Afterword

It is now seven years since Andy Hickford wrote *Meltdown in Schools*. To what degree are Andy's words still true in 2008? Do we need to think again?

Some things are indeed much improved. There is no longer a recruitment crisis for teachers. Indeed, in some parts of the country there is intense competition for jobs. This is thanks to the success of government recruitment campaigns as well as because pupil numbers are falling - and the salary isn't bad. Teacher morale has also improved dramatically, with teaching jumping from 54th to 11th in a recent job satisfaction survey. This is partly because teachers feel more valued by society and partly because the excessive work load has begun to be been addressed. So was Andy's use of the meltdown metaphor journalistic scaremongering?

Well no. In some ways the situation is worse in 2008 than in 2001. There may not now be a recruitment crisis with classroom teachers, but there certainly is with head teachers. 34% of today's headteachers plan to retire within the next five years. The General Teaching Council for England predicts that 40% of posts will be unfilled by 2011.Schools frequently have to re-advertise posts two or three times before finding a suitable candidate. Church schools have a particular problem in finding people who can lead their Christian ethos. But the research is clear; without inspired leadership schools do not flourish. There is an imminent crisis here.

Furthermore, although morale is improving and workload is becoming saner, the challenge of working in schools is still immense. The government's penchant for change means that the unrelenting stream of initiatives continues. In 2008, the National Curriculum will change yet again. The pressure to achieve high standards in exams and tests is relentless, particularly given that Britain performs poorly in comparison with other countries when it comes to pupils' achievements in literacy, numeracy and science. The challenge of working in schools is still as great as Andy identified, even if its character has changed a bit.

Meltdown is an evocative word designed to capture attention. But it would be a shame if it leads us to conclude that all is doom and gloom in schools, for the thrust of Andy's tract can be encapsulated in one word – opportunity. No mission field is easy for the worker; the fact that a challenge is tough is not a reason to discourage people from grasping the opportunity. Here Andy's message is as timely as it was in 2001. Teachers are at the frontline of the mission activity of the church; day by day they do work of eternal significance. His jigsaw pieces are as important in 2008 as in 2001.

Andy's call was for churches in Britain to recruit and support teachers. There is still a great need for motivated and equipped Christian teachers who have caught the vision for the significance of their work in the Kingdom of God. To use Andy's evocative image, the Church of 2008 still needs to produce Christian teachers who are an antibiotic in the world. We must inspire them with a vision for transforming schools rather than offer them an anaesthetic for surviving the stresses of working in school.

Since Andy wrote *Meltdown*, the *Transforming Lives* Project has come into being to promote the ideas that he develops in the pamphlet and to raise the profile of teaching as a Christian vocation. For further information see www.transforminglives.org.uk.

Recommended Resources

The *Transforming Lives* Project website (www.transforminglives.org.uk) is designed to be a first port of call for anyone wanting to discover more about being a Christian in education. It has produced a range of materials specifically designed for use by churches and Christian organisations. Of particular interest will be:

- The *Transforming Lives* Toolkit. An electronic resource with video clips, an interactive quiz and ideas for services, small groups and youth meetings. Only £5. Order your copy from transforminglives@stapleford-centre.org.
- *Supporting Christians in Education* by Trevor Cooling will be published by the *London Institute for Contemporary Christianity* in summer 2008. Watch this space!

The Stapleford Centre offers a wide range of resources for Christian teachers, schools workers and others working in classrooms. (www.stapleford-centre.org)

The Association of Christian Teachers (www.christian-teachers.org.uk) is the membership organisation for Christians working in schools. ACT provides a termly members' magazine and links to local groups.

The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (www.licc.org.uk) gives support to churches in promoting whole life discipleship.

- *Supporting Christians at Work* by Mark Greene is the best-selling volume which explores being a whole life disciple in the workplace and applies to anyone working in education.

- The materials and ideas from LICC's *Imagine* project offer innovative and practical resources for integrating faith and work.

The National Society (www.natsoc.org.uk) provides support to Church of England schools.

Education Sunday (www.educationsunday.org) is marked annually on the ninth Sunday before Easter. Each year new resources are provided.

The Journal of Education and Christian Belief (www.jecb.org) is for those who want to do some serious thinking about the relationship between Christianity and education.