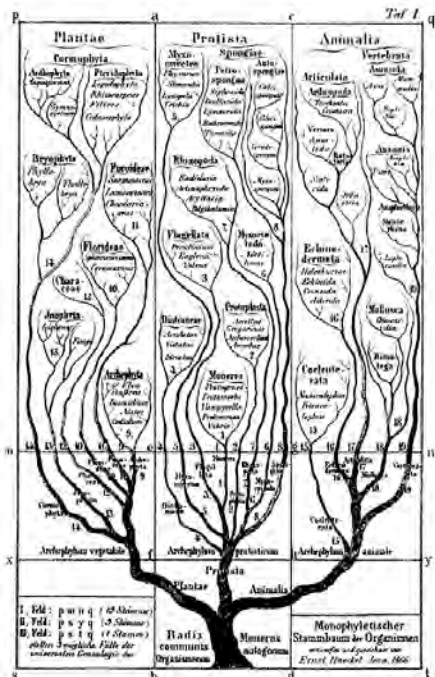
argues Dr Alastair Noble, Director of the Centre for Intelligent Design

You may have noticed that the Education Secretary, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, announced recently that the revision of the National Curriculum will include teaching evolution in primary schools.

Now you may wonder what is wrong with that, given that the scientific establishment regards evolution as a 'fact'. Well, there are two problems. Firstly, every scientific theory is tentative and subject to revision as fresh evidence is uncovered. You can be sure that the growing body of evidence against the all-pervasive theory of evolution will not be considered.

And here's what children won't be told about evolution:

1. Evolution has no explanation for the origin of life in the first place. By saying evolution doesn't deal with that, while implying it does, just highlights its deficiency.
2. Random mutation and natural selection cannot explain the synthesis of the hundreds of complex bio-molecules, like proteins, which are necessary for life.
3. The mechanism of evolution - natural selection acting on random mutation - has been shown to be unequal to the task of creating new organisms.
4. The 'junk DNA' hypothesis, an integral part of the teaching of evolution, has now been abandoned in the light of recent work on the human genome.



5. The much-vaunted 'tree of life' is being increasingly shown to be highly speculative and at odds with the evidence. The fossil record is not consistent with the numerous slight successive changes required by evolution, as Charles Darwin himself recognised.

6. Evolution is completely unable to explain the existence of the complex genetic information carried by every living cell in its DNA.

7. Evolution has no explanation for mind and consciousness, other than that it is an accidental by-product of chemistry and physics.

Any other scientific hypothesis with such glaring deficiencies would certainly not be taught as 'fact' in schools.

But the second problem is, that behind all this, there are now, as Prof Phillip Johnson has pointed out, two definitions of science. The first is the popular definition which insists science can only deal with natural processes and, for example, cannot contemplate any explanation about origins which suggests a non-material explanation such as 'mind before matter'. The older and more honest definition is that science goes where the evidence leads and does not rule out any possible explanation before it is given due consideration. It is clear then that evolution is based on the first definition. It is essentially materialistic dogma, not science. It persists for ideological reasons, despite the evidence.

So what is going to be taught in primary schools is the secular, humanistic, naturalistic worldview which rules out any possibility of design in nature, even before the evidence is considered. It is, in fact, a form of secular indoctrination.

The scientific study of origins is unlike any other because it has to consider the possibility of deliberate design in nature. That's why we argue that Intelligent Design should also be considered in any scientific study of origins.

Interestingly, in Radio 4's Today programme on March 6th, 2004, Sir David Attenborough said, 'The problem Darwin never solved was how one inorganic molecule became a living one. We're still struggling with that one.' That's the kind of honesty science needs, even though it is less apparent in some of his nature programmes. And in the film 'Expelled', Richard Dawkins, in an interview with Ben Stein, validates intelligent design by admitting that the intricacies of cellular biology could lead us to detect the existence of a 'higher intelligence' or 'designer' (his words). So why wouldn't we explore that with students?

It is high time we stopped indoctrinating pupils with the philosophy of naturalism dressed up as the scientific consensus. We should do what all honest scientists do, which is to go where the evidence leads. As has been observed, it takes years of indoctrination to miss the obvious signs of design in nature.

If schools are not going to be allowed to explore all the dimensions of origins, then perhaps it's time parents and churches did so! Or maybe even Free Schools!

Things you could do. For example,

1. If you are a parent, you could write to Michael Gove to say that you don't wish your child to be indoctrinated with secular atheism in the guise of evolutionary science. Write to him at The Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, Greater London, SW1P 3BT, or by email through their web site at www.education.gov.uk. Use some of the material if you wish, but it is always best to put your points in your own words. If you do write and get a response, please let us know its content via info@c4id.org.uk.

2. Encourage family members and friends with children to sign up for our monthly email news.

Dr Alastair Noble Director of the Centre for Intelligent Design UK, and Former HM Inspector of Schools in Scotland

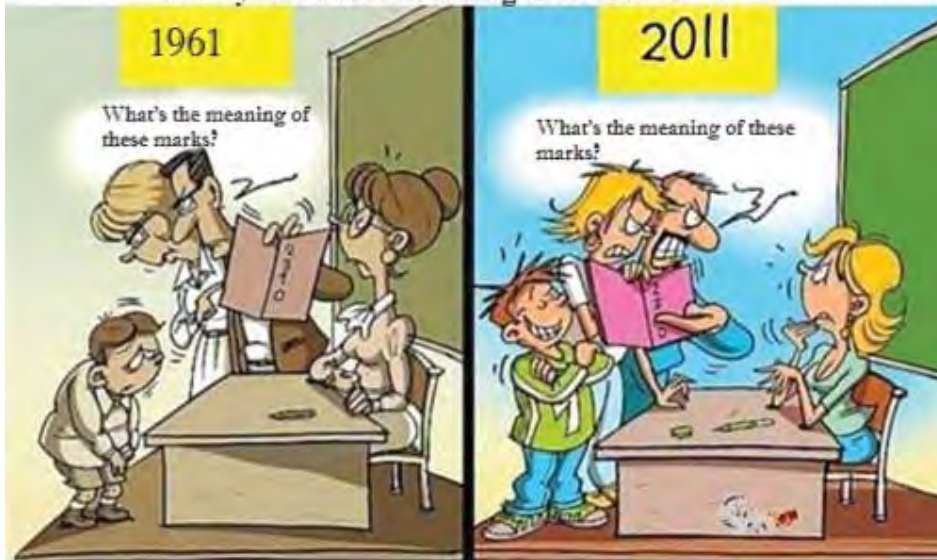
Prayer Spaces in Schools



Flying high: Children's prayers on display at Spring Harvest Minehead this year, as part of the Prayer Spaces for School stand, one of this year's Spring Harvest themes.

Below: Snapped during a quiet moment, Phil Togwell mans the stand.





copyright unknown

Unsuitable for investigation, unsuitable for education.

According to The Metro newspaper, police are abandoning inquiries into around 850,000 crimes a year because officers believe they are unlikely to be solved. Up to ninety percent of some offences are deemed unsuitable for investigation, to save resources. The Metropolitan Police Force abandoned investigation into more than 362,300 crimes in 2011-12.

I am grateful to our police officers for the job they do. The relative safety of our streets is due, in part, to their efforts. Police officers are not perfect, and, like in most employment sectors, we will find those ranging from the hero to the somewhat dodgy. And, if we are honest, the same is true in teaching. We will find most types in most professions: the hyperactive, the sensitive carer, the vicious schemer, the sloth etc.

One wonders what would happen if we abandoned certain children in our care because they were deemed unsuitable for the kind of examination success we are measured by, and we claimed that "it was a saving of resources". One of the truths that all teachers know, and that politicians find difficult, is the fact that one child can consume ten or more times resources than another. Or, to use another analogy, to navigate successfully, a canal boat requires a much greater depth of water than a swan.

Christians in education see each child, whether high-flying university material

or slow-lane plodder*, as made in the image of God. We understand that the fall has had a devastating impact on humanity through every generation since Genesis, chapter three. We also know that God has dealt totally with the situation. Christ's death for each of us is the boldest possible demonstration of God's love. Therefore, we are liberated to imitate Christ's work by spending time with struggling pupils. I suspect that spending time with individual pupils is the most powerful and effective thing we can do for them. After all, Jesus, although he was a great orator with audiences of thousands, also saw the value of spending time one-to-one with individuals.

Robert Hall

* William Carey saw himself as a plodder. The historic record would suggest otherwise.

Ofsted advice

Secondary headteacher Paul Bate describes inspection as a time when emotions are running high. He needs to be aware of those staff who might need more pre inspection reassurance and support. Paul says, 'On the whole, inspections are accurate although I can remember that on one inspection a certain department was given a glowing report when everyone knew it was the weakest in the school!'

Primary headteacher Dalwyn Attwell advises all staff to know the story of each child, and be prepared to tell it. Whereas you cannot know everything about each child, Dalwyn recommends that you can know their journey, where they have come from, where they are now, and where they are headed. This essential narrative should be at your fingertips.

Hope in an Age of Uncertainty

Dr John Shortt gave this address at the ATL union's Pre-Conference Service in Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral.

'Thank you for allowing me to share in your pre-conference service. I was a member of ATL throughout nearly all of my time in full-time employment in education. This includes the seventeen years I spent in the classrooms of a secondary school in Buckinghamshire, ten years working at the Stapleford Centre and another ten years plus as a consultant. I always valued ATL membership very highly and I feel very honoured to be invited to speak to you today.

An empty future

It was a seven-mile walk from Jerusalem to the village where they lived but it must have seemed longer than that to the two we met in the story we have just had read to us. Cleopas and his nameless companion must have been emotionally drained by the ups and downs of the previous few days. The happy children in the crowded streets had been displaced by a bloodthirsty mob outside the governor's residence. The joyful cries of 'Hosanna' had given way to hate-filled shouts of 'Crucify him'. Then there was the sad walk to the place of execution outside the city walls, the place where any lingering hopes had died along with the man called Jesus.

This was not how they had expected or wanted it to end. But it was over. "We had hoped ...", they said to the stranger who had overtaken them and walked along with them as they trudged homewards. "He was a prophet ...", they said, but they spoke in the past tense because he was gone. Nobody comes back from death, they implied, in spite of the women's fanciful stories about voices of angels and an empty tomb.

And their body language underlined their hopelessness for we read that their faces were 'downcast'. Their future had lost its horizon. Jerusalem was the city where it was all meant to take place, where the redemption of Israel should have burst on the scene but it had all turned out so differently. Their backs were now to Jerusalem and an empty future lay before them. The dream was ended, meaning had departed from their lives.

A hopeful world

I grew up in a world marked by hope for better things. It was a post-war world where progress was the name of the game: onwards and upwards. Many were finding that they had never had it so good. Winds of change were blowing and it was generally change for the better – in spite of the chill easterlies produced by the cold war. Sputnik had gone into orbit followed by the dog, Leika, and then by Yuri Gagarin and surely it could not be too long before the space race took man to the moon. What Jacob Bronowski called 'The Ascent of Man' was taken for granted. Some said it was the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. The world was getting better, we were getting richer and more comfortable, living longer and experiencing better health, seemingly more the masters of our own destinies. As a teenager, on the family farm in County Tipperary, with my eyes on the city in the distance, not Jerusalem but Dublin, the world was there for me to explore and to lay hold of what it had to offer me.

Is it different today for those we teach? I find it hard to imagine how the world and life seem to a child or young person. Even though I am a grandfather and very close to my two pre-teen grandsons, I cannot fully enter their world and see the future as they see it. Thomas Groome, Irish-American writer on religious education, tells of a mother and daughter he once saw in a shopping mall in Boston. With her finger wagging in the air for emphasis, the mother lectured the daughter: "When I was your age . . . When I was your age. . . ." The daughter waited. Finally, she interrupted, saying, "Ma, you were never my age." The mother was stunned into silence. Although I have clear recollections of what life was like for me when I was eleven (the age of my older grandson) and when I was six (the age of my younger grandson), in a real sense I was never their age because the world is different for them.

Orphans in an age of no tomorrows

It seems for many to be a world of fear rather than a world of hope, a world in which the possibility of environmental and, especially at the present time, economic catastrophe seems more tangible and omnipresent than the Cuban missile crisis ever did in the sixties.

It also seems to be a world of now rather than of the future, a world in which the



right to left: Dr. John Shortt, Right Reverend Thomas Williams, Auxiliary Bishop of Liverpool and Geoff Coggins, ACT Treasurer, who organised the event.

waiting has to be taken out of wanting. Perhaps this is because of our fears, perhaps we flee from them and shut them out by being taken up with the here and now rather than the there and then.

American folk-singer Joan Baez writes of the world that many young people inhabit in 'The Hitchhiker's Song'. She pictures them as hitchhikers holding out their thumbs, silhouetted against the mist that rolls in from the Pacific onto Highway One like a curtain to the day. She continues,

"You are the orphans in an age of no tomorrows and with your walking you wage a war against the sorrows
Your fathers left you a row to hoe and you'll hoe it."

"Orphans in an age of no tomorrows" – what a phrase! On a journey from nowhere to nowhere. Instead of living between memory and vision, the hitchhikers are cocooned in a world of now. In our age of uncertainty, this is not a matter of shattered hopes and unfulfilled dreams because, it sometimes seems, at least for some or even many, the hopes and dreams are not there in the first place.

Teaching for hope

What has the story from Luke to say to us for our work with children and young people who may be without hope in our uncertain world?

Cleopas and his nameless companion are transformed as the story unfolds. Their hearts begin to burn within them. Their eyes are opened. They get up and return at once to Jerusalem – seven miles along a now dark road, but it is nothing to them because they now have a new understanding of their times and a new hope within. They have discovered that death itself had died with the death of Jesus. "It is true! The Lord has risen!", they say to Jesus' followers who had stayed in Jerusalem.

What has brought about the change?

As the two walked along the road to Emmaus, we read that "Jesus himself came up and walked along with them". He walked along with them, he talked with them, he started where they were in their situation, he listened and experienced something of how disappointed they felt and then, gently and quietly, he took them to a bigger picture of what it was all about. And it was in something as ordinary and everyday as breaking bread and saying grace that the wonder of it all burst upon them, the extraordinary possibilities of life, hope-filled life, in God's world became visible.

I think there is a lot here for us as teachers. We are called to teach, not to evangelise, for those we walk with are not free to walk away and they are entrusted to our care as teachers.

We are called to teach, and that means walking with our students, talking with them, starting where they are, listening and experiencing something of how they

End of year report

written by Clive Ireson at the end of the academic year 2012-2013.

A long, long year in education. I have lost count of the number of new initiatives introduced by the coalition government. Our schools will never be the same again.

Many more of our schools under the academies programme are being centrally controlled. Our curriculum is being revised as is the examination and assessment system. School meals are under discussion. Local authorities have been sidelined. Many schools are losing their community governing bodies. Ofsted has become ever more powerful, changing the 'expectations' on a regular basis. With the shortage of school places even 'inadequate' rated schools are expanding. The first of the free schools has become 'inadequate' and the first of the free schools has become 'outstanding'.

Hope in an Age of Uncertainty *continued from page seven*

see and feel. Teaching is relational. We gather in the learning communities of our schools and classrooms, we who teach also learning and those who learn also teaching; yes, even teaching us for we have so much to learn ourselves.

Teaching is relational – we relate to one another but we also relate to that which we are studying together. As Parker Palmer puts it in his wonderful book 'The Courage to Teach', 'we gather around some great thing'. One of the positive aspects of these post-modern times is that the arrogant self-sufficiency of modernity has given way to a more humble attitude that recognises our weaknesses, limitations and vulnerabilities.

Humility is a precondition of learning and indeed, I think, also of teaching – humility before those whom we teach and that which we teach. We are not teaching subjects, we are opening windows on some aspect of God's world. Through one window, we look together at the world mathematically, through another historically, or psychologically or chemically or physically or aesthetically or linguistically. We may or may not refer to it explicitly as God's world but it is still a wonderful world to be discovered.

Academy chains are being challenged over how they are run. Teachers' pay is no longer to follow a regular format of yearly incremental rises for experience. There is a recruitment crisis for many primary headships. Perhaps the final brick of changes is the awaited new 'fairer' funding formula for schools.

I do believe the 'medicine' from Mr Gove is nearly over. Whilst the changes will take years to introduce, bed down and see if they work – I believe there will now be a charm offensive. In the last two years of this parliament - expect praise to be heaped on head teachers and their staff.

Despite all the changes, do we know whether our children are doing better now than before these reforms? The answer is clearly no. In fact it will be a decade before we know the effect of these changes. Currently, the state of our schools is being masked in published data, as each school that

In the ordinary and everyday, we may help those we teach, in the words of William Blake,

"To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour."

Irish poet Micheal O'Siadhail writes of a teacher he had as a boy:

"No blandishments or blind approval,
His unblinking trust enticed me,
Fingered some awareness of worth;
In his praise all is possible."

Thank God for that teacher who walked with us when we were young and talked with us and helped us to discern the extraordinary in the ordinary and everyday and to see a bigger picture of life in God's world. May we be refreshed and reinvigorated to follow our high calling, the call to teach. And how we do it may proclaim louder than any spoken words that Christ is risen indeed!
John Shortt www.johnshortt.org

Life is not an orange, it's a peach

'When we meet for worship on a Sunday, it's not the whole of our worship. There is no sacred / secular divide. What we do in the classroom is worship too. Don't segment life like you would an orange. Life's a peach!' *Anon.*

converts to an academy is treated as a new school without previous data. This, of course, negates overall data of the state of our schools in England.

It is worrying that one Secretary of State can make such a rapid change to our education system. Whether the changes have been successful will be for history to decide. The question we need to debate openly now in the country is should a Secretary of State have such power? Indeed, should education be such a political football? Also, we need to look carefully at how much money is being spent outside the classroom on academy organisations, consultants, Ofsted etc. to see whether some of that money would be better spent in schools.

Mr Gove, Whilst education cannot be immune to change – please, please in the future involve more teachers in both the construction and timescale for changes.
Clive Ireson, Director, Strategy.

The Association of Christian Teachers

Stephanie Muncherji

ACT Administrator, membership, finance
telephone 01604 632046
stephanie@actforhim.org.uk

Clive Ireson – Director, Strategy, press enquiries

mobile 07772 436532
clive@actforhim.org.uk

Robert Hall – Director, Membership, pastoral matters, newsletter, ACTuality

direct line 0121 364 0808
mobile 07890 118993
robert@actforhim.org.uk

Trustees

Barbara Bell, Ludlow, Joint vice-chair

Carol Morrison, Middlesex

Colin Broomfield Hertfordshire, Company Secretary

Frances Aubrey, London, Joint vice-chair

Hugh Bradby, Warwickshire, Chair

Jamie Jamieson, Isle of Wight

Jeanette Hender, Sefton

Paul Bate, Somerset

Registered office:

Rowan House 23 Billing Road
Northampton NN1 5AT
telephone 01604 632046

Registered Charity 295328

Company Limited by Guarantee 2056400