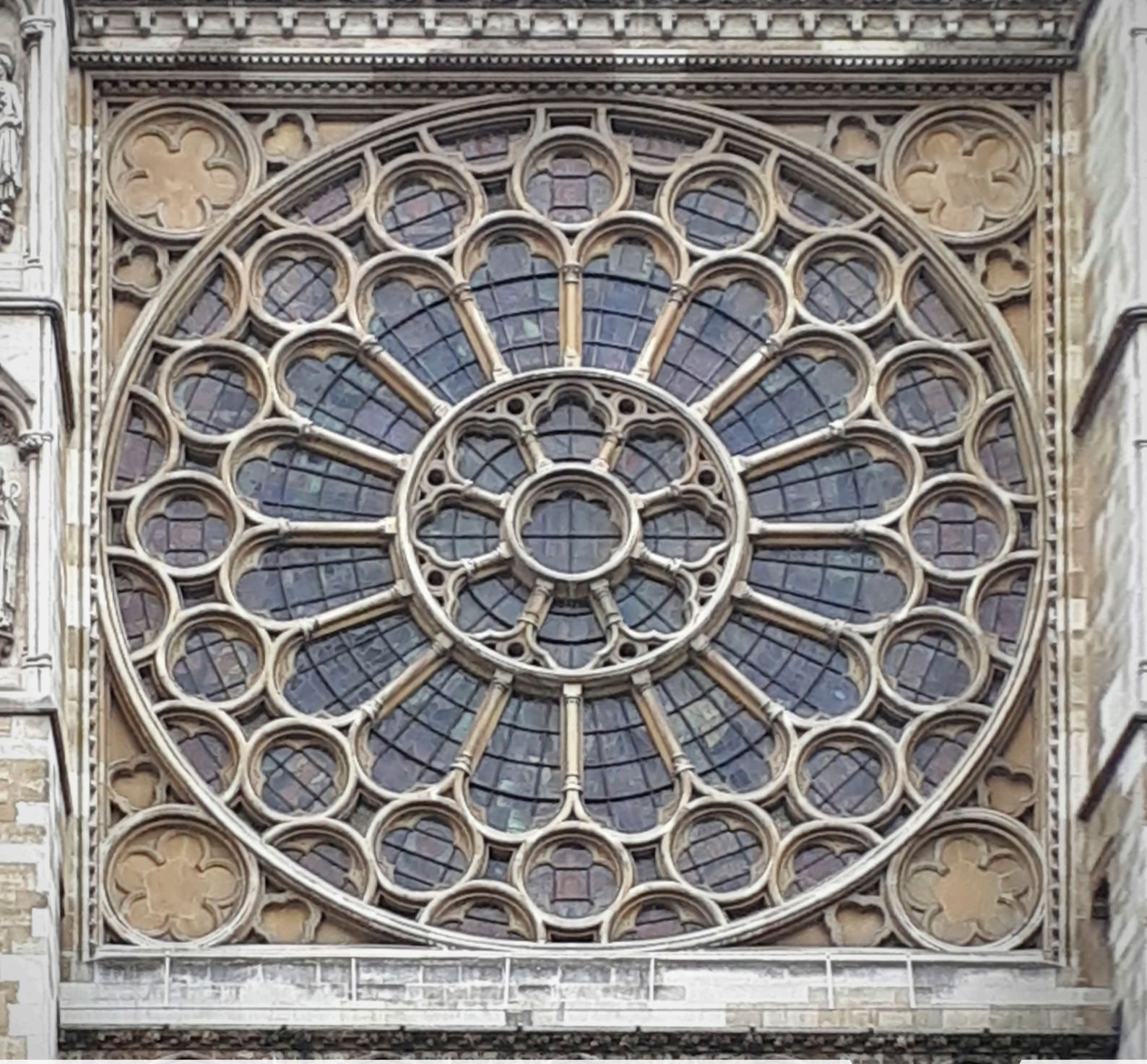

WARWICK

POLITICS AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Faith Schools, Policies and Principles

The research project which has been generously funded by the Spencer Foundation has been conducted by Professor Matthew Clayton, Professor Andrew Mason, Professor Adam Swift and Dr. Ruth Wareham

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Preamble

The authors of this pamphlet worked together on a research project, *Faith Schools: Principles and Policies* (funded by the Spencer Foundation) to try to identify the values and moral principles that should determine education policy about faith schools and religious education. This pamphlet draws on our longer piece, *How to Regulate Faith Schools* (freely available at: **https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/2048-416X.2018.12005.x**), which develops and defends proposals for schooling in England

Religion and Schools

In England, religious institutions are involved in the running of many schools—about 25% of pupils attend faith schools (schools with a religious character). In addition, in every state-funded school, religious education is a legal requirement, though parents may remove their children from these lessons. There are many moral questions about (a) faith schools and (b) religious education that are debated.

The State Funding of Faith Schools

In some countries, like France and the USA, the constitution forbids the government from supporting particular religious groups or faith schools. By contrast, England has an established religion, the Church of England, and gives financial support to Christian and some non-Christian faith schools.

Some argue that the state should remain neutral on the question of religion and not fund faith schools. Others argue that the state ought to help religious parents/guardians send their children to a school run by their religious institution. A Christian parent/guardian should be able to send their children to a school that encourages Christian understanding, belief and worship. The same goes for other faiths, such as Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism, and so on. One argument for the creation of more state-funded Muslim schools is that, although over 2.5 million Muslims live in England, only 27 Muslim schools receive state funding. Some argue that this inequality of access to religious schooling is unfair.

One of the big issues that needs addressing is whether the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights is right to assert that parents have a 'right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children' (Art. 26). Critics argue that Art. 26 overlooks the right of children to decide for themselves whether to follow a particular religious view. Why should parents get to determine the content of their children's education? This question is very topical given recent controversies about the teaching of LGBT rights in sex education lessons in some Birmingham schools.

Questions

1. Should the state/government be neutral on the question of religion?
2. Should the state fund schools that promote particular religions?
3. Do parents/guardians have the right to send their children to a faith school if they want a religious education for their children?
4. Should parents be free to remove their children from RE or sex education lessons that go against their religious beliefs?

Religious Instruction and Worship in Faith Schools

In our pamphlet, *How to Regulate Faith Schools*, we accept that faith schools in England are here to stay for the foreseeable future. We disagree about whether we should work to abolish some or all state-funded religious schools. However, accepting they are here to stay, we agree that faith schools need more regulation to protect the interests of children. We focus on two interests: our interest in living an autonomous or self-directed life and everyone's interest in living in a tolerant society.

In England, faith schools conduct assemblies that include religious worship and, not only do they teach students *about* different religions (religious education), they also teach *a* religion—they encourage their students to adopt particular religious beliefs (religious instruction). We argue that even faith schools should not be allowed to conduct religious ceremonies involving students or to engage in religious instruction, because these activities threaten children's personal autonomy.

Personal autonomy involves the capacity and confidence to make and act on one's own, independent, reasoned and well-informed judgments about what kind of life to live and what beliefs to hold. Many believe that developing children's autonomy is a very important educational goal, which overrides any competing desires parents might have. Our critics believe that holding and pursuing correct views—or one's parents' views—about how to live one's life is more important than deciding that for oneself.

But is developing the capacity for autonomy incompatible with religious instruction? Not necessarily. Still, we believe that religious instruction risks closing the minds of children to other religious and nonreligious worldviews, particularly when it reinforces the message children are getting at home. So, we believe that there should be no classes that encourage children to believe that Jesus is the son of God whose crucifixion and resurrection redeemed humankind, that Allah is the one true God and only He is worthy of worship, or that there is no God and human beings can find ethical and spiritual fulfillment without belief in a divinity. We say 'yes' to religious education, but 'no' to religious instruction and worship in schools.

Questions

5. Should faith schools be free to conduct religious ceremonies or engage in religious instruction? What explains your answer?
6. How important is the development of personal autonomy in schooling?
7. Do you think that personal autonomy is sometimes or always threatened by religious instruction?

Mixing Students of Different Faiths in Schools

As things stand, faith schools in England may use religious criteria to select some or all of their pupils. That can lead to a high proportion of children from one faith background in a single school. Some, like us, think rules for admission to school should be designed to achieve more mixing between pupils of different religious backgrounds. This is for two reasons.

First, mixing is good for the development of personal autonomy. To decide for oneself what to belief and what religion or worldview to follow, it is valuable to be exposed to a range of alternative views. Interacting with students from other faiths and no faith provides us with vivid examples of the different ways of living and, so, helps us to make informed and reasoned decisions about how to live our own lives.

Second, mixing helps to develop a tolerant, respectful, cohesive society in which we regard each other as equals. Social science research shows that high levels of contact between members of different religious and ethnic groups reduce prejudice and foster positive attitudes and behaviours towards outgroups. Such capacities play an important role in creating tolerant, respectful citizens.

In our view, then, religious schools should follow the slogan the Church of England has adopted to describe its own schools: 'Church schools for all' rather than 'faith schools for the faithful'. Schools should be allowed to admit no more than 50% of their pupils on the basis of religious criteria.

Others argue that having separate schools for students with minority faith backgrounds, like Muslim students, can have positive effects, because (a) they provide environments that are free of discrimination, which prevents Muslim pupils from internalising the stigmatising dominant culture; (b) they are staffed by teachers that have a better understanding of the challenges faced by Muslim pupils; (c) and they provide opportunities for students to reflect with others who face similar injustices and to consider how to resist discrimination.

Questions

8. Should faith schools be free to use religious criteria (the religious affiliation of parents/guardians or the pupil) to select some or all of their pupils?
9. If so, should there be a limit to how many school places should be allocated on the basis of religious criteria? What might the limit be—80%, 50%, 30%?

The Teaching of Religious Education in Schools?

We argue that religious instruction should not be allowed in schools, even in faith schools. Nevertheless, we are very much in favour of religious education that enables students to understand different religious and non-religious viewpoints.

Religions provide answers to several different kinds of question: *metaphysical* questions, such as 'does a god, or do gods, exist?' and 'why and how did the Universe begin?'; *ethical* questions, such as, 'what is the meaning of life?' and 'what does living well consist in?'; and *moral* questions such as 'how should we treat each other?' or 'what do we owe to each other?'. The religions of the world answer these questions in different ways, but there are also many different non-religious answers, which have been developed by non-religious philosophers, that should be studied alongside religious ones. Pupils should understand these different religious and non-religious approaches to life and the universe without religious views getting special treatment. Broadening the RE curriculum in that way would help to develop students' autonomy.

We propose a different kind of subject, which we call 'Civic, Religious, Ethical and Moral' (CREaM) education. This would help students examine different answers to questions about the Universe, how we ought to live, and how we ought to treat others.

The aim of CREaM education is not merely to develop students' capacity to decide for themselves what to belief or how to live their lives. It should enable them to take their place in political society and treat others justly. We all need the ability and motivation to regard and treat each other as equals, to promote and comply with democratic institutions, and to trust and respect others regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, sexuality, religion, or class. Toleration, mutual respect and a commitment to democracy and equality are required for every citizen to have the opportunity to live an autonomous life. We therefore believe that schools should be promoting these values and principles in schools.

Because CREaM education is very important, we propose that it should be a more prominent part of the curriculum. At present, religious, ethical and moral questions do not account for much of school time, and parents/guardians have the right to withdraw their children from RE lessons. We argue that every child should receive CREaM education as part of the National Curriculum and that the number of lessons devoted to this subject should be increased. After all, what is more important than the understanding and ability to tackle the big questions about human existence and the meaning of life?

Questions

10. What is the point of RE? How important is it for students to understand different religions?
11. How would you design a curriculum that teaches students about different religious and non-religious conceptions of the Universe, the meaning of life, morality and politics?
12. Should schools teach in a way that is neutral about religious and non-religious viewpoints? Sometimes or always?
    - Should teachers be neutral about competing views about natural history—between creationists and Darwinian evolutionists?
    - Should they be neutral about the values of mutual respect, toleration and democratic equality?
    - Should they about be neutral about the truth or falsity of Christianity, Humanism, Islam, etc.?