

dare to engage

address by Andrew Wright || dare to engage symposium || march 2004

the future of spirituality in education

Thanks for the invitation. I hope that what I've got to say in the next 45 minutes will act as a counterpart and have some synergy with the session we had before we broke.

I'm taking a different route in to the same set of issues – it's the route of philosophy and theology rather than empirical sociological research. I really want to try to unpack the notion of spirituality and what I want to argue is that every human being, according to my definition of spirituality, is basically spiritual, you can't avoid being spiritual. But what we're faced with is a range of diverse, sometimes overlapping, often conflicting and mutually contradictory spiritualities. I have no doubt that Adolf Hitler was a deeply spiritual person. I have no doubt that the suicide bombers roaming parts of the Middle East at the moment are deeply spiritual people. It's just that not all spiritualities are true, and not all spiritualities are morally acceptable.

What I want to focus on in particular are a cluster of spiritualities that emerged at about the time that humankind in the West effectively went to its Creator and asked for its inheritance and shot off into a far off country to try to live on its own apart from God. A cluster of spiritualities that emerged in the Enlightenment and probably reached a head ie came to a fulfilment in Postmodernity, and I'll explain what I mean by Postmodernity as I go along. And I hope also to point to the future, as the title suggests, and the possibilities for the future.

So let me start then with my definition of spirituality. I'll read it first.

"Spirituality is the developing relationship of the individual within community and tradition, to that which is, or is perceived to be, of ultimate concern, ultimate value, and ultimate truth."

That's the working definition that I'm basing everything on, and it's obviously up for grabs, but I assume it. Let me talk a little bit to it.

- Spirituality is a 'developing' thing, we're not static human beings: we change, we develop, we grow, we stagnate, we go backwards. And I see spirituality as dynamic in that sense. I also see spirituality as relational – it's to do with the way we relate to ourselves, to others in community, to the natural world, and to the presence or the absence of God.
- 'The relationship of the individual within community and tradition.' What I'm trying to do there is challenge this notion that we're autonomous beings, who can understand ourselves simply by turning inwards, and contemplating our inner space. We're relational creatures in the people we are, as we relate to others in community and in tradition.
- 'How we relate to that which is or is perceived to be...' I leave that floating in the air. You can have a spirituality which is unrelated to the way things actually are in the world. If there's no God and your spirituality is grounded in faith in God, then you perceive the world in one way, but the world ain't like that, and your spirituality therefore, however sincere, is downright wrong. And on the other hand, if there is a God, and your spirituality is predicated on the assumption there is no God, then your perceptions are wrong. And I want to keep that deliberately open. When you come across a spirituality, one of the questions to ask is 'To what extent does it relate to the way things actually are in the world?'
- The way we relate 'in community & tradition to that which is, or is perceived to be, of ultimate concern, ultimate value and ultimate truth'. And I cluster those together, deliberately, because what is of ultimate concern, ultimate value, needs to be related to that which is ultimately real. My ultimate concern again may be with God, but if there's no God, then my ultimate concern is

misplaced, and vice versa. But I'm trying to grasp there the notion that spirituality is not so much to do with the mundane and with the ordinary, although spirituality always works itself out in the context of the mundane and the ordinary, but it's to do with how the mundane and the ordinary relate to the big ultimate questions we all face as human beings.

So: "Spirituality is the developing relationship of the individual within community and tradition, to that which is, or is perceived to be, of ultimate concern, ultimate value, and ultimate truth."

So you'll see that that is so broad and inclusive that it includes everybody, because everybody has that in them somewhere, even if they deny it.

Who wants some philosophical reflection? I want to go back to the Enlightenment, the eighteenth century, and I characterise the Enlightenment as that point in time when human beings decided that they could get by quite happily without God. And we have a Copernical shift from a God-centred universe to a human-centred universe. In the Middle Ages the whole drive of spirituality is to relate appropriately to God, whether your God in the Middle Ages is the Christian God or the Islamic God, or the Jewish God. And of course all three Gods were deeply rooted in Western civilisation in the Middle Ages. With the coming of Modernity and Enlightenment the focus shifts and the first question you ask is 'Who am I? How do I relate to myself?' And then secondary, possibly, 'How does God come in?' It's to do with freedom. It's to do with breaking away from any imposed authority and having the courage to think for yourself. And the philosopher Immanuel Kant says that's the definition of Enlightenment: the watchword for Enlightenment is 'have the courage to think for yourself, don't let God do your thinking for you, don't let institutions do your thinking for you, think for yourself'.

There are two threats to this freedom to be yourself. The first is the threat of chaos. And that was the threat that Modernity responded to. If we've no longer got God to give order and purpose and meaning in our lives, we've got to find it somewhere else. And if we don't find it somewhere else, we're going to descend into chaos and anarchy. Postmodernity came up with a different threat: not the threat of chaos, but the threat of totalitarianism, but we'll come back to that in a few seconds – let me stay with Modernity.

If the threat is chaos, and you're thrown back on your own resources, you have to find some sort of bedrock on which to base your life and your understanding of the world. And what I want to suggest is that modernity threw up three distinct bedrocks. People tend to float with sometimes all of them, sometimes one of them, but they're there. It's the point Wittgenstein says, when I'm arguing, there's a point when I hit rock bottom and my spade is turned and I have to say I can't go any further – this is simply what I do, this is simply how I see the world, this is the foundation of reality as I perceive it. And I want to unpack the three foundations of reality that Modernity threw up to replace God.

The first is the natural world, that we use our reason to engage with nature, and we describe nature through science, and we can explain how and why everything happens. All explanations are ultimately reducible to a process of cause and effect in the natural world. And that is often seen as a deeply unspiritual world view. And I want to argue it's deeply spiritual. If all we are are biological mechanisms that have evolved over a period of time, bound up with the forces of nature, which are the ultimate forces in the universe, then I have to ask the question of how I relate to the world on that basis – how I make sense of it, how I find meaning in it, how I find purpose and value in it - given I'm born, I live and I die, and that's it: there's nothing more to be said. And it's easy to say, 'Well that's not spiritual at all'. I want to argue that it's deeply spiritual. And some of the deepest spiritual thinking has come from people who buy in to that naturalistic world view, and try to understand their humanity on that basis.

But for many people that wasn't good enough. There was a whole realm of discourse that science appeared to disallow. Because we don't just want to talk about the facts in the world, we want to talk about our experiences. Our experiences of beauty, of morality and of God. And so what you get in the nineteenth century is a reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment in the form of Romanticism. What the philosopher Gadamer calls 'the mirror image of Enlightenment'. With Romanticism, the bedrock is your feelings: your feelings of beauty, of morality, of relationship to God, if you happen to have one. That's the bedrock – that's the court against which you weigh judgement. It's the key bedrock that drives most soap operas. The criterion for whether you go out with someone, or marry someone, in a soap opera, tends to be the intensity of your feelings, and whether you still have feelings for someone. Listen to any character in Eastenders and the word 'feelings' will come out frequently: 'I still have feelings for him,' or whatever.

But at its highest level you've got Wordsworth and Beethoven trying to explore the dimension of feeling. And it's here I think that we get the most commonly understood understanding of spirituality. It's some intensity of feeling when we reflect inwards. It's where we get the language of the notion that we all have a divine spark in us. We talked about that last session – a theological comment in passing. Christianity has never taught that human beings have a spark of the divine in them. It was taught by Plato and introduced into Christianity by St Augustin who Platonised Christianity. Christians teach that we're made in the image of God, but that image has been disfigured. So you can turn inwards all you like, according to orthodox Christian thinking. You're not going to find a spark of the divine in there – you're going to find a corrupted human nature. That's aside, but I think it's important because this Romantic model of spirituality is the model that drives much spirituality in schools. Children are taught to be creative and imaginative and turn inwards, to find their inner spark, to explore their inner space. It's Pelagian; it's not Christian, it's Platonic. And I don't like using the word, but it's pagan. But it's there.

The problem, if that's your bedrock, of course is that everyone has different feelings. Everyone has different spiritual experiences, and they don't all link together. One of the things that emerged from Romanticism, was fascism, and totalitarianism. Hitler had these intense feelings about the meaning and purpose of life, about the superiority of the Arian race, about the need to remove corruption from society, if necessary through gas chambers and concentration camps. That was one of the outcomes of Romanticism. So the danger there, if you trust human feeling - and human feeling is fallen - you end up in totalitarianism.

The third bedrock came out of England – it's something to be proud of, being English! It came from the writings of John Locke, the founder of Liberalism. John Locke says – OK, we have the brute facts of the physical world, we have all the different feelings and values and emotions that people have, and the danger is that these are going to crash and produce anarchy. So what we've got to do is find a third bedrock, a moral bedrock, on which to order our different feelings. He introduced two basic principles of Liberalism. The first principle is that we're free to believe whatever we like, and no-one has the right to tell us any different. But that's tempered with the second principle: if we're free to believe anything we like, then we have a duty to tolerate the beliefs of others. From that basic Liberal principle you have the whole Humanistic discourse of Human Rights which, again I say in passing, is not a Christian discourse, because Christians don't talk about Human Rights, they talk about human duties. Humans don't have any rights before God, they have duties before God. But that's a different point altogether.

What I want to argue is this: we produced an understanding of the world in which people learned to be comfortable with each of those three frameworks in different situations: the brute facts that scientists tell us, the experiences that give shape and meaning to our lives, and the duty to tolerate the experience of others – the implication being that our experiences are relative to other people's experiences.

Now that whole modern bedrock of spirituality is in the process of being challenged by Postmodernity. And it's being challenged because Modernity sees that modern bedrock as totalitarian. It's not enhancing the freedom to think for yourself. It's actually imposing ways of thinking on you. You have to be obedient to the scientists, to your feelings, to the duty of tolerance. The fruits of Modernity are the killing fields, the weapons of mass destruction, the concentration camps. The project of Modernity didn't work. Why didn't it work? Because we were too quick to try and build foundations through which to avoid the danger of chaos. So what Post-modernity is trying to do is simply break down the foundations of Modernity. It does it in a number of ways. It denies that we can have meta-narrative stories that account for the whole of the world. It denies that our thinking can be logocentric, that it can be rational. It argues for the death of the author: when you read a book, when you read a text, there's no point in working out what the author intended you to mean, because that becomes authoritarian, totalitarian. What right has the author to tell you something? So read a book, you read into it whatever you like. You use your imagination to draw out the meaning you want to find. Knowledge is equated with power, in fact knowledge is power. We can't find ways to engage and know the world without imposing beliefs on other people. So we have to give up the project of searching for knowledge. We need to deconstruct the whole notion that we can make sense of the world. Therein lies our freedom. It's freedom from totalitarian accounts of the way things are in the world. The freedom to create the world we wish to live in. The Postmodern philosopher Baudrillard says quite candidly that the Gulf War didn't take place. All the Gulf War is is a collection of media images through which the Western media constructed a story of what was actually happening. And why should you buy that story? Go and make your own stories up. Have the freedom to create the world you want to live in, on the basis of your desires and your imagination. The irony of course is that the Postmodern claim that 'there is no such thing as truth' is itself a truth claim, and the notion that you should ignore authority and trust to your own desires simply produces a false foundation for the post-Enlightenment world. Trust your desires, follow your desires.

Two possible ways out of the dilemma. One is a Postmodern philosophy of a very different order from most Postmodern philosophies. Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas: he accepts that knowledge is corrupt, he accepts that when we encounter the world, we very quickly force it into the mould we want it to be. He's very happy to say our knowledge is limited. But he argues that our response to that shouldn't be that because our knowledge is limited, we should be free to create the imaginary world we want to live in. He goes on the opposite tack: because our knowledge is limited, we should be open to difference, to alterity, and to the voice of the 'Other' which he capitalises. We should be willing to listen to voices that don't tell the stories we tell. And if we really want to be free, our freedom should be the freedom to listen to people who have different stories to tell us. And you don't get that in Modernity. You don't get that in Postmodernity. It's all about constructing your secure world. Levinas says: what happens if we open ourselves to worlds which are very different? And as a Jewish philosopher, he says what happens if we open ourselves to the possibility of God?

Let's see what happens to religion in the Enlightenment, in Modernity, in Postmodernity. My basic argument is, we tend to see it as shift from belief into agnosticism into atheism. I'd like to put it in a different way. I'd like to suggest that it's a process of domesticating God and making God safe. Let's go through the four foundations I've identified and see what happens to God within them.

1) Firstly, the foundation of Naturalism. If all we have is the natural world which operates according to its own laws, then where does God fit in? Two answers: 1) He doesn't, and you end up with atheism. 2) He does, but simply as the Deistic Creator of the process in the first place: the Divine watchmaker, who winds up the universe and then leaves it behind. God in a sense is the rational principle that explains the rational universe, and nothing more. And that God, I would argue, is alive and kicking. It's not the Christian God, but it's there. God is the foundation of the order of the universe, but nothing more.

2) In the Romantic story, the turn to the divine inner spark. You have a very clear theology: I turn inwards and I experience the transcendent, I experience the divine, I experience the Holy Other. Or, some would say: no you don't, you experience your imagination, your own desires, your own divine thoughts and experiences. Well take it or leave it, you experience God, you experience humanity. As Feuerbach says, human beings create God in their own image as opposed to the other way round. But either way, this is a God who is a projection of human experiences, it's a domesticated God. The God of your experience is the God who simply fulfils what you want, what you desire.

3) Third foundation: Liberalism. How does God get domesticated in Liberalism, in the ethical system which says you're free to believe whatever you like, provided you tolerate the beliefs of others. I think what you get there is a universal theology in the tradition of people like John Hick. All religion is based on an experience of transcendence. Different religions express that transcendence in different culturally-bound doctrines and teachings. But it's not the doctrines and teachings which are important, which actually contradict one another, but it's the common experience which is the source of religion. And from there you get the notion that we are all free to believe whichever religion we like, provided we tolerate the beliefs of others, and all religious beliefs are equally true. Because they're not really making contradictory truth claims, all they're doing is giving expression to the divine spark within us. So once again you have a domesticated God, who simply confirms your liberal world view. The end of religion is to produce tolerance and freedom of belief.

4) In the Postmodern world, what kind of God do you end up with? I think you end up with a God very similar to Don Cupit's God. There's no reality or truth out there to discover. You're free to create the reality you want. And you're free to use any bits of culture you like to mould it together. So you can use bits of religious culture - and I think we saw this in the previous session - to create a world that's comfortable for you. And you may or may not use religious language. At the end of the day, God is that which you most desire, whatever that may be, as opposed to a reality out there.

So God is domesticated. If our foundation is the natural world, or our inner experiences, or our need to live in harmony with one another, or our need to express our desires and create our imaginary worlds, then in the modern world, God simply becomes a cipher for all those activities. We create God in our own image, according to our own needs. And there's an irony when we take our inheritance and leave home, because we can't stand the authority of our father any more, and we need to break away, and our father, out of love, doesn't stop us, but lets us go. But as soon as we're away we start creating our own father-substitute - this could be very Freudian couldn't it, I'd better not go down that line too much!

Possible solutions? Levinas points towards a 'feral' theology: a 'wild cat' God. What if God comes to you from outside and refuses to conform to the way you see the world, to the way you've grounded the world, to your assumptions and needs, and says 'I don't think that's what you really need, you need something different'. It opens up the whole possibility of revelation. And it's that strand of Postmodernity I think which can be very useful to Christian apologists. Not the strand which says 'create your own world', but the strand which says 'be open to otherness and difference and alterity'.

How does this all apply to education? I'd like to argue that the various models we employ in educational settings tend simply to reflect the various spiritual foundations of Modernity.

1) Naturalism. There's one very strong tradition in education: education is about giving children knowledge of the world. Not just knowledge but an ability to manipulate the world through technology etc. So what we need to do is teach children how to live effectively in the world. How to use computers so they can go into the world and become part of the economic game. It has no answer to the big questions. As long as children can leave school reading and writing, and are employable, then that's the best we can expect, because that's the best we can expect in a naturalistic world, where everything is simply cause and effect. A lot of politicians in particular like that model of education, so we introduce a National Curriculum, designed to transmit knowledge and skills to children, and we assess the knowledge and skills of children to see whether they can do it. And we have league tables to show how effective schools are in producing this knowledge. The whole thing is grounded in a Naturalistic world view, in which you have to learn to be a little bit streetwise and rational in that world in order to get the best out of it. And the best? Well no-one really questions it – what does it mean to flourish as a human being? Get a good job, make money, be happy, which is really not thought through at all, but it's there.

2) And of course there's a reaction to that – there's a Romantic reaction which says 'we can't reduce children to this level; we have to shift in to not a subject-centred education but a child-centred education'. Rousseau is a key figure here, and he came into fruition in schools in the 1960's, where you ripped up all the desks and instead produced play areas for children. Where you come to school, not to read and write, but to learn to get in touch with your inner divine spark, and become the person God intended you to be, whatever that may be. So you come in and play, 'What do you fancy doing today Johnny? Do you want to make noise? Right, go to the music area and bang the drum. Or do you want to be artistic? – get the paints out'. Which illustrates this whole child-centred, progressive education: children are naturally good, and if you protect them from an evil society they will grow up into well-rounded human beings in touch with their inner life. It's the hippy ideal. I can say that safely because I'm old enough to have been a hippy myself, so I get away with it. But it's precisely the ideal that Margaret Thatcher hated, which is why we have to produce a subject-centred education.

So you have this tension between the two. Child centred versus subject-centred. And at the moment we're in an era of subject-centred education. I've no doubt that in twenty years' time we'll be back in an era of child-centred education.

From a Christian perspective the child-centred education feels better, but I'd argue that both are grounded on profoundly unchristian world views – the world view that all there is is the natural order, or the world view that we all have the spark of the divine in us. Neither works.

3) The third model – Liberalism – grounding people in freedom and tolerance – that's fundamental to the present education system because the National Curriculum and the learning of knowledge is surrounded by a whole cluster of activities that come under the heading: 'social, personal and moral education' – and spiritual education of course. And so, as well as teaching children knowledge and skills, we must also teach them the virtues of liberalism, the virtues of freedom and tolerance. And so you have active programmes of education and nurture, designed to instil those values in children.

We're beginning to see emerge in some schools Postmodern versions of education: 'Post education' as it's trendily called, where education is about encouraging children to identify and fulfil their desires. To learn to create and recreate their own sense of identity at will; to learn to live with multiple identities. Madonna was a classic example of Postmodern identity shift – every time you come out with a new single you come out with a new identity. Actually David Bowie beats Madonna by about fifteen years! You can be cynical, but at the end of the day if all there is is desire, and there's no means of thinking through and structuring and grounding your desire, you end up in captivity to the market forces of capitalism, and an advertising industry which is driven by the creation of desire. Eg the Paul Merton voiced-over advertisement: 'Ashamed of your mobile?' It creates desire on two levels: 1) the desire or need to have a mobile phone; I don't need one, I enjoy my space, I enjoy the fact that people can't contact me or give me work or remind me to do things – I would never have one. But even if I had one, creating

the desire – if my mobile phone is bigger than anyone else's it must be less useful as a tool of communication, or less useful as a fashion aid, therefore I must buy a smaller one – technology is letting them get smaller & smaller – and so we have a kind of ironic shift there: instead of getting bigger and bigger we're back to 'hello, I'm on my mobile' or whatever...

But what about an education that is a genuinely critical education, that is opening children out to alternative voices? Voices claiming things that don't necessarily fit into the cherished world views of Modernity and Postmodernity. That is asking children to respond intelligently to them. Certainly some people working in the field of RE are trying to push that religious education shouldn't be simply a process of studying the facts of religion, or getting children to develop their religious sensibilities, or getting children to be tolerant of religions, or getting children to create their own imaginary religions. This happens all the time – my children are constantly being asked to create their own place of worship which I think is a strange way to teach religion. What about RE that's saying 'this is what Islam claims to be true about the world' or 'this is what Christianity claims to be true about the world' or 'this is what Atheism claims to be true about the world' – 'now engage with it and respond with it: hear their stories'. And we heard in the previous session: one of the major problems is that children simply don't hear or know the stories. What about hearing and knowing the stories, and learning to be literate about them? I think that's where we're heading – I think we're moving into a phase where people are beginning to recognise that the Postmodern emperor has no clothes on. And are recognising that genuine freedom is freedom to relate to that which is ultimately true, whatever that may be. And to do that, you have to be open to voices of difference, an alterity, the Other with a capital O.

Implications for Christian engagement - I nearly missed this section out, because I suspect I'm simply stating the obvious, but I thought I'd put it in anyway. Five thoughts on Christian engagement with what is essentially a pagan, a post-Christian world, and a post-Christian education system:-

1) First of all needs to be incarnation. Of course the incarnation is simply ruling out two heretical possibilities. The first is Arianism: the notion that Jesus was only a 'good human being' – therefore a Christian engagement with the world is reduced to social work, reduced to doing good, and has no notion of the divine attached to it. So I worry when Christians use for example the general language of spirituality, or the general language of transcendence, because there's nothing specifically Christian about that, and non-Christian groups can quite happily use it and mean entirely different things by it. So it's an incarnation that must bring the divine with it. I suspect most of us don't face that problem, most of us are not in danger of watering the gospel down to social work.

The other danger is of course docetism; that Jesus only appeared to be a human being, but wasn't actually incarnate in the flesh. And I think there is a danger with the more conservative traditions of Christianity of seeking to protect the faith and the gospel from the potential contamination of world out there, and therefore not having the courage genuinely to engage in it. Two thoughts there, one is my colleague at King's, Pete Ward, wrote a little book called 'Growing up Evangelical'. I'm sure many of you have read it; if you haven't I urge you to. One of his theses in that is that Christian youth work for the children of Christian parents is predicated not with empowering those children to go and incarnate their Christian lives in the outside world, but is predicated on protecting those children from engagement with the outside world. It's protecting them from that nasty world – in my day it was 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll' – it's probably something different now. But it's a protection because of the fear of the world. And that is docetic.

2) And another fault is the belief that the way to engage incarnately in the world is to import some form of Christian culture into it, that masquerades as being part of the world: 'the Christian club' or whatever. No I'm not saying that's necessarily an ineffective thing, but transposing Christian culture into a pagan world may be an avoidance tactic, a way of engaging with the world as it is. And I don't want to be misunderstood, because I think Greenbelt is a fascinating and superb and deeply rooted Christian organisation, but you can see it is docetically setting up an alternative to a genuine Christian engagement at Glastonbury. If you go to Glastonbury, the religious and new age people are out - you can't miss religion at Glastonbury - but you miss the Christian religion at Glastonbury. Have you seen the film of the second Glastonbury festival, around 1968? There's an elderly Roman Catholic priest saying mass: ie Christianity incarnate in the world, as opposed to producing alternatives.

Humility I take as read. Lots of people phoning me up, arguing with me, having a go at me because of what they see in the press about the proposed National Framework for Religious Education, and this notion that it might include the teaching of atheism or the teaching of other religions. You know, this notion that we can somehow impose a Christian syllabus in a non-

Christian world. I don't see that Christians have the right to do that, because that's not how Christ lived in the world. Christ lived in the spirit of humility and it took Him to the cross. So I'm not willing as a Christian to impose my Christian views by saying I want to use political power and authority to produce a Christian syllabus and impose it on other people – I couldn't look those people in the face.

3) Thirdly the common good. This is a good Anglican thing, in the prayers of intercessions in the Book of Common Prayer, which some of us still love and don't get to hear as often as we ought to. Building up the common good- God's love and care is for all humanity, and not just the salvation of their souls. There's a deeply rooted evangelical tradition of working for the common good. The abolition of slavery in Britain was brought about because of evangelical pressure groups. What seems to be happening now is that we've reached a stage when we engage in education and engage in the common good and very often the initiative of the common good has been taken up by people who buy in to the romantic and the liberal world views. It's those people who take the lead in questioning whether particular wars are right, or whether particular ways of behaviour are right. It seems as if we're almost moving towards a stage of quietism in Christianity, people are saying 'we shouldn't be involved in the political process because it's not properly Christian, it's secondary to Christianity'. I don't see that at all, for example Desmond Tutu. Anyone who reads the Bible and thinks it's got nothing to do with politics doesn't know how to read their Bible. If you're trying to engage with the world and you have common causes with the world – common causes that lead to the good of all humanity, and you withdraw from that activity, or don't take a lead in that activity, because your grounds for that common cause are different from those who do it for different reasons. Eg if I march against the war in Iraq because I believe that God is not a coercive God of violence, and therefore however bad the Iraq regime is, we shouldn't use violent means to overthrow that regime, I may have a very different motivation, as someone who is trying to imitate Christ, from someone who says 'I oppose this because I believe there's a divine spark in everybody and therefore we shouldn't kill anybody'. Or 'what we should do is tolerate people' – the motivation is different. The cause is common, and they think that we need to be truly engaging out there in that common cause.

4) Fourthly – challenge. My argument is that everyone has a spirituality, everybody has an understanding of what is ultimately true, ultimately valuable and of ultimate meaning in the world. For many, many people that understanding has no connection with Christianity whatsoever. They tend to think that because they don't belong to a labelled group, an organised group, then they don't have a religion, a faith or a spirituality. I want to argue that everybody you encounter comes to you with a developing spirituality, a developing world view, a developing set of beliefs whether it's a Postmodern one: 'none of this matters as long as I get my desire' – that's a very clearly articulated world view with a clearly articulated theology – God is irrelevant to that process – that's a theological statement. Everyone brings a theology with them. I think one task is to challenge it, not by saying this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong, but by bringing it to the surface, by encouraging young people to articulate the spirituality that they have with them.

5) Lastly proclamation - simply to put their story alongside the Christian story, so they can hear a voice of difference, the voice of Otherness, with a capital O, and encounter it for the first time What they do with it – you have to leave them to their own devices, because that appears to be what God has chosen to do in His wisdom – to leave people to their own devices. But you can challenge them to think, you can offer them stories which they haven't heard. You can gift those stories to them and in doing so you can say, 'come on I know very well, unless I'm badly mistaken, you've got stories to tell, even if you're not aware of it.' And it's engaging in that level of dialogue which I think is far more useful than simply training children to list and label these types of Gurdwaras. Or to be tolerant of religion. I'm very proud, I've brought my children up to be deeply intolerant. And God is a deeply intolerant God. God doesn't tolerate child abuse and poverty, and my children don't either – we need to challenge this surface thing. I'm rambling....! Questions please.

Notes on responses to questions.

RE in secular environments?

Recognise I'm a guest in someone's house – even if it used to belong to me I can't go in and criticise the decoration – you accept some of the disciplines and expectations of that environment. If you can't accept them it's not your calling. But you need to challenge that environment, you can't be neutral, no neutral ground. Establish a context for open dialogue. Best option in a liberal environment is to be grounded in the freedom and tolerance of liberalism, but challenge the liberal tendency to reduce freedom & tolerance to a bland relativism. Freedom in tolerance is the freedom to hear the exclusive claims of non-liberal groups. Not ideal but better. Play by other people's rules to some extent.

Is there such a thing as an alternative Christian liberalism?

Yes but not if you mean recasting the gospel according to the latest fashion. If you mean tolerance, reason, openness, lack of arrogance – these are Christian virtues that were hijacked by liberal humanism, Christians have the right to demand them back or at least share them. Christian liberalism can't ever be a matter of revising the gospel. My view is that the more orthodox you are doctrinally, then the more radical your ethics ought to be. We should be questioning injustice – I don't see Christians doing that – I see secular traditions doing that, ...but it's a different debate. Education in a secular liberal context can't replace Christian education. Christian education can come from Church schools - although some Church schools need to think about how they embody the faith -but if they're not available, there are alternatives, eg withdrawing – see how the Muslim community respond to this - Muslims have very developed out-of-school programmes.