

# Sermons, Speeches & Addresses

House of Lords Debate – Faith Schools  
8<sup>th</sup> February 2006



I begin by declaring an interest - more than one - in that I chair the governing body of a new city academy, which is to open formally this Friday. It is the first academy to be jointly sponsored by the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church in Liverpool and it is the first academy to take the environment as its specialism. It serves the local community and arose out of the New Deal for Communities programme. The Churches became natural partners with the local community because the Church in Liverpool - as elsewhere - has a proven and trusted track record in education.

Contrary to what the noble Lord said, faith-based education is not about propaganda or indoctrination. It simply recognises that the exploration of faith throughout the curriculum is integral to the formation of the whole person. As human beings we possess a variety of faculties - mental, emotional, physical, moral, spiritual and social - and an education that engages with all these capacities serves to educate the whole person, critically and spiritually. So I beg to differ with the noble Lord, especially with his view that religion should not be taught in schools. I have just returned from America, where I met many people who deeply regretted that particular stance being taken in that country

In a multi-faith society, where religion can be all the more important to the marginalised, it is best that such faith schools are invited into and sustained within the state provision so that there can be proper monitoring of the curriculum, proper access for the local neighbourhood, proper accountability to the community and proper integration into our society. Unless you are going to outlaw private faith-based schools, such schools in the minority communities are here to stay and show every sign of growing. Surely it is better to have such schools within the state provision as a means of integration and cohesion than to keep these schools and their communities on the margins of our society.

The Church of England is committed to inclusiveness. This historic position was re-emphasised recently in the report of the noble Lord, Lord Dearing, to the Church of England. We see evidence of this all the time, with, for example, members of the Jewish and Muslim communities choosing to send their children to our schools because faith is integral to education and explicitly respected. Again, my own academy has an admissions policy where priority is given to local young people within the New Deal area regardless of their faith affiliation. Residence is the only qualification, apart from special needs. Indeed, two-thirds of all the new Church of England secondary schools serve disadvantaged communities. This is consistent with our historic ideals of being biased to the poor.

The origin of the Church's involvement in education was to serve the children of the local parish, and especially the poor. It is true that, as the state rightly took responsibility for the education of the nation's children, the scope of the Church's involvement consequently narrowed. Now that the Government have opened wider the door to a new partnership with the Church and other faith communities, we are recovering our original mandate to serve the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Parents choose faith schools, especially in those areas of multiple deprivation - and I speak from a diocese of which 45 per cent of the parishes are in urban priority areas. I am delighted that we include the school of the noble Lord, Lord Baker, in the diocese of Liverpool at Holy Trinity, Southport. These faith schools are in some of our most deprived areas, and parents from these deprived areas choose these schools because of the standards they achieve, the values they share and the commitment of the staff - which, in many cases, is strengthened by the very faith that is integral to the education of the whole person.

© The Bishop of Liverpool