Education and Evangelism: Protagonists or Partners?

An examination of one of the issues raised by the proliferation of schools ministry in England

Introduction

There is a unique partnership at work in the education system of England and Wales between church and state. Historically this is reflected in the early establishment of church schools and training colleges. This legacy has continued through legislation that captures this arrangement but also charges all schools with a clear responsibility for the religious dimension of education. In a changing society we might have expected that legislation would be amended but the recent education acts have restated and strengthened the responsibility of schools for the 'spiritual development' of the pupils in their care. At the same time there has been a significant growth in the appointment of church based youth workers operating not from a community model but from a faith-based perspective. For them school has been one of the places where the young people they connect with spend a significant amount of time. The combination of a legislative mandate and a willingness and availability for involvement in the school day has led to a significant involvement in school communities by church based youth workers.

But underneath the surface there is a clash of agenda's. The mission of school is 'Education', that of many youth workers (and more especially their employers) is 'Evangelism'. Strategies have been adopted by those in both settings that gloss over these 'hidden agendas', because both parties benefit from the arrangement. Schools get people who can communicate with young people and help them deliver what the law requires. Youth workers get access to the environment that shapes the values of the young people they want to reach and a venue to meet them that is not overtly Christian.

In this paper I want to begin by exploring the historical roots of the churches involvement with education. This will lead us to thinking about what distinctive contributions Christians have made and could make to the world of Education.

It will also lead us to examine what we understand by the word 'Education' and what a 'Christian Education' means in a formal schooling context. We will then explore common understandings of 'Evangelism'. Contrasting those two ideas will enable us to see if there are areas of common ground and/or conflict at work. We will then examine some models of involvement in schools life and develop a framework for comparing them. This will then lead us to finally consider the question posed in the title – Protagonists or Partners? – with some practical hints towards developing a theology appropriate for schools ministry.

An English Historical Perspective

Although there are examples of church involvement in state education in other part of the world, the state funding and voluntary partnership in England and Wales is unique.

A brief look at more recent history will help in our understanding of the issue. New denominations established elementary schools during the 1800s. Two particular organisations led the way. The British and Foreign School Society founded in 1811, was interdenominational and evangelical aimed to promote 'the Education of the Labouring and Manufacturing classes of Society of every Religious Persuasion'[1]. The National Society was also founded in 1811 for promoting the 'education of the poor in the principles of the Established Church'. As a Church of England institution it insisted that instruction in the Bible, prayer book and the catechism was part of the curriculum, all teachers had to be Anglican and church attendance on Sundays should be Anglican[2]. Both organisations asked parents to contribute to running costs and so from 1818 some 'ragged schools' in the major cities were set up to provide an rudimentary education without the payment of fees as well as food and clothing to prevent children living on the streets[3].

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[1] Huelin, Gordon., 'Innovation: The National Society 1811-1834, in Yates, Joanna and Leonard Graham (eds.), *Faith for the Future* (London: The National Society 1986) 20.
[2] Kay, William K. and Francis, Leslie., *Religion in Education* Vol. 1 12.
[3] *Religion in Education* Vol. 1 12.

At this stage the churches were providing almost all the finance but there was a key moment politically in 1833 when the government voted to give £20,000 for the building of schools and education of the poor. One of the conditions was that either The National Society or the British and Foreign School Society had to support the application and be convinced that the school would be maintained. Having made this early decision, the government were then to some extent obliged to support church schools. Between 1833 and 1870, the Methodist and the Roman Catholics established schools using state grants. As government funding increased so did government control. In 1870 the Education Act established the dual system that forms the basis of the current position. It allowed the churches to continue to run denominational schools but where that provision was inadequate it encouraged and funded 'Board schools' (so called because they were run by locally elected school boards). This dual system of voluntary bodies – namely churches and statutory bodies running schools continues to this day.[4].

It is worth noting at this point that the starting point for this involvement in education was primarily driven by social need and Christian faith nurture rather than evangelism. Those being educated were the poor who without access to basic literacy and numeracy were often excluded from taking on wider roles in society.

The Butler Act of 1944 [5] that forms the basis of our current position essentially consolidated this dual system. Religious Education was compulsory for all schools and comprised both collective worship and classroom instruction, taught according to a locally agreed syllabus. Schools not provided by the churches were known as County schools. Schools provided by the churches were known as voluntary schools and could choose to be voluntary-controlled or voluntary-aided. The differences are complex but a simple distinction will suffice for our purposes. In controlled schools there is more 'control' resting with the government and consequently more funding is provided and

[4] Francis, Leslie J., 'Church and state' in Francis L., and Lankshear, David W., *Christian Perspectives on Church Schools* (Leominster: Gracewing 1993) 154-155
[5] Cruickshank, Marjorie., *Church and State in English Education; 1870 to the present day* (London: Macmillan 1963) 135-169.

Religious Education follows the agreed syllabus. In an aided school, less control and funding come from the government and so denominational instruction is allowed.

The response of the churches demonstrated clearly differing theological perspectives. In general Anglicans opted for the controlled route, Catholics for the aided and the Methodist (the largest non-conformist group) opted to get involved in state education rather than run denominational schools.

It is this dual system that undergirds many of the current debates regarding so-called 'faith schools'. The 1988 Education Act largely reinforced the place of collective worship and Religious Education in schools[6] (although it had its opponents) and the current debate is centred on the way that society has changed since 1944.

Alongside this involvement in state education, there have always been independent fee-paying schools that have a Christian foundation[7]. Many of these are still in existence and their ethos and philosophy are often encapsulated in both their trust deed and reflected in the structure of the curriculum and the school day. Additionally there has been a limited growth in modern independent Christian schools seeking to offer an alternative approach to what is seen as a secular humanist curriculum. Recent developments include a growth in city academies funded and run by Christian businessman and charitable organisations[8].

Reflections on the historical perspective

This brief look at history offers us some insights into the effect that theology has on behaviour with regard to the place of schools in society, education in general and the relationship between state and church in matters of faith.

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[6] DfEE, *Education Reform Act 1988* Sections 6-12
http://www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/Ukpga_19880040_en_1.htm .
[7] Winchester, http://www.winchestercollege.org/default.asp and Eton
http://www.etoncollege.com/default.asp .
[8] Oasis Community Learning, http://www.oasiscommunitylearning.org/

But the growth of involvement during the 1800s was driven by a combination of social, political and theological perspectives. These differing views led to very different approaches to church schools – largely encapsulated in the provisions of and the responses to the 1944 Butler Act. All of the approaches start from the presupposition that education of people is an inalienable right for human beings regardless of age, race and gender. One area of confusion is the way the terms 'Education' and 'schooling' are used interchangeably. We will limit ourselves to the formal pattern we know as 'schooling' but we shall see that the role that schools play in education vary enormously.

1) Church Schools as places of faith nurture

This position has been clearly taken by the Roman Catholic Church. Pope Paul VI declared that the proper function of the Catholic school was

> 'to create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity, to help youth grow according to the new creatures they were made through baptism as they develop their own personalities, and finally to order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith[9].

The outworking of this has meant that Catholic schools seek to act as 'a catechetical community in which the content and the life of faith are shared'[10]. It is also clear that faith nurturing is to be a partnership between parents, churches and schools and that 'This vision of the Catholic school lies at the heart of the firm expectation that Catholic parents send their children to Catholic schools, if at all possible'[11]. This approach inevitably leads to an application to adopt a 'voluntary-aided' status for schools so that catechism teaching can take place in the school environment.

2) Church Schools as places where children hearing Christian teaching.

[9] Pope Paul VI., *Gravissimum Educationis,* Oct 28 1965, Section 8 paragraph 1 http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html (27 June 2002).

[10] Bishop's Conference of England and Wales*., Bishops' statement on R.E. in Catholic Schools*, Press Release http://217.19.224.165/CN/00/000504a.htm (27 June 2002).

[11] *Bishops' statement on R.E. in Catholic Schools*, Press Release.

Whereas the Catholic Schools exist for Catholics to be nurtured in the faith, the Church of England schools have been founded on the idea that schools would be places where foundations of basic Christian truths are taught. As such they are not just for parents of believing children but are open to all. In cases where schools are oversubscribed, preference is often given to church attending families (thereby moving schools towards approach 1 above). The Church of England believes that as the State Church it has a responsibility to be involved in the Education system of the country. It would be argued that to understand the society we live in and how our country functions, children need a foundation in the Christian principles on which it is founded.

3) Christian schools as alternative models of Education.

The newer Christian schools have often been founded as a result of a concern about the secular values that underpin current Educational Philosophies. As a result of what has been perceived as a 'hidden curriculum', some Christians have established new schools, founded and at least partially funded by Christians. They have some similarities with model 1 above, but they particularly want to develop ways of delivering the curriculum in a way that reflects particular Christian emphases[12].

4) Christian involvement in state education.

For some the provision by the state of compulsory education founded on the 1944 Act with collective worship and Religious Education for all, led to a belief that the most important place to be is involved in the County Schools as a Christian influence. In fact the 1988 Education Act charges all schools with responsibility for the curriculum to 'promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at school and of society'[13]. There have been increasing calls for churches to recognise a call to teach as a vocation equal to that of the calling to ordained ministry[14]. Methodist churches favoured this route after 1944 and so the number of Methodist Schools has

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[12] MacKenzie, Pamela., *Entry points for Christian reflection in education* (London: CARE for Education 1997) Chapter 5.
[13] *Education Reform Act 1988* Section 1 paragraph 2.
[14] *The Way Ahead.* 50.

declined to a very small level as a result of a conscious decision to get involved in state education.

Defining 'Education'

A cursory study of the literature on Christian Education highlights a major problem in this area. What do we mean by the term 'Christian Education'? Many writers acknowledge this issue but in doing so choose to define the term in relation to religious instruction or faith nurture. Astley and Day identify five distinct understandings[15]. In order to attempt to provide some clarity I intend to focus on what could be termed a Christian perspective on Education. But the situation is made worse when we seek to define education because in everyday usage the word is used in many different ways.

Most dictionary definitions see education as

> 'a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills'[16].

This is a useful starting point for thinking about a Christian perspective. In seeking to establish a curriculum influenced by Christian theology the questions become

1. What knowledge and skills do we want our young people to acquire? and
2. Are there any processes of teaching training and learning that contradict our beliefs and values?

It is important to recognise that seeing the goal of education closely linked to knowledge and skills is heavily influenced by a Greek model of education. In contrast a Jewish model of 'knowing' is focussed much more strongly on relationships[17].

It has been suggested by William B Anderson that the two tasks that are central to education are person-building and community-building and that

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[15] Astley J., and Day D., 'The Contours of Christian Education' in Astley J., and Day D., (eds.), *The Contours of Christian Education* (McGrimmons: Great Wakering, 1992) 14-16

[16] Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, http://www.oup.com/oald-bin/web_getald7index1a.pl

[17] MacKenzie, Pamela., *Entry points for Christian reflection in education* (London: CARE for Education 1997) 73, 267

these are achieved through understanding and involvement in personal relationships [18]. This leads him to suggest that having developed a Christian view of Education based on a Christian vision of life, we can proceed to a Christian view of schooling[19].

Defining Evangelism

The word evangelism and the role evangelist have a damaged reputation in contemporary society. This may be because the image of the word has become associated with a particular method of evangelism. But the use of the term among youth workers in the church (many of whom come from a tradition that would describe itself as 'evangelical') reflects the prevailing understanding in Western Christianity, namely that evangelism is tied into the proclamation of the Christian gospel[20]. This should come as no surprise since the 52 occurrences of the verb 'to evangelise' in the New Testament focus on 'announcing or proclaiming the good news'[21].

However the term takes on a slightly different tone when we consult dictionary definitions that often associate the word evangelize with the concept of 'persuading people to become Christians'[22]. Implicit in this is that to persuade people is something inappropriate in our tolerant society. But it highlights for us, what is often at the root of the problem of evangelism in an educational setting. For many evangelism by its very nature demands a response. It is proclamation for a purpose. The Lausanne covenant puts it succinctly

> 'evangelism is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God.'[23]

This is at the heart of the unspoken agenda that I referred to earlier.

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[18] Anderson, William B., 'A Biblical view of Education' in Francis, Leslie J. and Thatcher, Adrian., (eds.) *Christian Perspectives for Education* (Leominster: Gracewing 1990) 48.
[19] Francis, Leslie J. and Thatcher, Adrian., (eds) *Christian Perspectives for Education* 48.
[20] Abraham, Dr. William., *The Logic of Evangelism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1989) 41
[21] Watson, David *I believe in Evangelism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1976) 26
[22] Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, http://www.oup.com/oald-bin/web_getald7index1a.pl
[23] Quoted in Watson, David *I believe in Evangelism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1976) 26

In recent times there has been a shift in language use by those involved in schools ministry. Recognising that the word evangelism is a stumbling block, they have adopted the word 'mission' instead. Whilst recognising that some have taken on board a wider understanding of the terms, for many this is simply a change in language. Beneath the language is hidden an understanding that is primarily focussed on evangelism as proclamation for response. In reality their view is summed up by Metropolitan Mar Osthathios

> 'Evangelism is the spreading of the good news by proclamation, whereas mission is the outflow of the love of God in and through our life, word and deed'[24]

The Conflict between Education and Evangelism

This understanding of evangelism has a significant influence on the starting point for many involved in schools ministry. Since their task is proclamation they look for places where the good news can be proclaimed. In a school setting these are part of the legislative framework. All schools should have a daily act of collective worship and are required to teach Religious Education as part of the curriculum.

But the educational setting brings with it significant constraints

1. The setting is compulsory – so any proclamation needs to be done in a way that respects the integrity of the individual.
2. The setting is pluralistic – so all that is said needs to be done in a way that demonstrates a respect for the multiplicity of beliefs present in the group
3. The setting is formal – so appropriate responses need to be developed that take account of these limitations.

In addition some things just don't work in school and so there is a need to develop appropriate methods for this setting

However education is not value free and any school seeking to offer appropriate education for its students needs to allow for the expression and discussion of a wide range of viewpoints so that students are able to make

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[24] Quoted in Abraham, Dr. William., *The Logic of Evangelism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1989) 42

decisions for themselves. The justification for our Christian activity in school must be justifiable on the grounds of education because that is the very basis on which schools exist

This conflict is well illustrated by debates among schools workers

> We'd never ever got to grips with the relationship between education and evangelism. It's the dark shadow in the closet of schools work. To the churches we talked evangelism. To the Head Teachers we talked education. We prayed the two would never meet[25]

> Youth workers engaged in schools work, however, will inevitably question the appropriateness of direct or relational evangelism while in school time or on school premises[26]

Faced with this situation there are three common responses that leave the conflict unresolved

1. Involvement at a lower age range – particularly under 11's dominates so that a foundation of Christian teaching can be laid for future commitment. Often at this age there is a greater emphasis on knowledge acquisition and so this is an easier option. This foundational approach has some merits and compensates for the decline in church attendance. However any coherent strategy will need to have plans for involvement when children become adolescents at secondary school

2. A sense of frustration kicks in because the setting prevents the youth worker from doing what they perceive they should be doing – 'proclaiming the good news'. They then either try harder to make sure the message is heard or they give up because there is no response. Often this is combined with a high energy, high impact campaign on a short term basis with significant energy invested in these occasions. There is clearly value in such activities, but the long term effect is not to use the schools as a way of getting to the young people, rather than contributing to the task of education

3. The youth worker gets involved in a wider range of activities in the school as a way of making contacts and being known – even adopting

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[25] Curtis, Chris., *The Death of Schools Work*
http://www.lcet.org/downloads/the_death_of_schoolswork.doc
[26] Jacskson, Lee. *Evangelism vs Education*
http://www.schoolsministrynetwork.co.uk/education_v_evangelism.htm

the language that they think is appropriate ('Christians believe that…).
However this continues to be simply a place to build relationships so
that significant work can take place outside of the school setting. It is
almost as if they are operating undercover as a guerrilla fighter –
hoping to rescue some from the tyranny they live under.

To continue in this vein is to end up with Education and Evangelism as
protagonists. If we ignore this then we are likely to end up with only a limited
understanding of the value of schools ministry

At this point it is worth reminding ourselves that the situation we have been
describing has a number of unique characteristics as a result of our
educational history. In most parts of the world Christians have no rights of
access to the educational process. They are there by negotiation and
partnership. Where education is secular Christians have needed to develop
strategies that justified involvement in school life on the grounds of education.
Some of those secular approaches also dominate in our educational system.
Christians and especially those in Church Schools have been and continue to
be challenged on the grounds of 'religious indoctrination' and 'intolerance.
This is because Christianity makes exclusive truth claims regarding the
person of Jesus. In getting involved in school we need to make explicit our
agenda. But Copley argues cogently that educational institutions are in danger
of 'secular indoctrination' by default[27] and that this sort of indoctrination is only
tolerant of those that agree with their own starting point.

Given these tensions and the need for sensitivity in the school setting, there is
no doubt that the current situation in England is one of great opportunity and
openness. This is a situation that may not last for ever so it is vital that we
develop methods of working that demonstrate real partnerships between
those in the school and church communities. We also need to develop a
rationale for partnership that allows us to be true to our calling whilst
acknowledging the genuine limitations of the context

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[27] Copley Terence, *Indoctrination, Education and God: The Struggle for the Mind* (London: SPCK
2005) 3-7

Resolving the Conflict

I would like to suggest that there are a number of steps that need to be taken if real partnerships are to develop. A number of strategies can then develop that will allow us to be true to the tasks of education and evangelism.

1. Developing a Christian perspective on education

As Western society has increasingly rejected a modernist rationalistic worldview as the meta-narrative by which it makes decisions about the world, so the place of religious belief has been relegated from the public arena to that of private opinion[28]. In the educational world, the place of religion in education has been strongly challenged by the views of Paul Hirst on the nature of religious knowledge. He states that religious knowledge is highly subjective and hence not appropriate for study in schools. He goes even further and suggests that 'the notion of Christian Education is properly regarded as an anachronism'[29].

The impact of Paul Hirst's thinking cannot be underestimated. His views led to many Christian teachers feeling that their faith was a private matter and nothing to do with being a teacher. However its underlying premise is that there is a neutral view of Education that is to be aspired to and one step to that is to remove religion from schools. His arguments have prompted a wave of responses and discussions. These are well summarised in 'Critical Perspectives on Christian Education'[30]. Much of this thinking about the nature of education and the theology of education has mot permeated to the churches and often not even as far as the teachers being trained in church colleges, and certainly not to the youth work world.

This view of value-free education needs to be challenged. Everyone imposes their values on education by virtue of their presuppositions and for education

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[28] Newbiggin, Lesslie., *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1989) 14-26.
[29] Hirst, Paul., 'Christian Education: a contradiction in terms' in Astley, Jeff., and Francis, Leslie J., (eds.) *Critical Perspectives on Education* (Leominster: Gracewing 1994) 305-313.
[30] Astley, Jeff., and Francis, Leslie J., (eds.) *Critical Perspectives on Education.*

to be effective it needs to allow space to explore the faith positions that inform and motivate the actions of individuals and groups in society[31].

Historically, current church involvement in state education has been driven a range of factors: a desire for increased literacy and numeracy so that people might read the Bible and learn the catechism, a desire for faith nurture, a concern to fulfil the role of the state church by being partners in the education of all children or a reaction to what are perceived as the inadequacies of a state system. Those involved in schools ministry need to grasp this history alongside their understanding of theology and mission. But they also need to have an understanding of the contemporary issues faced by schools.

Two recent developments offer a way forward in developing this thinking.

A) FAITH IN THE FUTURE: In March 2006 the Church of England held a conference to celebrate the history of church schools and to look to the future. This was 5 years after the Dearing report on church schools suggested that schools should be at the centre of the mission task of the church[32]. In planning for the future their emphasis is on 'Transforming Church and Community through Education and Learning'[33]. It sees its role as

> 'to promote education and learning that **nurtures** people within the church and community; **encourages** all people's vocation and participation; **equips** those engaged in all forms of service; and **provides** opportunities of the highest quality[34]

B) OASIS COMMUNITY LEARNING: as part of the current educational policy Oasis plans to open City Academies with a distinctively Christian ethos. This is clearly stated in their statement of purpose, ethos and values.

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[31] Cooling, Trevor., *A Christian Vision for State Education* (London: SPCK 1994) 50-63.
[32] *The Way Ahead: Church of England Schools in the new millennium* (London: Church House Publishing 2001).
[33] Hall John in draft strategy document April 2005.
http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/education/quinquennium.doc
[34] Hall John in draft strategy document April 2005.
http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/education/quinquennium.doc

> 'our work is motivated and inspired by the life, message and example of Christ, which shapes and guides every aspect of each of our schools. This is foundational to our belief that all people are created and loved by God and to our commitment to model inclusion and compassion through all aspects of the life and culture of each Academy community'[35].

Although these statements reflect approaches to 'Christian schools', they offer an approach to education which is deeply rooted in a Christian approach to education. It is this sort of thinking that those involved in school need to undertake if they are to effectively contextualise their work.

2. Developing our understanding of evangelism

It would be possible to engage in a much wider discussion about the relationship between mission and evangelism, but at this stage it is suffice to say that all of the work of mission must be rooted in the mission of God. In addition there is much written about the changing nature of society with the influence of postmodernity and potential alternative approaches to evangelism. However I want to focus narrowly on the task of evangelism as previously outlined – namely the task of proclamation of the good news.

The apostle Paul in the first century embarked on the task of proclaiming the good news in a multi-cultural and multi-faith society. He encounters a range of differing philosophies and religions. He preaches the message in Ephesus – the centre of worship to Artemis, Lystra – where the suggestion that they are gods links to Greek deities and in Athens he engages with Epicurian and Stoic philosophers. In some ways however it is seeking to model our evangelism on Paul that we run into difficulties. We read these passages through our own cultural lens of individualism. Yet the term evangelist only appears three times in the New Testament[36]. Our focus on studying Paul has often been focussed on his speaking activities to the exclusion of the other activities. Instead we need to recognise that Paul's primary task was to establish communities. So on his journeys he sought to develop churches. His journeys often involved re-

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[35] Immingham Academy purpose statement.
http://www.oasisacademyimmingham.co.uk/assets/PurposeEthosValues.pdf
[36] Watson, David *I believe in Evangelism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1976) 34

visiting those communities and his letters bear witness to his commitment to supporting and strengthening them.

This establishment of community is at the heart of the evangelistic task. In that sense we need to see evangelism as a corporate responsibility outworked through individuals. This emphasises God's call to be a people who belong to him and who live out his values. God's people are god's message of good news to the world.

> ' Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:5.6)

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. ….. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us (1 Peter 2:10,12)

This call to be a community of evangelism has a number of implications. Firstly, the proclamation of the message always takes place in the context of a community that embodies God's character and purpose. So the idea of acting as a lone evangelist should not exist. Anyone involved in the life of school communities needs to identify the others in that community who are called to be God's people in that place. Secondly, God's people are to be a blessing to those they meet. The priest mediates between God and people and we are called to be a 'kingdom of priests'. This means that by their way they live in the school community, believers are to be a source of God's grace and love. Thirdly, in order to fulfil God's purposes, his people need to be distinctive in lifestyle and relationships. As Peter suggests in the verses above, we are called to declare God's praises and to live good lives. We need to be involved in the life of that school community if we are to proclaim the message.

Too often in schools ministry, driven by a right desire to speak to those beyond the community of faith, visitors have by-passed the rest of God's people in the school community. However God's strategy is to call a people to

live for him as his people in that school community. It is only as we do so that we will be effective in evangelism – proclaiming the good news from a context where it is seen to be lived out.

Partnership?

In an educational system that is often driven by a secular humanist agenda, it is vital that Christians develop appropriate partnerships to express God's message of good news in word and deed to those in school. But what does this partnership look like and what role does the Christian visitor play?

1. God's people in school: fundamental to thinking about this partnership is the recognition that for Christian staff and students, school is the venue where their faith is expressed. Any activity that takes place in school needs to take account of this. It is easy for this to be seen as having meetings but fundamentally it is about relationships. Just as Jesus came to serve, God's people are called to serve their community. For the visitor this means that the activities we engage should be deigned to empower those Christians in school to live out their vocation. This will clearly have a personal dimension as we look at ways of equipping people to live in ways that reflect the gospel. But it also has a community aspect. How can Christians serve their school community – getting involved in all aspects of that community? Being involved in sport and music, not just for personal fulfilment but in order to bring God's love and care to those settings. Attending school functions and helping out at special occasions. There will also be specific opportunities to be more explicit about faith – through school assembly or special services. The Christian community in school can act as the conscience of the school as it raises issues of need in the local and global communities and take initiative in developing activities to build supportive links with them. The international links that exist provide real opportunities to demonstrate God's care for the poor through his people. This vision of God's people as a servant community should be at the heart of any schools ministry.

2. Partners in spiritual development: school is the place where many of our values are shaped and responsibility for spiritual development is stated in the

legislation[37]. Getting involved in this area is an area where Christians have a distinctive contribution to make. Although many see Christianity as irrelevant and out of date, they are interested in the spiritual realm. There is ground to be reclaimed here as we seek to help young people to see ways of engaging with Christian spirituality, This task of 'evangelism in a spiritual age'[38] is one that means we need to rethink how we connect with those who have grown up in a world which doe not have knowledge of key Biblical concepts and ideas. This is an area that offers opportunities in all areas of the curriculum and the resources produced for the Charis project[39]. offer a useful starting point. They also remind us that evangelism will ultimately impact the whole of life.

3. Ministers of God's grace: if God's people are to be a blessing to those they meet, then there is a clear role for people in what we might term a 'chaplaincy' role in schools work. This demonstrates God's care for the whole person and seeks to meet needs of the community. Involvement in school life is costly both in time and pastoral resources. A commitment to the growth of chaplaincy in schools would signal the clearest intent about to partner with schools in helping young people achieve their full potential.

The Future?

Current education policy is re-inventing local communities with schools at the hub. A range of children's services are on offer with extended care and school provision based on one site. When churches were involved in starting schools, they did so because they were at the hub of the community. If we are to meet the challenge of the future, we will need to explore what it means to be God's people in these communities. This will mean developing a range of partnerships with others – those of the same faith, other faiths and no faith. Our motivation is that we serve a God who

> 'made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross' (Phil 2:7,8)

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[37] DfEE, *Education Reform Act 1988*

[38] *Evangelism in a spiritual age: communicating faith in a changing culture* (London: Church House Publishing 2005)

[39] *http://www.stapleford-centre.org/Charis/charis.html*

It will mean thinking again about how we use our resources, live our lives and worship God in places that are shared with others in the community. It will involve partnering in providing nursery care or after school care. It will mean building chaplaincy links with schools so that we look for ways to serve them and bless them. A more radical approach might even consider relocating churches to be part of this new community hub. If we fail to do so, simply meeting in our places of worship and not interacting and engaging at the community hub we will be left behind. More importantly we will fail to be the people God has called us to be – that would be the biggest tragedy of all.