A comprehensive religious education is one which includes preparation for spirituality

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Spiritual education is twofold, including education about spirituality and preparation for spirituality.

Spiritual education is defined as ‘education in a spiritual activity’. Such activities include prayer, worship and meditation. Pupils should be educated about, and prepared for, participation in such activities. This is linked to the primary aim of religious education which is to enable pupils to critically engage with truth claims. If a pupil concludes that one of these claims is true then she is likely to want to participate in the spiritual activities that accompany it. A comprehensive religious education should enable her to do so.

Education about spirituality is a straightforward matter but how do we prepare pupils? We do so by enabling them to take seriously and develop their ‘inner lives’; such development being a precondition for spirituality. Opportunities for inner life development should be given their rightful place as part of a secondary but essential aim of religious education.

Introduction

Though the promotion of spiritual development is a legal requirement in schools in England and Wales, it is neither entirely clear what spirituality is nor how schools might educate in this area. In the literature one finds a number of divergent conceptions of spirituality (see, for example, Carr 1996; Davies 1998; Hand 2003; Hay with Nye 1998; Lewis 2000; Wright 1998) as well as a lack of agreement regarding whether or not spiritual education has any place in the common school. Some even argue that spirituality is beyond definition (Priestley 1985). In this paper I begin by dispensing with the notion that spirituality is beyond definition. Then, following a discussion of Hand’s (2003) taxonomy of possible meanings of spiritual education, one of these meanings (‘education in a spiritual activity’) is defended. I will show why education in a spiritual activity is twofold, including education about spirituality and preparation for spirituality. We shall see why Hammond and Hay’s (1990) experiential approach to religious education offers us a way in which we can meet both of these aims. Many readers will be familiar with this well-worn approach, and will know that it is not without its critics (see, for example, Thatcher 1991; Wright 1998). Their arguments cannot be rejected lightly, but I will show that they can indeed be rejected. This will leave us with a proposal for a comprehensive religious education which incorporates a clearly delineated spiritual education.

Is spirituality beyond definition?

For Priestley (1985), attempts to define spirituality are both ‘futile’ and ‘counter – productive’. He enlists the help of Wordsworth when making his case:

Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous form of things.
We murder to dissect. (From Priestley 1985, 114)
Priestley points out that ‘spirit’ has its etymological roots in ‘air’ and ‘wind’ and, herein, lays the problem:

To conceptualize the ‘spirit’ is to catch the wind, and a static wind is as meaningless as a square circle. To know the wind is to have stood in it and experienced its effects. It must be felt before it can be conceptualized. Consequently any acknowledgement or portrayal of the spirit must be communicated in dynamic images or models. Intellectual analysis requires static models, which is simply another way of saying that the spiritual dimension must first be removed. (Priestley 1985, 114)

If Priestley (1985) is right about this and we cannot define spirituality, then how can we be sure that it has any place in our schools? The answer must surely be that we cannot. Vague notions, such as those presented by Priestley, may be apt for all sorts of other occasions but this is not so where education is concerned; there is too much at stake. Moreover, vague notions count for little when spirituality has to vie to be taken seriously in an already crowded curriculum. In any case, Priestley has not shown that spirituality is beyond definition. Indeed, in the same paper he goes on to make some suggestions regarding the definition of spirituality. Even in the above citation, where he argues that spirituality cannot be defined, Priestley defines it as a dynamic entity that is analogous to the wind. It is through this analogy that Priestley attempts to demonstrate the elusiveness of spirituality but he is unsuccessful. A static wind may be as meaningless as a square circle but wind itself is not beyond conceptualization. It may be true to say that one has to stand in wind and experience its effects to ‘know’ it, but it is also true to say that one could gain a reasonable understanding of wind through seeing, or hearing descriptions of, its effects. Furthermore, if Priestley is retaining the analogy, to say that ‘intellectual analysis requires static models’ is to suggest that wind cannot be understood on an intellectual level and this is simply not the case. Firstly, it is not clear why intellectual analysis requires static models. Secondly, wind can be experienced, its effects can be observed and it can be understood on an intellectual level. Of course, there is a difference between understanding wind on an intellectual level and experiencing it but the former is possible without the latter.

There is no murderous intention, as Wordsworth is employed to suggest, behind the desire to bring clarity to spirituality for the common school. In fact, it is the assumption that spirituality is beyond definition that is potentially deadly. In Carr’s words:

… as the spiritual comes to be characterised in terms of various vague feelings of awe and wonder in relation to everything under the sun it becomes less and less easy to see how education might begin to engage with it in any meaningful way. This is … a basic conceptual problem which has … to be addressed by anyone who wishes to develop anything like a coherent practical policy or programme in the field of spiritual education. (Carr 1995, 85)

It is meaningful engagement with spirituality that keeps it alive, and such engagement is only possible if educators know what they are dealing with. In this sense, the intellect is far from murderous.

We can, and must, reject the notion that spirituality is beyond definition. So, how might we come to a decision regarding the definition of spirituality? Hand offers us a way of doing this, in his ‘logical geographical analysis of “spiritual education”’ (2003, 396).
Hand’s taxonomy

Hand’s taxonomy is constructed from a consideration of how ‘the adjective “spiritual” might qualify the noun “education”’ (2003, 396). He unearths four possible categories and tells us that spiritual education could mean one of the following:

1. education based on spiritual principles
2. education of the human spirit
3. education in a spiritual activity
4. education in a spiritual disposition (2003, 397)

Hand suggests that how far any of the above are appropriate for describing spiritual education in the common school will depend on their usefulness. This can be measured by how far the category in question is ‘(1) compatible with the aims of the common school; and (2) distinct from the established curriculum subjects.’ (2003, 400) Here follows a discussion of each of Hand’s categories in turn.

Education based on spiritual principles

Where the first category is concerned, Hand contends that ‘spiritual’ is most often understood to be synonymous with ‘religious’. It is in this sense that schools of a religious character might be understood to be providing a spiritual education. According to Hand, this first sense must be ruled out for common schools, as they are based on the principle of neutrality where religion is concerned. Wright (1998) takes issue with the notion of neutrality and argues that such a position is not possible. To claim neutrality towards religion is to make claims about the importance and nature of religion. For example, it is to say that religion and education are distinct areas, and that religion is a private rather than public matter. Mabud (in Watson 2006) describes this neutrality as belonging to a particular humanistic or secular spirituality, that is not neutral because it contradicts religious spirituality:

As with all faiths or world-views, secularism is based on, and promotes, a certain philosophy of life … The absolute and immutable norms and values, which for all the major religions are God-given, are denied … (Mabud from Watson 2006, 115)

For some, these ‘absolute and immutable norms and values’ apply to all aspects of life and thus should underpin education. On this view, it does not make sense nor is it possible to conceive of education as distinct from religion. As Wright and Mabud would acknowledge, this is certainly not a neutral stance on religion. And Mabud correctly identifies secularism as not being neutral towards religion. Secularism rejects religion. However, the suggestion that common schools are based on the values of secularism has not been substantiated by Wright or Mabud. It is certainly not supported in legislation regarding Collective Worship, religious education and spiritual development in schools. A secular school is not synonymous with a common school, precisely because the latter is based on the principle of neutrality towards religion. Hand’s rejection of ‘education based on spiritual principles’ stands, where the common school is concerned.

Education of the human spirit

Hand’s second category, can be understood in a wide and narrow sense. In its widest sense, ‘spirit’ refers to all of the educable parts of a person and therefore ‘all education is education of the spirit’ (2003, 397). Hand rejects this, as to talk of spiritual education in this sense is simply to talk of education per se. Carr supports Hand’s rejection stating that ‘we already
have a term (education) for the totality of such development’ (2001, 155). Hand opts for the narrower sense of education of the spirit, and points out that ‘spirit’ is commonly used in this narrow sense:

The parts of the soul [that ‘mind’ and ‘spirit’] respectively identify can be brought to light by considering the difference between saying of someone that she has a good mind and saying that she has a good spirit. In the first case we are making an assessment of her intelligence … in the second, we are making an assessment of her character. A person with a good spirit is one who is honourable or decent, whose motives are sound, whose heart is in the right place … In this narrower sense, then, the spirit is the seat of the virtues and vices, of the passions, emotions and desires … On this interpretation, a call for spiritual education would be a call for educational attention to the heart as well as the head. It would be an assertion that our responsibilities as educators extend beyond the transmission of knowledge and understanding to the firing of passions and the shaping of character. (Hand 2003, 398)

Few would reject the assertion that educational attention should be given to the heart. But a more appropriate term for what Hand describes is character education; Hand himself makes explicit reference to character in the above quote. Moreover, in this category Hand refers to ‘spirit’ rather than ‘spiritual’, and the latter is more closely connected with spirituality in ordinary usage than the former. Therefore, contra Hand, this second category is rejected.

**Education in a spiritual activity**

For Hand, education in a spiritual activity includes education in activities like prayer, worship and some forms of meditation. What makes these activities spiritual is that they are believed to be a way of connecting with the divine. This fits with ordinary and historical usage of the word ‘spirituality’, which for the most part would have spirituality as a dimension of religion. This corresponds with Carr’s (1995) definition of spirituality. It is because of its religious nature that Carr rejects spiritual education for the common school. So the argument goes, this would not cohere with the obligation to be neutral in matters of religious truth for sincere participation requires a commitment to some such truth. But Carr is being too hasty here. Of course, it is certainly the case that ‘pupils who do not hold religious beliefs cannot sincerely participate in prayer, worship or religious contemplation’ (Hand 2003, 398). And even where pupils do hold such beliefs, school is not the place for sincere participation in such activities. However, as Hand points out, participation (sincere or otherwise) is not a necessary component of education in a spiritual activity. Without participation, pupils can:

…learn what these activities are all about, how they are conducted and why they are important to religious believers. They can learn about different kinds of prayer and different kinds of answers to prayer. They can come to an empathetic understanding of the intense religious feelings that give rise to spontaneous worship, and of the quieter sense of holiness to which ritual worship gives rise. (Hand 2003, 399)

Though I think Hand has slightly overstated the case when he says that pupils can learn what spiritual activities are all about, it seems uncontroversial that they can learn about them and about why they are an important aspect of religion. As such it is entirely appropriate that such activities be included in religious education, in the common school.

It is important to note that Hand (2003) rejects ‘education in a spiritual activity’ as a useful definition of spiritual education because it does not meet the criteria of being ‘distinct from
the established curriculum subjects’ (Hand 2003, 400). Education in a spiritual activity is part of religious education. However, it is a distinctive aspect of religious education and therefore it is appropriate that it has its own title. This is already accepted practice in other subject areas, such as science (physics, chemistry, biology) and technology (food, resistant materials). Therefore it makes sense to refer to different dimensions of religious education (spiritual education, philosophy of religion, sociology of religion).

**Education in a spiritual disposition**

The fourth category that Hand presents is ‘education in a spiritual disposition’. In this sense, ‘to describe a person as “spiritual” is to ascribe to her a certain serenity or equanimity … a person in whom this quality has been deliberately cultivated could reasonably be described as “spiritually educated”’ (Hand 2003, 399). He goes on to argue that, as such a disposition would be difficult to obtain other than through belief in a transcendent reality, it is not appropriate for the common school.

Hand (2003) demonstrates that only two of the above categories, ‘education of the spirit’ and ‘education in a spiritual activity’, are appropriate for the common school. He then argues that the former is the only category which meets both of his criteria of usefulness to the educational community. However, ‘character education’ is a more fitting title for what Hand describes here, and this understanding of spiritual education is too far removed from ordinary usage of the term spirituality. Hand also argues that, what may be referred to as the spiritual education dimension of religious education, does not meet the aforementioned criteria. However, just as it is useful to talk of physics as part of science so it is useful to refer to spiritual education as part of religious education.

In this section, I have presented a case for defining spiritual education as education in a spiritual activity. This education already takes place to a limited extent within religious education, where pupils can learn about spiritual activities. It will now be shown that a comprehensive religious education should do more than educate pupils about spirituality. It should also prepare them for it.

**Preparation for Spirituality**

The argument I present here is based upon the premise that the primary aim of religious education is to enable pupils to critically engage with truth claims. I am, of course, aware that this is not universally accepted as the principal aim of the subject. However, there is not the space here to rehearse the familiar arguments about the aims of religious education (readers wishing to pursue them could see Cush 2007; Hand 2004; Hand and White 2004; White 2004, 2005; Wright 2004, 2005). It is my contention that a comprehensive religious education should go beyond critical engagement with truth claims. Those pupils whose critical engagement leads them to religious belief should be enabled to participate in the accompanying spiritual activities. I contend that a religious education that does not enable pupils in this way is incomplete. Engaging with truth claims is more worthwhile if one then genuinely has the option to practice according to what one believes to be true. It is not enough, then, to learn about spirituality. We must also prepare pupils for it.

One could argue that, as so few pupils will end up leading lives in which spiritual activities play a part, there is little justification for preparing all pupils for spirituality. Two points can be made in response to this. Firstly, as we shall see, the activities designed to prepare pupils for spirituality would also contribute to learning about spirituality. Whether or not one accepts religious truth claims, this is an important part of understanding what it means to be religious. Secondly, by not preparing pupils for spirituality we could be closing down (or certainly hindering) the option to live a religious life. We might also add a third practical
point. The organisation of religious education in schools would become prohibitively complex if only those who had, or might in the future, accept particular truth claims were prepared for spirituality.

The primary justification for religious education is that one, or some, religious truth claim(s) may in fact be true and that pupils should be equipped with the wherewithal to come to a decision on such matters (Hand 2004). If this is accepted, it follows that pupils should also be equipped with the wherewithal to respond to what they believe to be true, indeed to what may in fact be true. Arguments against either one of these aims must amount to at least a challenge to the other.

Having established that preparing students for spirituality is an appropriate aim, how do we go about it? According to Scheindlin, we do so by enabling students to take seriously and develop their ‘inner lives’:

I do not mean to equate the inner life with spirituality, but only to say that a rich inner life is a prerequisite for spirituality. Spirituality entails reaching from inside to something transcendent. The inner life, therefore, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for spirituality. (Scheindlin 1999, 193)

With Scheindlin, I reject the notion that the inner life equates with spirituality. Whilst we can all be said to have an inner life, we are not all spiritual. We do not all accept the existence of something transcendent, let alone seek to connect with it. It is assertions that we are all spiritual that have seriously muddied the waters regarding the conceptualisation of spirituality.

In an attempt to avoid muddying the waters of inner development, I would like to add a small caveat before accepting Scheindlin’s advice regarding preparation for spirituality. This is in relation to his apparent understanding of what counts as an inner life. Scheindlin seems to have a rather narrow definition, where the inner life is confined to that which necessarily precedes spirituality. He refers to the ‘emotional responses’ such as ‘senses of awe, mystery and wonder’ (Scheindlin 1990, 194). My understanding of the inner life is wider than this, consisting of thought processes and feelings which are not publicly observable. This can range from mental arithmetic, to having a piece of music ‘playing in my head’, to meditation. Therefore, I am not suggesting that religious education is or should be responsible for all aspects of inner life development. My call for a focus on inner life development in religious education is limited to those thought processes and feelings relevant to learning about and preparing for spirituality.

By responding to the question of how we might prepare students for spirituality, Scheindlin has raised a further question: how do we go about enabling students to take seriously and develop their inner lives? As a number of conceptualisations of spirituality make reference to inner life development, there is much in the literature purporting to advise on spiritual education that can help us here. An obvious example of a salient body of work is that of Hay and his colleagues (see, for example, Hammond and Hay et al. 1990; Hay 2000; Hay with Nye 1998).

Preparing for spirituality through experiential religious education
I have suggested above that there is a wealth of ‘spiritual development’ literature that can aid us in finding ways of providing opportunities for inner life development. I have also identified the work of Hay and his colleagues as an obvious choice. Many readers will be
familiar with Hay’s collaboration with Hammond and others, in the production of a comprehensive guide to experiential religious education (Hammond and Hay et al. 1990). This section will demonstrate that the experiential approach they advocate does indeed provide us with a means of preparing young people for spirituality.

*New Methods in RE Teaching* (Hammond and Hay et al. 1990) presents activities which its authors claim will ‘be useful to teachers who want to help their ... students to understand something of the ways in which people with spiritual or religious belief experience the world’ (Hammond and Hay et al. 1990, 6). According to the authors, developing an understanding of such experiences necessitates recognition of an inner life:

> To understand how somebody else experiences the world, we have to take their inner experience seriously, and that involves an awareness that we have an inner experience of our own. (Hammond and Hay et al. 1990, 7)

It is suggested that one way of enabling students to increase their awareness of their inner experience is to engage them in ‘stilling’:

> Bodily relaxation and clearing the mind are recommended by many religious traditions. While stilling is an end in itself for some religious people, for others it is a preparation for worship and prayer. The ability to still, focus or centre ourselves needs careful attention... This can be done in a number of ways – through physical relaxation, breathing exercises, fantasy processes and meditation techniques... It is through the raising of their own awareness that [pupils] have an opportunity to understand religious practices. (Hammond and Hay et al. 1990, 72)

This particular activity would actually enable us to provide for both aspects of spiritual education. Pupils could learn about spirituality by developing their understanding of why some religious people might engage in stilling in order to prepare for spiritual activity. They could prepare for spirituality by developing (an awareness of) their inner lives. One of the stilling activities suggested involves asking pupils to be silent for a short while. As with many of the other activities, teachers are provided with a script, accompanied with instructions, that can be adapted for their own classes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In a quiet, relaxed voice give the following instructions:</th>
<th>What I am about to ask you to do is not easy although the instructions sound very simple. In a moment I am going to ask you to be silent for five minutes.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you think five minutes is too long, try two minutes.</td>
<td>First of all make sure you are sitting in a comfortable position ... Try to sit still. Now close your eyes, if you feel you can, but if not, try to look down so that you can’t see anyone else. Just use the time to think about what is happening, how you, and perhaps others, are feeling. We’ll talk about this later. There’s no need to check your watch as I will call time at the end of the five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pause long enough to let them get comfortable.</td>
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7
You should also be silent as you time the exercise...

Discussion can be in pairs, small groups or the entire class.

OK. The period of silence begins NOW.

Turn to the person nearest to you, and spend a few minutes talking about this experience...

(Hammond and Hay et al. 1990, 73)

The authors suggest some questions that the teacher might like to put to students:

What is it like being silent?
What made it easy or difficult to do?
What did you like or not like about it?
... How do you think silence might be of value?

(Hammond and Hay et al. 1990, 73)

I have chosen this activity as an example as it is one that I have used, frequently, in the classroom. What I report below stems from my own secondary school teaching. For the most part I have allowed students some time to reflect on the questions in silence before asking them to share their responses. Of course, it is important that students are given the opportunity to discuss their responses without being pressurised to do so (Hammond and Hay et al. 1990). The stilling activity and the private reflection that follows it raises students’ awareness that they have an inner life of their own. Some of them find it more difficult than others to be still and ignore both inner and outer distractions. When it comes to sharing their responses to the questions, at first in pairs and then as a whole class, students can learn that people experience the world differently. This ‘involves admitting to ourselves that our own perspective is only one among many’ (Hammond and Hay et al. 1990, 6). Finally, in addition to the questions suggested above, students are asked why religious people might find it valuable to be silent and still. On every occasion that I have asked this, at least one student suggests that silence and stillness can be an important precursor to spiritual activity. Thus in this exercise students learn about spirituality, as they develop some ‘appreciation of the intentions of religious people’ (Hammond and Hay et al. 1990, 6). This exercise can also prepare students for spirituality, as they become more aware of their inner life and are given the tools with which to access spiritual activity should they wish to do so.

Readers familiar with the experiential approach to religious education are also likely to be aware of the fact it has attracted a fair amount of criticism. We shall now turn our attention to two of the more serious criticisms. Firstly, we will consider the view that the notion of inner lives must be ruled out because it rests upon a philosophically unsound dualistic understanding of the human being (Thatcher 1991). Following this, we will address the fact that Wright rejects the approach because he sees it as prioritising experience over truth (Wright 1998).

Is the notion of an inner life philosophically unsound?
According to Thatcher (1991), the experiential approach advocated in New Methods (1990) is ‘deeply flawed’ because it rests upon Cartesian dualism. Thatcher makes it clear that, in his view, Hammond and Hay should know better than to accept ‘this misleading and
philosophically spurious view of the human being’ (Thatcher 1991, 22). Instead, he argues, their approach seems to actively promote this dualistic view of the human:

References abound to ‘inner intentions’, inner experience’, inner aspects’, ‘the inside world’, ‘going inwards’, ‘the inner self’, ‘inner space’, and so on. The lack of criticism of this inner/outer dualism is astonishing. (Thatcher 1991, 23)

Thatcher draws upon Wittgenstein’s private language argument, in his rejection of the notion of an ‘inner self’:

According to Wittgenstein, expressing my own mental states or feeling states is impossible without a shared publicly-owned language and considerable induction into its use, with the result that descriptions of sensations and feelings rely on prior social realities, provided by a linguistic community... It is not denied that we have private sensations, but since the language used to express them is publicly learned, the meaning of language cannot be derived from the sensations alone. (Thatcher 1991, 23)

I am not sure how this ‘causes loose talk about inner states to fall’ (Thatcher 1991, 23). On the contrary, it demonstrates that Thatcher, after Wittgenstein, accepts that we have mental and feeling states, or private sensations. As Mott-Thornton points out, ‘these things make up presumably some part of what the experientialists would call an inner life’ (Mott-Thornton 1996, 157). Mott-Thornton notes further the irrelevance of Wittgenstein’s private language argument to the point Thatcher is trying to make:

The private language argument ... is not designed to show either that inner experience does not exist or cannot be spoken of but rather that the criteria used for making inner judgments are fundamentally public ... these remarks do not relate directly to the language of the experientialists. (Mott-Thornton 1996, 157)

Thatcher’s (1991) use of the private language argument is unsuccessful. Furthermore, his suggestion that the notion of inwardness is damaging to Christian theology (1991, 22) is curious when one considers that ‘references abound’ to this very notion in the Bible. Here are just a few of the examples, quoted by Hay and Hammond in their response to Thatcher:

Not a word from their lips can be trusted, deep within them lies ruin
Psalm 5, 9

Man’s spirit is the lamp of Yahweh, searching his deepest self
Proverbs 20, 27

Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts.
Jeremiah 31, 33

Oh, you Pharisees! You clean the outside of cup and plate, while inside yourselves you are filled with extortion and wickedness. Fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside too?
Luke 11, 39-40
(Hay and Hammond 1992, 147)

Despite the use of these quotes, Hay and Hammond say they ‘disagree entirely … that dualism is at the foundation of experiential religious education’ (1992, 145). But perhaps they
are being too hasty, in their bid to defend their approach, in denying dualism. To be sure, they reject a particular formulation of dualism:

That inheritance of the European Enlightenment which creates an inner, private world, parallel to, but cut off from the public world of experience, fails to recognise the embodiedness of persons.
(Hay and Hammond 1992, 145)

But this is not the only way of understanding dualism. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘dualism’ as ‘the division of something conceptually into two opposed or contrasted aspects’ (2008, 441). According to this definition, we can contrast inner and outer, or private and public, without the need to cut one off from the other. This is the kind of dualism that underpins the experiential approach, as is evidenced in one of the introductory chapters to New Methods:

It is the personal experience, the inner intention, that matters to the religious believer, and without some grasp of that intention, students will have no real understanding of religion… Publicly available phenomena are not enough.
(Hammond and Hay et al. 1990, 10)

A possible explanation for Hay and Hammond’s adamant rejection of dualism is that they have an unnecessarily narrow understanding of it.

In this section, we have seen that the notion of an inner life need not be rejected as philosophically unsound. But this is not the only serious criticism to be levelled at an approach which places such importance on inner experience. In the following section we shall consider the issue of truth, raised by Wright (1998)

What about truth?

Wright (1998) criticises experiential religious education for prioritising experience over truth. Though I have already explained that I consider truth to be a primary concern in religious education, I think it is worth emphasising that the approach I advocate does not fall foul of Wright’s attack(s) on the experiential approach. On the contrary, it complements and completes Wright’s own vision for religious education. Both Hand (2004) and Wright (1993) have successfully shown that the primary aim of religious education is that of enabling students to grapple with conflicting truth claims. What they advocate in this regard is religious education as philosophy of religion, placing truth firmly on the agenda. This is the primary aim of, and justification for, religious education ‘on the grounds that some of those [truth claims] may in fact be true’ (Hand 2004, 161). It is precisely because some religious truth claims might be true, that religious education needs to go further than philosophy of religion allows. It should also enable pupils to engage in those spiritual activities that accompany particular truth claims, should they choose to do so. Wright (1998) is correct to have put truth at the top of the agenda, but this should not be at the cost of ignoring the spiritual dimension of religion.

Conclusion

I have argued that we can and must define spiritual education. It has been defined as education in a spiritual activity. This coheres with ordinary usage of the term ‘spirituality’. Spiritual activities are those that are believed by practitioners to be a way of connecting with
the transcendent. Spiritual education involves both learning about and preparing for spirituality. We can prepare students for spirituality by enabling them to take seriously and develop their inner lives. This is an essential accompaniment to grappling with truth claims in religious education. If a pupil concludes that a particular claim is true then she is likely to want to participate in the spiritual activities that accompany it. If her religious education prepares her to enter into such activities should she choose to do so, then she genuinely has the option of living according to what she believes to be true. The argument I have offered is that spiritual education should be given its rightful place as a secondary but essential aim of religious education.

References


