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— Introduction —

The biblical perspective

These are things we learnt from our ancestors, and we will tell them to the next generation. We won't keep secret the glorious deeds and the mighty miracles of the Lord. God gave his Law to Jacob's descendants, the people of Israel. And he told our ancestors to teach their children, so that each new generation would know his Law and tell it to the next. Then they would trust God and obey his teachings, without forgetting anything God had done.

PSALM 78:3–7

It is evening and the whole family is gathered around the table for dinner. Candles are lit; the best crockery and silver are sparkling; special food has been prepared and served. Toasts are drunk, news is shared and stories are told. You can decide where this meal is taking place. It could be in almost any part of the world and in almost any century.

Suddenly, the youngest child turns to his father. 'Why is tonight different from all the other nights?' he asks. 'On all other nights, we eat either leavened bread or "Matza"; on this night, only Matza.' And, as the Passover moon shines through the window, the father retells the story of how God delivered his ancient people, the Jewish nation, out of slavery in Egypt to freedom in the promised land.

In the Bible we read how Moses commanded the Jewish people to hand down this message of their deliverance to their descendants:

Some day your children will ask, 'Why did the Lord give us these laws and teachings?' Then you will answer: We were slaves of the king of Egypt, but the Lord used his great power and set us free... The Lord rescued us from Egypt, so he could bring us into this land, as he had promised our

ancestors. That's why the Lord our God demands that we obey his laws and worship him with fear and trembling. (Deuteronomy 6:20–21, 23–24)

Over the centuries, this has evolved into a ceremonial meal. A significant point is that the youngest child is at the centre of the ceremony. He asks the questions; his father teaches him through his replies and reminds the whole family of the story. The ritual is a response to God's command to hand down the story that gave his people identity at times of persecution and assured them of their role as his chosen people.

Jesus gave children a central place in his teaching. In the prevailing culture, children were ignored in public, but he welcomed them, called them 'signs of his kingdom' and was harsh with the disciples who wanted to marginalise them. As we have noted, children played a central part in Jewish celebrations and the early Jewish church would have continued this practice. Children were part of the household and would have been present when Christians met in homes for teaching, prayers and the breaking of bread.

In Ephesians 6:1, Paul addresses children directly: 'Children, you belong to the Lord, and you do the right thing when you obey your parents.' Then he reminds parents of the way that they should treat their children: 'Parents, don't be hard on your children' (v. 4). The style of his writing indicates that the children would have been present with the rest of their families, listening to his letter being read to them.

How do we continue to tell the story of our salvation to today's children? The Church and children's education have always been closely linked; indeed, they were almost inseparable until the time of the Reformation. Today, a significant number of children are educated in Christian schools, but not every child goes to a church school. Even fewer attend church. Family life is no longer based around shared meals and there is no guarantee that parents will know the Christian story or be willing to tell it.

This book has been written to encourage local churches to see their local school as a place where they can live out their Christian calling to ‘tell the story’ in today’s culture. This can be as much through presence and practical support as through teaching and leading worship, and has the added bonus of giving confidence to schools to see their local church as a teaching resource as well as a community with much to offer.



— 1 —

Christian vocation

‘Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also... Seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness.’

MATTHEW 6:21, 33 (NIV)

Every day we are faced with hundreds of choices. Some of them involve a selection between two unimportant actions: what to eat for supper or whether to travel by car or on foot. We often make these choices almost mechanically. Other choices are more difficult and take time to think through. They have long-term consequences for ourselves and for the people around us. Behind all these choices, however, lies a fundamental choice about how we live and the direction we follow as individuals. Once that choice is made, the smaller decisions tend to follow automatically. That is why the basic decisions matter so much. If a life has no clear focus, it leads to confused and inconsistent choices with the resulting lack of direction.

The idea of vocation is closely bound up with choice. If choice is an inescapable part of daily life and rests on that fundamental choice of direction, then vocation by implication encompasses the whole of life.

Responding to a call

Perhaps you are wondering why there is a chapter about vocation so early in this book, or even here at all. The very term ‘vocation’ sounds dramatic and mysterious, and a long way from the playground of a local primary school. The word comes from the Latin *vocare*, which means ‘to call’ or ‘to summon’. It implies that there is someone to do the calling and that the call is asking the listener to move from

one state or position to another. It suggests a new way of living or a new task.

In practice, as Christians we believe that God calls each one of us. He invites us to a way of being or to perform some particular task. This means that God has his own plan for every person and that we need to hear and accept his call. It involves responding to him and committing ourselves to his service in whatever position or place he invites us to be.

Like many other religious words, 'vocation' has become part of everyday vocabulary and changed its meaning. It often means little more than a change of job or career. 'Vocational guidance' helps people to sort out what they want from life and how to use their skills and experience to achieve it; 'vocational training' is education geared towards a particular range of jobs, and so on. This changed meaning has, in turn, affected the Church's understanding of vocation, with a loss of the clear sense that it is God who calls. It can become bound up with individual feelings and needs, but we are not unrelated individuals. We are in relationships within our families and our various communities, and we share a common humanity. God calls us into existence, he calls us to be a holy people, and then he brings a particular call to each individual person within that context.

Within the Church, the word 'vocation' is commonly restricted to the religious life, to ordination and a plethora of authorised lay ministries. A great deal of time and expertise is spent on encouraging and training people for these particular ministries, but it has sometimes led to 'professional' clericalism and the concept of two-tier Christian ministry. Typically, this means that little interest or official support is given to the majority of Christians who live out their baptismal calling 'in the world'.

There is only one answer to the question, 'Do I have a vocation?' That is, 'Yes!' Asking that question is part of living out the Christian life and leads to the search to discover how and where God is inviting us to fulfil our particular calling.

Proclaiming the gospel in our daily lives

Nearly all lay people and some clergy live out their Christian calling in the home, in secular employment and through voluntary service. This inevitably entails close cooperation with people who may not share our Christian faith but are committed to the same values or have common interests or skills.

As Christians, we are called first and foremost to be ourselves, to proclaim the gospel by living out our faith where we are, whatever our means of employment, and particularly as parents or carers of the young and vulnerable members of society. Living out the Christian faith in this way proclaims the gospel by example and presence, which is often more effective than an overtly religious approach. It is also vital to the Church in that it provides links and insights into daily life that can be lacking if the Church becomes too centred on its own needs and perceptions.

- The council and leaders of a large semi-rural church held a study day led by a visiting senior clergyman. When they gathered, the local minister asked each person to say their name and role in the church. ‘No,’ interrupted the visiting leader, ‘I would like you to tell me what you do when you are not at church.’ The ensuing discussion brought to light a wide variety of jobs and hobbies—and also revealed that three people present were unemployed but had not made the situation known to the church family. ■

Biblical accounts of people’s callings to particular tasks or ways of living are usually dramatic. The callings of Samuel, Isaiah and Paul are described vividly, with visions and the voice of God being clearly seen and heard. They are recorded as single events, with no reference to any previous experiences, influences and opportunities or to the time these people would have taken in seeking advice and holding themselves open to God’s will beforehand. Patience

is an integral part of vocation. A sense of calling may take years to develop and will rarely arise from a single dramatic experience.

Called to be in school

Some years ago, there was a car sticker that read, 'If you can read this—thank a teacher.' This clever piece of marketing was designed as a reminder of the valuable part that teachers play in shaping children's lives. After parents and the home, school has the largest influence on children, their daily lives and their long-term future.

This book is about the ways in which individual Christians and church communities can seek to live out their Christian vocation by becoming part of the life of a local school, and how the school can have a fruitful relationship with its local churches. From the church perspective, it is a many-faceted relationship. Principally, however, it is a ministry of service which will include a Christian presence and perhaps an overtly Christian input to the curriculum, worship and decision-making process of the school.

Some Christians will be involved with schools in a voluntary capacity. Others will include involvement as part of their specific ministry as clergy, lay ministers and schools' workers. The largest and possibly the most effective group, however, will be people who are living out their Christian lives as employees of the school. The children see them every day. They build up relationships with their class teacher and teaching assistant. They are told off or consoled by staff in the playground. They meet office staff, meals supervisors and technicians regularly, and the work of the caretaker and cleaners has an effect on their well-being and working environment.

Most of the work connected with a school does not appear to be particularly Christian. Some of it is decidedly unglamorous, but all of it will have an effect on literally thousands of young people and their future directions in life. It is estimated that during a working life of 30 years, a primary class teacher or teaching assistant will

have played a significant part in the education and development of between 250 and 1000 children and will have taught far more. Non-teaching staff will be in frequent contact with every child in the school, one way or another. Friends chatting on the Internet years after they have left school demonstrate the influence and often profound effect that teachers and other staff have had on them.

The Church of England, which has so much invested in its schools, recognised this when it wrote in its report on Church schools: ‘Unless action is taken by the Church to encourage Christians to see teaching as a valued profession, and to show by its actions how it values Christian teachers, the long-term prospect is daunting.’¹

The same action needs to be taken to encourage Christians with an appropriate interest or skill to consider supporting and serving a school as a way of living out their Christian life and modelling Christian values through their presence.² We proclaim Christ by what we are as much as by what we say, and God is glorified in the simplest of tasks. The following story was told by an elderly man about an experience he had in India at the end of World War II:

■ As a young man, I visited a leper colony and was shown around by one of the nuns who ran it. I saw the ways that the patients were treated for their condition as well as the projects to help them to lead as full lives as was possible. I was very impressed, but asked her if, as they were a religious community, they taught the Christian faith to their patients. The nun looked at me with withering scorn. ‘What do you think all this is about?’ she asked. ■

Be patient!

It can take a lot of courage to offer ourselves for a particular task and even more to accept that God may be calling us to be or do

something that will be costly in terms of our time, personal freedom and possibly our work. We shouldn't try to work it out on our own. The story of the call of Samuel relates how he went again and again to his mentor, Eli, for guidance as to where his vocation lay. It took time for Eli to recognise that God was calling Samuel to a particular task. Samuel's response to God led to an unwelcome message that he had to deliver to Eli, but was also the beginning of his ministry as a great prophet (1 Samuel 3:1–20).

It is advisable always to seek out someone such as a minister, vicar or spiritual director for guidance, and be prepared for the decision-making to take time. After his conversion experience, Paul went to Ananias and stayed with him and his fellow disciples for some time before starting his ministry (Acts 9:8–19). In the same way, the Christian community today needs to support and guide people in living out their Christian lives. The gentle 'Have you considered...?' may lead to a firm negative reply but it may also be just the spur someone needs to think further or seek advice.

Sometimes a person may see a need, and feel called to make a difference, but may not be the appropriate person or in the right situation to meet that need. This needs sensitive handling. For example, at a vocations day in Essex, two young women attended the session on working with children and youth. When they were asked what they hoped to gain from the session, one of them said, 'God is calling us to bring young people to know the love of Jesus by taking assemblies in the local secondary school. How do we start?' It transpired that neither woman had any experience of working with young people or had been inside a school since the day they had left. The leader affirmed their desire to bring young people to Christ but suggested that they were trying to do too much, too fast. She advised them to start by helping with the children's and youth work at their church, and see where that would lead them.

Jesus calls us to be salt and yeast—tiny grains that can make a huge difference (Matthew 5:13). He also commands us, 'Make your

Christian vocation

light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven' (v. 16). Ways of working this out in the world of education form the substance of the rest of this book.

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Christianity and schools

The Church's commitment to the provision of education extends over many centuries. It was most powerfully evident in its drive for the mass provision of Christian education for the poor in the early and middle years of the nineteenth century. Its principal instrument was the National Society, created in 1811. By the time of the national census of 1851, 40 years later, the Church had established 17,000 schools.

THE WAY AHEAD: CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOLS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM
(ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL, 2000)

In 1780, Robert Raikes, a philanthropic journalist and prison visitor, was concerned about the welfare of the children in the Sooty Alley area of Gloucester. Raikes believed that the underlying cause of crime was ignorance, so he started a Sunday school to teach the children to 'read the Bible and keep the Sabbath'. Over the next few years, Sunday schools were set up all over the country. A few taught writing and arithmetic as well as reading. The work grew and the principle of free education for all was soon firmly established. Some Sunday schools became evening classes where adults could gain basic skills. Others eventually became day schools and some of the present-day Church primary schools started in this way.

In 1811, the National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church throughout England and Wales was formed.¹ Its aim was to found and maintain a Church school in every parish. In 1814, Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker, founded the British and Foreign Schools' Society to educate poor children through a monitor system. By the end of the 19th century, about 50 per cent of children were educated in schools run by the National Society (known as 'national schools') and other denominational

bodies. They became collectively known as ‘voluntary schools’. The following story gives a brief picture of such a school in the early 20th century and the beginnings of the development of education for girls from poor families.

■ Penge lies to the south of the Crystal Palace and the National Sports stadium at the foot of Crystal Palace Hill. In the early 19th century it was a village but, when the canal and the railways were built, immigrants from Ireland and Liverpool moved in to work as labourers. The area was poor and unhealthy. The polluted canal brought typhoid and diphtheria. Several families lived together in tiny cottages, with a pub on every corner (27 in 1880) and a pawnbroker’s next door to it. In 1873, the parish church funded a school in a tin ‘chapel of ease’.² It was ‘for the children of the labouring poor’. The school soon grew too big for the chapel so the girls and infants were rehoused in the local market. It charged fees of 3d a week, with 2d for ‘those of labouring classes and below’.

From 1899, all children went to school until they were 12. Before 1918, the girls were taught cooking, sewing and laundry so that they could get work in service, but the Great War showed that women should be educated to do other work. This school in Penge was one of the first to give girls a general education that included PE and games lessons in the park and opportunities for exceptionally able girls to sit scholarship exams to the grammar school. Links with the parish church were strong. The vicar took assemblies and gave Religious Instruction to every class. The children sang ‘God that madest earth and heaven’ at the end of every Friday afternoon.

The school now has a modern building and is an Aided school in the diocese of Rochester. It still maintains its relationship with the local church. ■

Universal education

The state took responsibility for education in 1870, when the Forster Education Act ordered that schools should be provided for all children. If there were not enough places in the voluntary schools in each district, board schools would be built and paid for by the rates. The aim was to provide schooling for every child. The Religious Education in them was non-denominational and, in some cases, was left to the Sunday schools. Education was not free, except for the poorest children, until 1891.³

Attending Sunday school was not the only way that children learned about the Christian faith. The entire state educational system was based on Christian culture and practice. The children of wealthy families were educated at public schools (some originally founded by religious orders during the Middle Ages), where they attended daily worship in chapel and were automatically prepared for confirmation.

Voluntary schools provided a distinctive Christian education. Boys were recruited from them into church choirs. This gave them experience of the Book of Common Prayer, and they were expected to learn and recite the Collect for the week and a biblical text each Sunday. The parish clergy were in the school frequently to lead worship and teach Religious Instruction, often known as ‘Scripture’ or ‘Divinity’.

■ A certificate from the diocese of Chichester was presented to Charlie Verrall for passing his exam in Divinity. It was signed by the curate of Hellingly Church and dated July 1909. Charlie was aged 6. ■

In 1918, the school leaving age was raised to 14. Most children stayed at the same elementary school throughout their school lives, with the most able children moving to fee-paying grammar schools at the age of 11.

Primary schools and the effect on Christian education

In 1944, the Butler Education Act made radical changes to state education. Religious Education (RE) and a daily act of worship became compulsory unless children were withdrawn by their parents. The school leaving age was raised to 15 years. The elementary schools became primary schools, and every child moved to a secondary school at 11. Many new secondary schools had no formal links with the Church, so many young people thought of religion as something ‘childish’.

Social changes, including the post-war break-up of communities, development of urban housing estates and the popularity of television in the early 1950s, destroyed many families’ links with their relatives and familiar communities—including the local church. For many children, the only place where they learned anything about Christianity was in school or through youth activities. Daily Christian assembly and RE were part of every child’s education and many children belonged to uniformed organisations, choirs and other church-based groups. Until the mid-1960s, most adults could say the Lord’s Prayer and sing a few Christmas carols and well-known hymns at weddings and funerals.

Rising secularism

This was not to last. Society was becoming secularised and the Christian principles that underpinned the educational system were being questioned. Practising a religion was considered to be a personal matter. Worship and teaching about the Christian faith in school and children’s organisations was discouraged, even in some Church schools, and quality was often poor. The place of RE in state schools was frequently discussed and even questioned.

In 1970, the Church of England’s report *The Fourth R*⁴ stated that

the role of RE in Church schools was educational, not evangelistic, and had different aims from the teaching provided by the local church. RE became, increasingly, the provision of information about different religions and ignored the need for children to learn about religious experience and practices. Some RE teachers were so anxious to be objective that they discouraged children from mentioning their personal faith or anything they had experienced in church. Schools and uniformed organisations severed their contact with their local churches and, by the 1970s, even traditional events like carol concerts and nativity plays were often marginalised. These developments dechurched the nation: many children were brought up with little or no knowledge of the Christian faith, and those children are today's parents.

The present situation

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a time of major change for children, with far-reaching legislation about their care and education. The Children Act (1989) changed thinking about the rights of the child as well as improving standards of care. The 1988 Education Reform Act established the National Curriculum alongside RE. It transformed the teaching of RE and acts of worship. The spiritual life of the school and its worship had to be assessed as part of regular Ofsted⁵ inspections.

The Education Reform Act (1988) also allowed schools to opt out of local authority control and become grant-maintained.⁶ Many grant-maintained Church schools became more consciously Christian as they strengthened their links with their local churches and diocesan Boards of Education. Standards improved through having denominational inspections of worship and RE.⁷

Today, for a variety of reasons, there is a more positive attitude to religion in school, although there are frequent attempts to curtail the influence of faith schools on the grounds that they are elitist or

divisive. This situation offers both challenges and opportunities to churches in forming relationships with schools and is discussed in the next two chapters.