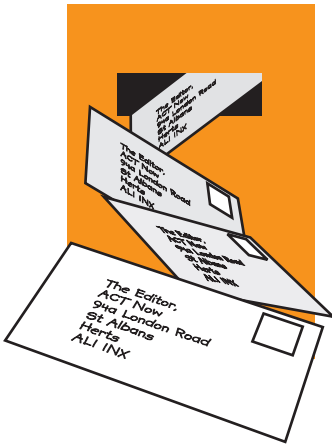


notes in the post



Dear Editor

I am grateful to David Edgington for his sympathetic and careful review of my book, *Whatever Happened to Religious Education?* (ACT Now, Autumn 2004)

I do not argue that only the Christian faith should be the subject matter of Religious Education (RE). I do, however, contend that a grounding in Christianity is necessary before other religions are introduced. I say: 'at some point... a serious study of some other religions must begin.' (p158)

The central point at issue, and here I agree with Edgington, is on what basis RE is to proceed. Edgington suggests three possibilities:

- To introduce children to a 'religious dimension to life'.
- To teach children about religions.
- To present children with a wide-reaching menu of religious morsels from which children construct their own belief system.

The problem is that none of these options is satisfactory. The first option assumes that religions can be understood as variations upon a theme, 'religion'. Attempts to set out the dimensions of something called religion inevitably break down because of the great variety and complexity of individual 'religions'. The second option, depending on how religions are taught, may also leave pupils thinking that religions are variations on a theme. Or pupils will learn that no-one really knows which religion is true or to be believed. Hence RE may end up favouring the third option ie pupils learn that all they can do is to construct a belief system which appeals to them.

My concern was that I could not conscientiously base my teaching on any of these options. I therefore set out to write a book that would argue that the better option was

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to teach Religious Education on the basis that Christianity is true. My book is an attempt to show that this option: is better from a philosophical point of view; is in accordance with legal requirements; and respects the rights of parents and the responsibilities of society. I argue that it is best to approach Religious Education with a firm grip on what is believed to be true, rather than a woolly agnosticism or vague sense of universal religiosity. In this scenario a teacher's faith becomes a primary resource, rather than a problem best battened down below decks, voiceless apart from acts of kindness.

Penny Thompson

Author of *Whatever Happened to Religious Education?*

