

The Anglican Clergy and Education at the end of the First World War

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In March 1918 the bishop of Oxford, Charles Gore, issued a set of queries prior to his final visitation. For the most part, his questionnaire followed the standard format established since the mid-eighteenth century, seeking details about the condition of the 600 parishes that comprised his diocese which might subsequently be used to address issues of organisation or pastoral concern. When it came to the subject of education, however, his approach was rather different, asking not for information but rather for the views of his clergy on how best to proceed. Another move to address the educational issues facing both church and state in the early twentieth century was in the offing. Gore had already engaged publicly with the question in a speech in the House of Lords, reprinted for the benefit of his local audience in the pages of the *Diocesan Magazine*, in the debate around the proposals for what eventually became the Fisher Education Act of 1918. Here he contended that educational reform should proceed without reference to religious controversy, principally because the bulk of public opinion was exasperated by it. Nevertheless, once the reform was enacted, 'the country must reconsider the question of religion and its position in education on a new basis.' In particular, he argued, 'I am quite sure it is impossible that we could go forward for ten years without something approaching total reconstruction of the position which religion must occupy in the training of teachers.'¹

Informed by his experience of parliamentary debate, Gore's questionnaire addressed the issue of 'Single School Areas',² asking his clergy whether they thought the current status of Church schools ought to be retained or whether there might be compromises to be made in the make-up of management committees, the appointment of headteachers and the character of religious teaching. Then moving to a more general issue about the place of religion in education, Gore enquired whether his clergy might think such compromises might be worth making in exchange for more satisfactory conditions of religious teaching in state-provided elementary schools. Framed as a series of short sentences at the head of a blank foolscap page, these queries invited discursive answers. Many of the clergy duly obliged. Taken together, the responses to the questionnaire provide an excellent basis on which to evaluate a considerable body of Anglican clerical opinion on the state of religious education in their parishes and its prospects for the future.³

Although rich in studies of individual schools, the more general historiography of the relationship between religion and elementary education in the first couple of decades of the twentieth century remains relatively slender. There is no full-length study of the topic, which therefore tends to receive a few pages

¹ *Oxford Diocesan Magazine*, Vol XII (Oxford, 1918), 89.

² Parishes where there was no alternative elementary educational provision to that provided by the Church of England.

³ The surviving returns to the survey are collected in three bound volumes held in the Oxfordshire History Centre (hereafter, Oxford, OHC) within which each return has been assigned an individual serial number. The returns for the Oxford Archdeaconry, essentially co-terminus with the pre-1974 county, are at Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380.

of coverage in more general works either in the history of religion – in which the topic of education is only of passing interest⁴ – or in general social histories or histories of education which, especially after 1914, have tended to discard religion as a major concern.⁵ Even where the relationship between religion and education has been at the centre of historical attention, the early twentieth century has tended to receive relatively little coverage, especially in comparison with the struggles of the nineteenth century or the consequences of the second world war and the Butler education act of 1944, recently described by Simon Green as ‘an instrument of Christian stewardship’.⁶ Only the politics and policies of education in this period have attracted sustained attention from historians: Ian Machin, and others have provided a high-level view of the fortunes of parliamentary attempts to address educational problems in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷ However, a consequence of the focus on politics has tended to be a preoccupation with conflict as the primary lens through which education is viewed, especially in the period between the passage of the Balfour Education Act in 1902⁸ and the first world war. In his work on the ‘Nonconformist Conscience’, for example, David Bebbington stressed the significance of Nonconformist resistance to rate-supported denominational education, the introduction of which provoked, ‘a classic crusade of unprecedented proportions’,⁹ and one, moreover, which generated sustained resistance for over a decade. Nonconformity, Bebbington

⁴ See, for example, Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow, 2006); Keith Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales The Christian Church 1900-2000* (Oxford, 2008), 65-9; Stewart J. Brown, *Providence and Empire 1815-1914* (Harlow, 2008), 412-23.

⁵ Pamela Horn, *Education in Rural England 1800-1914* (New York, 1978); W.B. Stephens, *Education in Britain 1750-1914* (Basingstoke, 1998); Gillian Sutherland, ‘Education’, in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950* vol 3 (Cambridge, 1990), 119-169; Martin Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare. An Economic and Social History of Britain 1851-1951* (Oxford, 2007), 488-510.

⁶ S.J.D. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England* (Cambridge, 2011), 213. See also, Priscilla Chadwick, *Shifting Alliances Church and State in English Education* (London, 1997); John T. Smith, *Methodism and Education 1849-1902* (Oxford, 1998); Lois Loudon, *Distinctive and Inclusive The National Society and Church of England Schools 1811-2011* (London, 2012).

⁷ G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1832 to 1868* (Oxford, 1977), 151-160; G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1869-1921* (Oxford, 1987), 31-40, 260-73, 284-293. See also, E.R. Norman, *Church and Society in England 1770-1970* (Oxford, 1976), 262-266; Tony Taylor, ‘Lord Cranbourne, the Church Party and Anglican education 1893-1902: from politics to pressure’, *History of Education*, 22:2, (1993), 125-146; Geoffrey Sherington, *English education, Social change and war 1911-20* (Manchester, 1981).

⁸ The 1902 Education Act allowed LEAs to give financial support raised from the rates to voluntary denominational schools including those of the Church of England and the Roman Catholics without taking them under state control (though they would have the right to appoint two of the managers) or supervising the religious teaching given in the schools.

⁹ D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience Chapel and Politics 1870-1914* (London, 1982), 142.

notes, 'was stirred more deeply and more unanimously on a public issue than ever before or since'.¹⁰ Searches for a compromise thereafter were frustrated by the incompatible views of, and the mutual distaste between, Nonconformist Protestants and Anglo-Catholic Anglicans, compounded by an increasingly assertive Roman Catholic interest given additional weight by the parliamentary influence of Irish nationalism.¹¹

This paper uses as its sample the 234 returns made by Oxfordshire parishes. The material is given additional interest by being drawn from the largest diocese of the Church of England, headed by a bishop who was centrally concerned with educational issues. Oxford Diocese provided a mainly rural setting particularly rich in single school areas (where those issues were potentially at their most acute), but also including a range of market towns and more substantial urban settlements such as Banbury and the city of Oxford itself. Attending to the words of the Oxfordshire clergy themselves provides an opportunity to move away from the preoccupations of the current historiography and to take a fresh look at the issues surrounding education from the point of view of men on the ground in the parishes. It also opens a window into the shift in balance of clerical opinion on the matter in the light of a decade-and-a-half's experience of the Balfour Act in operation and the impact of three-and-a-half years of war.

Three central themes emerge from a review of this material. First is considerable evidence of a growing détente between Anglicans and nonconformists in the field of religious education. While perhaps surprising, given the historiographical prominence of the notion of conflict following the 1902 Act, a substantial number of Oxfordshire incumbents reported an absence of tension and occasionally the increasing growth of friendly relationships. At Steeple Barton, for example, the incumbent remarked on, 'events which point to vast improvement to the better in the relations of the Church and Nonconformist.'¹² Clear evidence of mellowing on the part of the parish clergy can be found in their response to the thought of compromise in the area of school management. While some were determined to strive to keep day-to-day control of Church schools entirely in Church hands, a majority were happy to contemplate the inclusion of nonconformists on their management committees and several had positive experience of mixed management committees already in operation (often in cases where managers appointed by the local education authority [L.E.A.]¹³ were nonconformists). This applied even in small parishes where the Church of England might have expected to enjoy a monopoly: in the tiny seigneurial village of Astall the incumbent reported that his management committee of six

¹⁰ Ibid. 143. See also, D. R. Pugh, 'English Nonconformity, education and passive resistance 1903-6, *History of Education*, 19:4 (1990), 355-373.

¹¹ Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, 143-152; Machin, *Politics and the Churches 1869-1921*, 284-293.

¹² Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 18.

¹³ Local education Authorities replaced the earlier School Boards as the state providers of elementary education following the education act of 1902. They were essentially committees appointed by county and county borough councils and some larger urban districts.

had for many years included two nonconformists and that 'all the Managers have worked together in perfect harmony'.¹⁴

A similar attitude marked clerical responses to the possibility of modifying religious teaching in Church schools. Many of the clergy felt that no changes need be made. In some parishes, this was the result of an entire absence of nonconformity, as at Bucknell and Harpsden,¹⁵ but more usually it was because, at least from the perspective of the clergy, the nonconformists resident in their parishes appeared to be content with the existing arrangements. Thus, the vicar of St Clements in Oxford, commented:

No demand has ever been made in my hearing for any alteration ... as to the character of the religious teaching. So far as the last mentioned point is concerned we have a number of children of Nonconformist parents in the schools who regularly attend Wesleyan Sunday Schools but no request has ever been made to withdraw any children from religious instruction.¹⁶

Occasionally, clergy also testified to their willingness to promote the effective operation of the conscience clause when nonconformist parishioners had expressed concerns. At Asthall, for example,

In this Parish there has never been any desire on the part of Nonconformist parents to withdraw their children from Religious Instruction as given in the School: the only objection ever made was by Baptist parents who objected to their children being made to say the answers to the first portion of the Church Catechism, which was only natural and their wishes were at once complied with.¹⁷

An overwhelming majority of those who did recommend change supported the admission of nonconformist ministers or other qualified teachers into Church schools to teach groups of nonconformist children at the request of their parents, as at South Banbury and St Frideswide in Oxford.¹⁸ A few of the clergy, though, suspected that their nonconformist colleagues were unlikely to rise to the challenge. As the vicar of Swalcliffe reported, 'I would be prepared to allow nonconformists to give their particular teaching to their children in Church Schools. But I doubt very much whether they would avail themselves of the privilege'.¹⁹

In only a handful of parishes does conflict seem to have remained high on the clerical agenda: notably at Piddington, where, perhaps giving evidence of the persistence of Anglican hauteur, the incumbent complained of, 'a nonconformist element of an ignorant and therefore narrow and bigoted type'.²⁰ However, even in the view of the Anglican clergy themselves, the

¹⁴ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 7.

¹⁵ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 37, 93.

¹⁶ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 151.

¹⁷ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 7.

¹⁸ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 16, 154.

¹⁹ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 202. See also, Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 42, 104a.

²⁰ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 166 He was probably referring to the Independents/Congregationalists who were present in some strength in the Oxfordshire parishes along the Buckinghamshire border and had established a chapel in Piddington by 1848. K. Tiller, *Church and Chapel in Oxfordshire 1851*(Oxford,

most significant threat to the progress of détente in the Oxford diocese came less from the nonconformist side than from the increasingly assertive Anglo-Catholicism evident in some of its parishes. Several of the clergy pointed to the risks: the incumbent of Horton, for example, suggested that in some parishes Free Churchmen, 'resent the religious teaching which in many cases approximates to Roman teaching.' The curate of Ducklington expressed the view that, 'It is the very extreme views of some which have alarmed even moderate nonconformists.'²¹

A prominent example of this tendency was Nicholas Poyntz, vicar of Dorchester on Thames, whose response to the bishop's options for compromise was characteristically uncompromising,

If the Church believes in Herself she cannot recognise other forms of religion, or make any compromise with them. In Baptism She becomes the Spiritual Mother of the Baptized and cannot rightly hand them over to another form of religion.²²

Poyntz was an unusually vigorous and pugnacious Anglo-Catholic whose interventions in his local schools, especially his teaching the schoolgirls to say the *Hail Mary*, had caused some embarrassment to bishop Paget as a member of the Ecclesiastical Discipline Commission in the previous decade. He had also been conducting a campaign of attrition against local nonconformists for years, culminating in his purchase in 1908 of the site of the recently closed Baptist chapel and the application to the land title of a restrictive covenant preventing its use in future by any nonconformist group. He had sought, without success, to use the same tactic ten years previously in relation to the former site of the Primitive Methodist chapel subsequently acquired by the Salvation Army.²³

The second theme to emerge from the Oxfordshire clergy's responses to their bishop was a strong commitment to the retention and, if possible, extension of the denominational principle in education. As the incumbent of Milton under Wychwood explained, 'I believe in denominational schools, first, last, and all the time.'²⁴ In consequence, while content to accommodate nonconformists in management and teaching, they were much less happy to compromise on the appointment of head-teachers. Here the bishop's question was adverting not just to the concerns of the nonconformists but also of the N.U.T., which was campaigning against religious tests in relation to teaching appointments. In the responses, as compared to the more relaxed position on school management, the proportions opposing and supporting compromise were reversed, with only 22 incumbents even tentatively in favour of the move, compared to 110 resolutely opposed. Most of these contented themselves with simply stating that the head teacher should be a churchman or woman or that it would be inappropriate for a nonconformist to head a Church school.

1987), 82. *A History of the County of Oxford, vol 5, Bullingdon Hundred* (London, 1957), 258. A comparably dismissive attitude, in this case to Baptists, was exhibited by the vicar of Littlemore. Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 123.

²¹ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 109, 69.

²² Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 66.

²³ K. Tiller, ed., *Dorchester Abbey Church and People 635-2005*, (Stonesfield, 2005), 76-83.

²⁴ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 131

Some, however, expressed their position with considerable force, as in the case of the incumbent of Pyrton who reported, 'I feel very strongly that we must never surrender the appointment of the Headteacher, nothing will compensate us for such a loss.'²⁵ Where extensive negative comment was provided, it tended to be the N.U.T. rather than nonconformists which provided the target. The vicar of Blackbourton, for example, confided to his bishop that, 'I have no faith in the "scraps of paper" of the N.U.T. Socialist and nonconformist ideas are too prevalent for us to give an inch which would mean in the end the N.U.T. taking the ell.'²⁶

Several incumbents made a comprehensive defence of the current arrangement precisely on the grounds that it was essential to the preservation of denominational education. For instance, the vicar of Chipping Norton, proposed:

I think we should seek by all means to retain our Church Schools in single-school areas. Neither the management, appointment of head teachers or the character of religious teaching should be altered lest it should interfere with the "atmosphere" of the school. It is this "atmosphere" that is so tremendously important. So many children have no real homes and a school under proper management and loyal Church Teachers with no vagueness of undenominationalism can be made a real home and "mother" to teach them devotion and in addition one has to remember there is such a thing as teaching secular things religiously. The sense of Church membership too can only be fostered by attendance at such a school. I venture to think that the sad lack of sense of membership, and ignorance generally of their own Church, revealed by so many soldiers at the front (we are told) is arising [from] attendance at Council Schools or Church Schools compromised out of all character.²⁷

The necessity for 'definite' church teaching was a commonplace in the clergy's responses to their bishop's enquiries²⁸ and their welcome to nonconformist teachers was intended to promote parallel denominational teaching. It aimed not to water down the teaching of the Church but rather to permit its intensification, as the vicar of Sandford St Martin explained,

My own view is, that ... it would be worthwhile and fair to give Nonconformity the privilege of teaching their own children in Church Schools in single-school areas: that it would be better to teach a few church children definitely than a large number indefinitely or whose church teaching is counteracted at home – and that it would make for Christian fellowship and charity.²⁹

The corollary of the clerical commitment to denominational education was a deep scepticism about the utility of undenominationalism and a general hostility to the principle. At Brize Norton, for example, the vicar reported on the unsatisfactory nature of the undemoninational religious teaching at the local LEA provided school in consequence of which, 'Our Children are

²⁵ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 168

²⁶ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 26

²⁷ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 49.

²⁸ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 1, 123, 143.

²⁹ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 175.

absolutely heathen and ignorant of the simplest facts even of the Patriarchs, or of our Lord's Life. In many cases, as here, if the clergy have no voice in the teaching, the Bible is a dead letter.'³⁰

Similarly, the Perpetual Curate of Claydon noted that a 'Council School, humanly speaking renders it impossible to hope for the spread of any religious feeling among the people – it practically kills religion.'³¹ To clergy like these, the idea of a more satisfactory version of the terms currently in operation in L.E.A. provided schools was a contradiction in terms and the only proper course was resolute opposition to the spread of these schools and an energetic attempt to render it unnecessary. As the vicar of Fritwell put it, "Compromise may act in politics but concentration is needed in wars." and this is war to the knife against the hideous monster of "undenominationalism".³²

The final theme to emerge from a review of the clergy's response to the bishop's enquiry, somewhat less overt than the other two, offers both an insight into their view of the purpose of religious education at the elementary level and in some cases, evidence for an underlying anxiety about its usefulness. A handful commented warmly on the value of Church schools in laying the foundation on which the clergy could build the Church in the next generation. The vicar of Sydenham, for example, thought his school should be retained in its current status because, 'the influence over the children and through them over the parish generally is very great.'³³ Similar views were expressed both in urban benefices like St Barnabas in Oxford and village parishes throughout the county.³⁴ The warmest endorsement, however came from the perpetual curate of Holy Trinity Henley:

As one who has given religious instruction in Church day-schools for 20-5 years regularly once or twice a week, and continues to do so, I am profoundly convinced of the necessity of doing our utmost to maintain their definite status as far as possible. I find the School to be the invaluable nursery of the Church. It is through teaching and knowing the children that I find doors open to me in houses which would be otherwise, in a sense, closed.³⁵

It was this sense of the continuing potential of church schools that encouraged the clergy to be so tenacious of the denominational principle. Indeed, there was, despite the different inflections of church party, a broad agreement across the range of responses about the essentials of religious education. The vicar of Faringdon wanted, 'truly Gospel teaching in education'.³⁶ His colleague at St Frideswide in Oxford asserted that, 'the whole training and development of the child should be based on a religious ideal, and that the Catholic ideal, and should be religious in aim and in method.'³⁷ They would have agreed, however, that such education must be a

³⁰ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 34.

³¹ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 51.

³² Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 84.

³³ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 205.

³⁴ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 150, 197, 198, 224.

³⁵ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 98.

³⁶ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 75.

³⁷ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 154.

genuine expression of the faith rather than merely formal. As the vicar of Shirburn put it, 'real religious education should be given in all elementary schools,'³⁸ and for the incumbent of Fritwell, 'The Head teacher must be a consistent Churchman or Church woman, believing and living the Catholic faith... they cannot teach what they do not believe and practice themselves.'³⁹

The unusually irenic rector of Swerford reported:

If such a thing were possible, I should like to see a system under which (with safeguards against bitterly controversial teaching such as would justly be offensive to consciences on the one side or the other) we could all agree to encourage the individual teachers, High, Low or Broad, to teach what they themselves really feel most strongly and with most conviction. This does not seem to me impossible. But I am... assured that your Lordship will regard me as an enthusiastic dreamer.

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Nonetheless, not all the clergy were equally convinced that that the schools were realising their potential and the returns are marked by a strong undercurrent of disquiet. For some this was simply a question of viability: they feared their preferred model of denominational instruction would be overwhelmed by state-backed undenominationalism underpinned by the power of the purse, reflected in better equipped schools and higher salaried teachers, and reinforced by the support of the teachers' union.⁴¹ For others, though, even denominational education had produced such disappointing results that it seemed hardly worth persisting. The Rector of Rotherfield Peppard reported,

There has been a Church School in this Parish for close upon 50 years, but I cannot find that it has been instrumental in building up convinced Churchmen. Practically all the men of the artisan and labouring classes in the Parish have been educated at the School, and yet it is a rare exception to find among them a Communicant. A Church School which produces a beggarly harvest of this kind is certainly not worth retaining, if in doing so we are standing in the way of a really efficient National System of Education.⁴²

To some extent attitudes like this reveal heightened expectations on the part of an increasingly Anglo-Catholic clergy, especially with respect to producing congregations of communicants rather than the kind of results produced by the school at Sandford St Martin: 'though there is perhaps no very deep or definite Church membership realised, it is peculiarly a parish of men and women of goodwill to the church.'⁴³ However, the responses adduced a range of reasons for educational failure. Some were disappointed by the material with which they had to work. One or two expressed concern about the children. At Newington, for example, the incumbent contrasted his previous charge in the north of England which had two large schools 'with effective church teaching of very intelligent children' with his country cure in

³⁸ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 183.

³⁹ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 89.

⁴⁰ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 212.

⁴¹ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 50, 57, 107.

⁴² Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 172.

⁴³ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 175

Oxfordshire where, 'I realise how much there is of the very first rudiments of religion which has constantly to be taught and which we do not seem to get beyond.'⁴⁴ Others were concerned about the indifference of the parents which undermined attempts at religious formation.⁴⁵ Given the emphasis on 'reality' in religious instruction, however, the most frequently expressed anxieties were about teachers who were Churchmen or women in name only and did not therefore deliver the teaching with conviction.⁴⁶ This was supplemented by a serious concern within the clerical body that not all of their number gave a high enough priority to involvement with the school. At Cowley, for example, the vicar warned, 'the real danger is that my brethren the Clergy do not visit the Schools enough and that they do not look upon them as one of the most important branches of their work.'⁴⁷ Moreover, even those who did engage were not always a success. As the Rector of Drayton St Leonard, himself married to a certificated teacher, put it, 'the clergy, if they teach must learn to teach scientifically.'⁴⁸

A few of the responses suggested that the problems lay deeper in the system. The incumbent of Shipton on Cherwell thought the system was too 'examinational' tending to treat religion like any other subject,⁴⁹ and given this situation, his colleague at Nuffield felt that elementary schools should focus on moral instruction, 'A knowledge of certain parts of Bible history either of the old or n. Testament will not save children from lying and stealing and foul speech.' He suggested reserving more definite church teaching for the Sunday school.⁵⁰ At Swerford, the rector thought the structure of religious education for mixed school communities militated against 'reality' in the teaching:

What I feel most strongly is that the present system tends to make each teacher present to the children a minimum of his or her... religious convictions. They say to themselves "I must not say this, or I shall not be dealing fairly with the children of dissenters: I must not say that, or I shall not be dealing fairly with the children of strong churchmen."⁵¹

The vicar of Goring felt the Church school system was flawed by its failure to pursue a sufficiently wholistic view of religious education: 'I do not think our Church Schools have stood to their ideal. The sacred and the secular are almost as sharply separated in them as in Council Schools.'⁵² The Rector of Witney, on the other hand, thought there was probably too much religious teaching in the schools already:

I am sure the children are fed up with religious lessons – five days every week and twice on Sundays. I take great care that my own

⁴⁴ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 137.

⁴⁵ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 1, 77, 182.

⁴⁶ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 42, 68, 194.

⁴⁷ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 57.

⁴⁸ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 68.

⁴⁹ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 181.

⁵⁰ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 144.

⁵¹ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 212

⁵² Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 88.

children are not surfeited as the elementary school children are.

Religion is to them knowing facts not living a life.⁵³

Whatever their qualms, however, only a tiny minority of the Oxfordshire clergy favoured any kind of major reconstruction; unsatisfactory though many of them felt the system might be they were determined to stick with it for fear of something worse. This view had, if anything, been deepened by the experience of war. As the incumbent of St Peter in the East, Oxford put it, the reports of misconduct by German troops provided 'an object lesson in the necessity of religious teaching'.⁵⁴

Given the clear views expressed by his clergy, the bishop's own policy as enunciated in the charge he delivered on his visitation tour in May and June 1918 must have come as something of a bombshell. Gore began with a gloomy analysis of the prospects for the present system. The existing provision of Church schools would be impossible to maintain, he argued, because of a lack of resources and the tendency of the new central schools to be established under the forthcoming education act to displace them in importance, making the district rather than the parish the natural unit of education. The increasing proportion of teachers trained in undenominational state colleges would further weaken the influence of the Church,⁵⁵ and if the issue were left unaddressed would ensure the eventual general triumph of undenominational education which, he conended, 'rests on no intelligent principle and provides no sound basis for training in religion'.⁵⁶ Thus far, Gore's attitudes were in line with Oxfordshire clerical opinion. However, in the light of the developments he foresaw, Gore suggested a series of radical responses.

Rather than capitalising on the new spirit of compromise evident in the returns, Gore rejected the option of parallel denominationalism favoured by the vast majority of his clergy in favour of a third way – a new inter-denominationalism. Optimistic about the prospects for improved relations with the nonconformist churches already developed during the war, he proposed statutory inter-denominational councils which local education authorities could ask to direct the religious instruction in their schools and which could also oversee training in state colleges leading to a certificate of competence in religious instruction. Such certified teachers could then be given primary responsibility for the delivery of religious instruction in state-provided schools.⁵⁷ In areas with multiple schools, Gore proposed that Church schools could continue to operate on their existing basis. In single school areas where the only school was a LEA 'provided school' it should make facilities available for denominational education as requested by groups of parents. His most radical proposals, however, were reserved for the single school areas most prevalent in his own diocese – those where the school was provided by the Church of England. These schools, he argued, must become 'provided schools' during school hours, with head teachers appointed not by the managers but by the local education authority. Religious instruction would be given on an inter-

⁵³ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 226.

⁵⁴ Oxford, OHC, MSS.Oxf.Dioc.c.380, 162.

⁵⁵ C. Gore, *Dominant ideas and Corrective Principles* (Oxford, 1918), 52-9.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 60-3.

denominational basis as in other local education authority schools, though facilities for Anglican denominational teaching would also be made available. Any other approach, he concluded, especially an attempt to retain the system of elementary education in its present form, would be to embark on a losing battle leading to the marginalisation of religious education however conceived.⁵⁸

Consideration of the clerical responses to bishop Gore's visitation queries demonstrates the capacity of attention to the views of men on the ground to refocus the historiography of the relationship between religion and education in the early twentieth century. Of particular importance here, is the evidence of growing détente around issues of school management and the admission of nonconformist teaching into Church schools, despite the longevity of a few ecclesiastical warriors. This development suggests that the paradigm of conflict in the relationship between religion and education in the early twentieth century, still dominant in the historiography, requires modification. The central issue, in the minds of the Anglican clergy, was no longer *whether* to accommodate the scruples of nonconformist parents but *how* to do so without compromising the principle of denominational education. This principle was maintained with such tenacity not because of ecclesiastical competition with, or theological animus against, nonconformity but because they believed it to be the only sure foundation for a system of education in which religion could be a living reality. In some respects, this was a debate stretching back to the rivalries of the early 1800s, but it was, by 1918, inflected by a century of experience and given new urgency by wartime conditions. The solution supported by the vast majority of clerical opinion in Oxfordshire – a sort of mutually assured denominationalism – was fundamentally different from the model of inter-denominational agreement espoused by their diocesan. The difference between the views of the bishop and his clergy was perhaps mainly one of perspective. On the one hand, that of Anglican ministers working in the harvest fields of rural Oxfordshire and on the other an ecclesiastical statesman deeply involved in debates over the government's educational proposals for months. However, the challenges they faced accelerated with the social and demographic changes of the post war years as declining rolls and restricted finance undermined the viability of village schools and the Church's educational efforts in the towns were swamped by the rising tide of urban population growth. In this context, the degree of divergence between the two visions of the future for Anglican schools represents all too clearly the difficulty the Church was to face in developing any educational policy capable of addressing the challenges of the succeeding decades.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 63-6.