**CONFESSIONS OF A SERIAL WEBSITE DEVELOPER:
Towards global portals for Religious, Moral and Values Education**

*As have all previous media (printing, radio, TV) inventions, the internet is changing human experience. This is evident for Religious and Moral Education. This article reflects on the importance of portal websites. It draws on engagement with the creation of eight over a period of twenty-five years. Their distinctive contents are represented in some detail. Vulnerabilities are identified, along with their shared academic provenance. An indication is given that the three of these portals which are still active are in process of being strengthened, especially through imaginative use of social media.*

**Evolving media** It is characteristic of both religion and education to want to communicate with others. Religious sense, however defined, and no matter how inchoate or how sophisticated, is so intrinsically basic that people want to share it with others. Education, whether formally organised or informally provided, is the means deployed for passing on to others all the learning and insights deemed desirable for living in the contemporary world. Thus, any combination of religion and education is a shaping force. It generates an urgency arising from given inheritance and from wondering over what is ahead.
The inventions of writing, printing, radio, TV, and the internet have successively changed our human capacity to communicate information generally and especially what is regarded as important. As someone who throughout his professional life has been a critical enthusiast for learning and teaching in Religion, Ethics, and Education, I confess to related resource preoccupations with text, sound, video, film, and, for the last 25 years, the internet.
Taking stock, I realise that communication technology has moved on. I risk being stuck in an internet time warp, because entirely lacking in any familiarity with the social networking immediacy of Meta, youtube, X, et al. It is evident that human beings are undergoing technological changes of such magnitude and at such speed that evolution is ‘flipping’. To TV accompaniment in bedrooms from infancy is now added everyday smartphone usage and ownership by children as well as teenagers, plus tablet use by 3-year-olds and chat rooms soon after. Technology ‘does telepathy’ across continents and even in the villages of Africa and India. Are chip implants as alternative means of access as feasible as is the blinking eye to control the phone? Basic consciousness is becoming readily expanded. What does this mean for the nature of humanity, religion, and education?
More immediately, I need help with a question about the future of website portal collations of resources, intended as companion aids for students, teachers, and teacher educators. What user-friendly changes should be made for their effectiveness in an environment where the smartphone replaces the pc as primary instrument for accessing information?
Before the question is elaborated, there is a lengthy preamble in the form of an overview of personal engagement with website development in Religious Education (RE) and Moral Education (ME) over 25 years. It sets out each of these portal’s distinctive ingredients, their shared academic provenance, and their vulnerabilities. Is their potential for revitalisation along the right lines?
The text is deliberately autobiographical and by someone on the UK front continuously associated with AULRE and its antecedents going back through NATFHE, CULRE to the ATDCE (Divinity Section), and more globally with EuroShap, EFTRE, ISREV, AME and APNME.

**AMBLING THROUGH EIGHT PORTAL WEBSITES**
 **Working context.** Since 1975 most of my working context has been the University College of St Martin, Lancaster UK (re-established in 2007 as the University of Cumbria). A state-funded Church of England foundation, it has offered a range of subject-specific Primary and Secondary teaching degrees, along with others in the Liberal Arts, including ones in Religious Studies, in Social Ethics and in Christian Ministry, plus post-graduate teaching and research awards (Certificates, Diplomas, MPhils and PhDs). Academic studies in Religion and Social Ethics provided the underpinning of both Religious and Moral Education. And there was experienced carry-over from the Schools Council Projects RE and ME Projects, especially the RE ones directed by Ninian Smart. A National Moral Education Resource Centre was established at St Martin’s in collaboration with the Social Morality Council in 1978 (initially funded by the central government’s Department of Education & Science and then from within the College).
**Resourcing as a major priority**. For many years departmentally we had built up a physical resource collection of relevant books, audio-visual aids and loan boxes of artifacts which was widely used on campus and extramurally, but dependent on physical borrowing. We were widely known as an RE-ME Centre (Gates 1982). Of a sudden, the invention of the World Wide Web provided ways and means to extend access, not only to such familiar materials, but also to more varied ones in more distant locations and all online. In 1995, and in collaboration with colleagues, I began a foray into the internet as a vehicle for learning – for both students and the wider community. I relied heavily on technical help from colleagues in implementation. Our shared umbrella was **ELMAR: Electronic Media and Religions** (Gates 2000).

**The substance of eight websites –** five ‘has-beens’, three presently active.
1. [**www.churchnet.uk**](http://www.churchnet.uk/)was its first website. It was designed as a networking hub for churches locally and nationally, as also for individual Christians. It encouraged them to get online and provided an inexpensive means for doing so. It was launched on BBC Newsnight TV by the Bishop of Lancaster in 1995. My key colleagues for taking it forward were Klaus Stoll and Neil Hamilton. Its components included denominational listings, a news service, an individual prayer net, and hotlinks to resources of the World Council of Churches in Geneva and of the Vatican.
Following consultation with the Church of England at diocesan and national levels, the German EKD and the WCC, an International Christian Internet Conference (ICIC) July 1997 was held on the St Martin’s campus, which published a LANCASTER DECLARATION:

“We recognise the duty of every individual, government, organisation or faith community to make use of electronic information and communications technology for the exchange between cultures and religions with the aim of establishing peace and justice throughout the world.
ICIC recognises the vital potential of Information Technologies and Electronic Communications for mission, empowering Christian community and enabling Ecumenical learning and working methodologies.
ICIC challenges the Churches, Christian organisations, and Christian communicators of the world to give urgent consideration to producing and adopting statements and comprehensive guidelines within their own context regarding the rights and obligations pertaining to issues of the Christian use of the Internet. Specifically, the following issues should be addressed:

* Access to Communication and Information Technologies
* Expression of thoughts, conscience, religion, and opinion
* Privacy and protection from interference
* Empowerment of the marginalised
* Contribution of content appropriate to Christian faith and life
* Education and training in the use of information technologies.”

Churchnet ran on for 7 years by which time the internet scene had expanded dramatically, other providers had come on stream and our related voluntary capacities had run out.

2. [**www.re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk**](http://www.re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk/)was ELMAR’s second website: RE Exchange Service. For topicality, its name picked up an association with the pop group INXS. It was launched in 1997 at a meeting in London of the RE Council of England & Wales and became widely used by schools throughout the country, and frequently commended as a resource by local Agreed Syllabuses. Colleague Carolyn Reade took on much of its interactive development.
RE-XS provided an RE networking hub for teachers and schools nationally and beyond. It was a ‘vademecum’ with access to reliable information relevant for teaching needs, hotlinking to selected websites on individual religious traditions and specific moral themes, to libraries and resource centres, to religion in the news, to special needs services and publishers. It was also interactive with face-to-face/faith-to-faith link ups for individuals and groups, question-and-answer facility, discussion forums, language bridge, advert pinboard, and an email/url directory. It ran for over 9 years with literally thousands of regular users and tens of thousands of ‘hits’ in any one week. Again, by then voluntary energies became exhausted and better funded alternatives had become available from elsewhere, including the University of Derby.

Three others followed: PHILTAR, YBGUD and INTERPAN.
3. [**www.philtar.ac.uk**](http://www.philtar.ac.uk/). There were already links to higher education from within RE-XS, but the logic for extending the university teaching and research features came from the opportunity to bid for funding to provide such a service. This came from the UK government funding agency (JISC) for IT in Further and Higher Education. One of the subject areas for which it advertised the development of a national internet resource centre was Religious Studies. Our PHILTAR (**PHIL**osophy, **T**heology **A**nd **R**eligions) bid was prepared and submitted in 1998, with components hotlinking to universities and related specialist centres throughout the world. Its most distinctive features were its Compendium of Philosophers and its Overview of World Religions. The former was a global listing of individuals, each supported by hotlinks selected by colleague Trevor Curnow. The latter contains entirely original material on religions with historical spidergrams and geographical charts. It was able to draw on previous work by colleague Elliott Shaw with the development of an online Encyclopaedia of World Religions part-funded by a Buddhist Trust in Taiwan.
The funding bid was unsuccessful; we were runners up to the joint bid from the universities of Lampeter and Leeds. This was also the fate of a 1999 collaborative bid, with the Oslo University Theology Department for European Union for Socrates Funding in support Open and Distance Learning. However, the full PHILTAR site continued in its own right for several years, and though now unsupported is still partially accessible in its ‘overview’ component: <http://philtar.ac.uk/encyclopedia>.

4. [**www.ybgud.net**.](http://www.ybgud.net/) The YBGUD website was distinctive for ELMAR in that it received external funding from an application to the Jerusalem Trust to develop an entry point for making moral judgements and most especially a resource for doing Christian Ethics. It was launched in 2002 and was live for five years. Its collated sections included: an introductory moral thinking test, a glossary, ethics in the news, a compendium of moral theologians, official teachings of churches (Anglican, Free Churches, Roman Catholic), and advice links. Alongside these was a newly created series of substantial overviews ofAreas of Moral Challenge:
DISCRIMINATION: roots of prejudice and its various manifestations, in relation to or in the form of antisemitism, homosexuality, islamophobia, racism, sexism, ‘speciesism’.
ENVIRONMENT: attitudes towards nature and ecology; use of natural resources; realism and romanticism; relationships between humankind and animals; meat eating and vegetarianism.
FAMILY AND SEXUALITY: monogamy, serial monogamy, and polygamy; divorce and remarriage; hetero- and homosexuality; celibacy and obligations of kinship.
HEALTH: criteria: physical, spiritual, and moral; IVF and reproductive technologies; gene and gender selection; blood transfusion and transplant surgery; contraception and abortion; euthanasia, senility, and suicide.
WAR AND PEACE: pacifism and non-violence; just and holy warring; nuclear deterrence; rebellion and revolution; espionage; international law; specific international conflicts.
WEALTH: inequalities of distribution and poverty; command and free enterprise models of economy; triage and resource allocation; charities and voluntary organisations; spiritual and material riches; transnational companies.
 For each of these areas there were the following sections:

* preliminary mapping of the territory involved and defining of terms
* Biblical teaching
* Christian tradition
* current Christian thinking and initiatives
* specific issues
* extracts from influential writings by dramatists, social scientists, and philosophers
* Biblical references and scholarship
* expositions by theologians
* parallels in other cultures and religions.

5. [**www.interpan.net**](http://www.interpan.net/)Relative to each of the previous websites, INTERPAN was doubly different in focus. It concentrated on inter-religious dialogue rather than the substance of any one religious tradition. And it invited website users to participate in dialogue online. It was an on-line companion for inter-religious communication and learning for use in formal and informal education. Its scope and intent were set out at the 2010 Nuremberg Forum.
It had five components:
GLOSSARY: key terms and acronyms in religions and inter religious dialogue.
NATIONAL GAZETTEER/INVENTORY.For each nation within Europe and eventually within other continents: religious demography, national constitutions (referring specifically to religion, conscience, and educational provision), faith communities engaging in inter faith dialogue, related university teaching + research.
RESOURCES FOR LEARNING AND DIALOGUE: key historical and contemporary texts about dialogue from within the full range of individual religious traditions.
PARALLEL PLAYERS: links to international agencies engaging in dialogue.
DOING DIALOGUE: an interactive facility for bi-lateral dialogues between two persons of different faiths, and a cumulative database of each of these exchanges according to age, country, and religious belief. Once individuals register their desire to participate, it becomes possible for links with another person to be automatically assigned. Dialogue can then take place with different partners, from different world views (both religious and secular) and nationalities.
Unfortunately, following a year of preparation and approaches to a range of potential sponsoring sources, including the Templeton Foundation, INTERPAN failed to attract funding. Such would have been the necessary intensity of energy demands to take it forward, it seemed wiser to accept that it was not going to take off.

In the years since, three further websites have been developed, each quite different –
one is historically focussed, and asking questions relating to war and peace. Another concentrates on school assemblies and the matter of worship in education. The third ranges comprehensively and globally across the field of moral education. They are all still variously alive and accessible.

6. [**www.armisticenow.net**](https://www.armisticenow.net)takes the centenary of the ending of World War 1 as an opportunity to explore the interwoven character of historical identities and conflicts. It engages with the inhumanity of war, the range of motivations involved and especially the nature and extent of religious diversity which comprised the British Forces. It also reviews the transition from Empire to Commonwealth. The site’s main users are predominantly in religious + moral education, history, citizenship, and in inter-faith dialogue.
Its landing page is accompanied by a statue of Edith Cavell, and what follows are twenty fully searchable components:
1 Scenarios for dialogue in home, school, and community (some carry over from
 INTERPAN).
 2 Some basic questions about WW1 (e.g. who? why? and where? use of animals,
 scale of casualties, popular memories, attitudes in religions towards war, religion
 and nationalism, superstition, and religion, both better outgrown?).
 3 Then and now - from Empire to Commonwealth (the nature of Empire, its British
 version and critiques thereof, ‘subjects’ and ‘citizens’, monarchy).
 4 Religious demography of WW1 British forces and UK today (global populations,
 the extent of British and Allies diversity).
 5 African & African-Caribbean: Christian, Muslim + local Traditional religious life.
 6 ANZAC - Australia & New Zealand + Canada & Newfoundland.
 7 Chinese - Animist, Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist.
 8 Indian - Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh.
 9 UK - Christians, Jews + those of Other Beliefs.
10 USA - Christians and Jews.
11 Conscientious Objection (nature and extent, religious incidence, legal provision,
 popular abuse and caricature, organised support).
12 Chaplains and YMCA (roles and army, navy and airforce provision, critiques, some
 individual examples).
13 Christians at war in WW1 - British v. German.
14 Muslims at war in WW1 – within British forces, Ottoman, and Turks
 15 Religion and Race in WW1 (inheritance from slavery and its practice within
 individual religious traditions, incidence of racial discrimination across the British
 Empire).
 16 Remembering as fundamental to human identity. The inclusivity/exclusivity of
 Memorials.
 17 Significant Libraries, Museums, Organisations.
 18 Selected online resource sites and a projected exhibition.
 19 Some recommended reading.
 20 Some unlikely truths. Eg: Might it be that the British Forces comprised
 more Muslims than there were those of any other individual faith? How did the
 Chinese Labour Corps travel to England and France during WW1?
Each component is supported from academic literature and online resources, from primary records accessible in the British Library, and by direct consultation with specialist historians.

7. **schoolassemblieswithadifference.org.uk** This second current site began as [www.communityclapping.net](https://www.communityclapping.net) (2021), then became [www.commonwealthing.org](http://www.commonwealthing.org/) (2023) and is now [www.schoolassemblieswithadifference.org.uk](https://www.schoolassemblieswithadifference.org.uk). It is more apologetically thrusting than my previous sites. Its immediate users were and are expected to be from within the UK, and there was and is prospect of an associated school development project. It focusses on the matter of worship in education by directly challenging the tendency to falsely peculiarise the terms ‘worship’ and ‘religion’ as minority institutionalised activities. Instead, it claims that they are more properly defined as universal aspects of human being. Individually or joint with others, they variously express deepest beliefs and values, some but not all of which are theistic. It follows that ‘Religion and World Views’ (RE) and the Welsh ‘Religion, Values and Ethics’ (RVE), as also Moral Education (ME) are deficient unless they are attentive to worship. They each have whole-school dimensions in addition to any separate curriculum subject slot.
My initial choice of ‘communityclapping’ as name for the site, rather than the ‘Collective Worship’ of education legislation, was to appeal to a wider user interest than might the latter. In response to the pandemic COVID, for over a year it became common practice to clap in genuinely heart-felt appreciation of the NHS and all its workers. I was invoking such sentiments. With COVID’s retreat, the practice waned. As an alternative I chose ‘commonwealthing’ - a term which connotes a similar sense of recognition of the deep worth of social belonging. Its connotations are cumulative – the early Christian community (Acts 2:42-6)), the philosophical exposition of Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes, the transformative democracy of the English Civil War, and the radical shift from British Empire to Commonwealth. In retrospect, I realised this makes sense once explained, but it is unlikely to come up on a google search regarding ‘worship in schools’ - hence the shift to the simpler ‘schoolassemblieswithadifference’.
The site content is displayed behind a series of eight buttons, the first seven of which are in summary form (a concession to smartphone access), with the eighth *Documentation* providing more academic elaboration for each of the others. An overall justification for the initiative is given by reference to the many challenges of the contemporary context – national and global. In turn, the key concepts of *nation, faith, religion,* *humanist,* and *worship* are defined, and the ‘collective worship’ dimension of school assemblies is expounded as one of ‘mutual enrichment and pointing beyond’ and summed as ‘commonwealthing’. As whole community celebration it comprises four dimensions: rhythmic features in human life; sense of personal context - belongings and boundaries; subject-learning, stretching + transcendence; and religious inheritances - key festivals and representative expressions. Why the UK should be properly defined as Christian, Secular and Multi-Faith is explained and justified. Based on all such considerations, an indicative outline National Calendar for Collective Worship is set out. And finally, there is an overview of the sources of academic and professional debate regarding requirements for worship in public education since 1870.
Exploratory sessions with groups of teachers small and large, especially ‘after COVID’, revealed interest, even excitement at the prospect of in-school trial and experiment. However, work-load pressure and discouragement show that without generous financial support to participating schools, head teachers are understandably reluctant to take on the challenges involved. My efforts to attract such funding continue, but, in the meantime, I am hopeful that the website’s overall suggestions will arouse attention from heads + governors, teacher educators, parents + politicians. They may be prompted to consider how individual teacher enthusiasms and interests might be combined with archetypal themes to create collective celebration which is both personally and professionally rewarding. The hearts and minds of schools and academies will then be simultaneously refreshed. The permissive ingenuity of the ‘wholly or mainly broadly Christian’ wording of the 1988 Education Reform Act becomes no longer a legal embarrassment but statutorily enabling.

8. [**www.moraleducation.info**](https://www.moraleducation.info)is the third website in active service. It began in 2014, first as **moralcompost.com** (richly fertile) and until 2023-4 **moralcapital.info**. It draws on and extends previous ELMAR site ingredients and is currently being reconfigured to proactively engage more actively with social media. It has been developed to be global in cover and purpose in accord with the priorities of the Journal of Moral Education Trust which has adopted the site as its own portal.
The website recognises that Moral Education has personal, social and political dimensions, all influenced by different national constitutions, religions, and world views. By way of five ‘workrooms’, each with three research areas, it is a doorway into all of them conceptually, performatively, and organisationally. As is the case with each of the other sites, moraleducation.info can be worked through sequentially or dipped into specifically with help from the search facility.
 As *Starting Points*, the site has a comprehensive thesaurus, a scrutiny of several key concepts, plus an introduction to the psychology of moral behaviour. The thesaurus contains over 400 terms used in moral education and ethics, including those from the social sciences, philosophy, and different religious traditions. Each of the 7 concepts which are scrutinised has its definition extended by the creation of illustrative scenarios along with testing questions. The psychology component opens up the interplay between self or other, and obeying or considering, with the use of associated character personifications acting in different scenarios.
For *Resources,* there are both traditional and contemporary ones. Under Global wisdom traditions there are 7 sections each with live links to full text sources: the ‘Tao’ of C. S. Lewis; Folk Tales and Proverbs; Codes Ancient and Modern; the Global Ethic of the Parliament of the World’s Religions; Moral Foundations Theory; [Natural Law Theory;](https://www.moralcapital.info/workrooms/starting-points/digest-of-key-terms/show/natural-law) and Recent wisdom research. The contemporary resources are video links to specific areas of Applied Ethics, plus links to international sites providing material for moral education.
*Persons* includes global exemplars, plus a current individual register arranged by national belonging. For each of some 550 exemplar figures, there is an initial summary and category indication (including that of Religion), followed by selected working links to sites providing access to their lives and writings, plus related illustrative video. The International Register is a self-listing of those with an academic or professional ME interest, arranged by country. That is followed by a separate listing of named ME contacts for each country. Both lists are being presently revitalised and extended.
*Organisations* provides overviews of the three formally committed to promoting ME globally: the North America based Association for Moral Education (AME), the China based Asia-Pacific Network for Moral Education (APNME), and the Journal of Moral Education Trust (JMET).
*Nations* contains extracts from international data-bases (e.g. UNESCO, WHO and CIA) to construct national portraits applying criteria relevant for ME: economies and climate change; population and life expectancy, natal care, diet and drug use, alcohol and tobacco use, HIV/AIDS, and mental health; educational provision; human rights; religious identifications; military strength + weapons trade; sustainable development. To these is added other nation-specific links from elsewhere in moraleducation.net. There are then lists of national and international organisations relevant for ME.
I am especially indebted to John Shepherd and Trevor Curnow in early and continuing development of this portal. In its reconfiguration and promotion, they have now been joined by Rebekah Ackroyd for social media commendation and interaction.

**ACADEMIC PROVENANCE RUNNING THROUGH THE SITES**
The schoolassemblieswithadifference.co.uk website engages explicitly with existing literature on worship in schools. It does so because it is proposing a novel and comprehensively different way of understanding what is possible and desirable in interpreting and implementing primary legislation in England and Wales regarding collective worship. I argue that that is fundamental for the field of RE there.
By contrast, although themselves containing extensive academic referencing, neither of the other websites has occasion to engage overtly with the literature on RE. They are not designed to promote one specifically defined version of RE as a curriculum subject, but rather as global resources variously relevant for RE and for ME, however defined, as also for any wider curriculum subject concerns involving beliefs + values.
This is not a sign of ignorance of or indifference to the range of academic writing and professional practice in RE (as in ME), nor of shifts in emphasis over the last fifty years. On the contrary, my familiarity has been continuous and ongoing from founding membership of the Shap Working Party on Education in World Religions and the Journal of Moral Education Trust, as well as service with the RE Council of England & Wales. And critical engagement throughout with that literature is evident in each of my books. The open contexting, evident in each of the portals, actively counters any tendency for RE or ME to become too narrowly defined.
In spite of their variety, there are common academic stances which inform each of the portals:
***Hermeneutics***From my 1975 PhD research, I became convinced of the complex hermeneutical processes required in good RE. The thesis was entitled ‘Religion in the developing world of children and young people’. Children themselves are interpreters, and so are their teachers – of their learners, of religion, and of the world and religions’ part in it. This is now I have conveyed the experience, as set out in a Nuremberg Forum book.

"Imagine a child – any child – being born into the world:
*Image 1*. He/she is surrounded by a multiplicity of stimuli which had already begun to have an impact whilst yet unborn. Sounds, images, tastes and smells all to be made sense of. Somehow identity, meaning and purpose must be found amidst buzzing confusion.
*Image 2*. Parents and schools set out to assist the child’s search for meaning. And in a European context that has for centuries meant providing them with a Bible or Catechism belt within which they can each feel confident and unsinkably safe in spite of everything that is happening around them. More recently that safety belt may have become plural. Other children will have been given Qur'anic belts, or ones generated by yet other religious communities. And schools may have encouraged their pupils to recognise these other belts and perhaps even to 'try them on'. At the same time the multiplicity of stimuli has continued to bombard the child with different messages and questions – from peer group, from daily news, from TV and other media, and from their own individual reflection.
*Image 3*. Too easily the bottom drops out of the Bible belt – or any religious belt. Religion may be there in one part of the young person's heart and mind, but the other part will be secularity – science and technology, music and football, the suffering from natural disasters, poverty and war. The result is a split condition. Religion, whether singularly or plurally, is in one compartment, the changing world is in another. For some such a condition may be an acceptable given. I would argue however that it is fundamentally deficient. The integrity of a religious perspective requires correspondence between its own beliefs and the common experience of the human condition. The integrity of the secular experience is incomplete if it is closed off from the religious insights that continue to inform global humanity.
*Image 4.* Instead, we need to work creatively in a condition of mutual challenge. Religions deserve to be interrogated by secular learning and achievement. They also individually deserve to be interrogated by other religions. But so too does secular experience deserve to be challenged by religious perspectives and insights. Religions alone and secularity alone are deficient. They need mutual interrogation and illumination, in which reason and revelation may discover new coherencies and consistencies. And we become individually and collectively transformed.” iv
The role of interpretation in education is lifelong, both personally and professionally. We are all hermeneuts.
***Christian universalism****.* There are many versions of Christianity. Some are exclusive of other Christian views of the world, as of all others. They deserve understanding, as do more open stances. The latter stem from the Genesis vision of the Noachic covenant and whole universe deriving from God, a vision continued in Jewish and Christian prophetic traditions. Churches and their institutions are naive not to acknowledge this in their educational provision. I can make this remark as an insider to Christian belonging. And although I lack that insider qualification in respect of other religious and belief traditions, I observe that none of them lacks some exponents of comparable universalism – whilst avoiding any claim that all world views are equally true.
***Plurality****.* Even if once referred to as a Christian country, throughout its centuries not everyone living in the UK has ever been Christian. Nationally and globally, religious diversity has been as real as mount Everest and inviting at least foothill exploration, if not full climbing. Even though it was not until 1988 that the Education Reform Act formally required that RE give attention to other principal religions as well as to Christianity. (Already in some locally agreed syllabuses for RE were doing so in the 1970s.)
***Inclusivity****.* Globally most, but not all, people identify with one religious tradition or another. In the UK less than half of those under 30 do so (Office for National Statistics, 2023). The government-approved, non-statutory *National Framework for RE* (QCA 2004) required recognition of secular philosophies such as Humanism. It was published with the agreement of the academic and professional RE community, and was officially endorsed by religious and humanist leaders (Gates 2005). However, only a minority of ‘Nones’ self-ascribe as Humanists. Neither are all religions theistic. My own preference is to interpret the words ‘religion’, ‘faith’, and ‘humanism‘ as including deepest personal beliefs and values/world views/life streams, irrespective of whether they conform with institutional belonging.
***Interplay of Religion and Ethics.*** In world-wide terms, this is hard to deny. However, such has been the wariness of a risk from association with moralising that academic RE specialists have preferred to insist on the separation of RE from ME. Provided their respective autonomies are respected, this not only frees up their potential separation but also allows recognition of some religious ingredients in ethics and *vice versa*, whilst also inviting their mutual challenge.
These academic stances had and have pertinence not only for developing RE-ME portal websites and their hosting department of Religion and Ethics, but also for the whole curricula of universities.

**OVERCOMING PORTAL WEBSITE VULNERABILITIES**
Returning now to initial questions regarding human future with the internet, there is no denying that “we know not what we shall become.” Revolutions in electronic communication will undoubtedly be transformative of human being. That said, there are more immediate matters of the use and usefulness of the internet for RE and ME.
In terms of potential to maximise individual links and promote specific learning activities, the opportunities are huge. Many are smart-phone compatible. However, there is a risk that portal-websites, like books in libraries, may increasingly be bi-passed in favour of more instantly accessible conveniences. Shorter bytes, restricted from wider contexting and complexities, instead become the norm. The fuller picture visible on pc and laptop is lost from view.

***A ‘Google’ alternative***. One of the incentives for developing a portal website was and remains the threat from ‘swamping’. There were and are so many internet pages that users can easily be overwhelmed by them. Potentially relevant Information is instantly available from search engines delivering hundreds of relevant sites and sources, but prioritised simply by numbers of site-hits. The portal site is designed as a companion interpreter - a comprehensive entry point to high quality information, clearly co-ordinated, well contextualised and linking with relevant sites carefully sifted and pre-selected for authentic usefulness.
***Fleeting visits***. Depending on entry point (making use of an already known portal, or the result of a link from a search engine) the amount of time spent on moraleducation.info can vary enormously. Initial prompts are significant ‘hits’, but less so unless associated extensive stays and continuing returns. Sense of the ‘bigger picture’ which contextualises particular meanings is an ongoing educational asset.
***Site migration***. To prevent the portal becoming dated, arrangements must be in place for adding new content and to monitor migration, even mortality, of hotlinked sites, and wherever possible adding appropriate replacements.
***Long term renewal and viability***. By building into a portal site an invitation for users to feed in critical comments and suggestions for additional material and links, there is prospect of organic growth. However, user colleagues in schools and universities are likely to be hard-pressed, and the lack of tangible public reward might deter contributions. Editorial nurturing remains vital as a guarantee of portal authority and integrity as well as cumulative build
***Social media promotion***. The extent to which social media are becoming a normative condition for much personal and social learning requires response from portal providers. An arrangement directly to link portals into social media exchange has become an urgent necessity.

**Implications for ‘ELMAR’**
Confessions are both reflections on the past and revisionary opportunities for the future. Taking the three websites which have continuing currency, how might they each respectively be enriched for future worth and impact?
[**www.armisticenow.net**](http://www.armisticenow.net/)Although more specifically focussed than the other two sites, it ranges more widely than WW1 in the issues it treats. As in all three portals, their detailed search facilities are invaluable, and appropriate additions and amendments remain a priority. Comments on the site are consistently positive, but it is not well known. Promotional initiatives are needed with others besides RE and ME enthusiasts. It has novel implications in any discussion of ‘British values’.
***schoolassemblieswithadifference.co.uk***. Some recasting is underway using the revised title and url. Its working context is legally that of England and Wales. The significance of its message has become more important as evidence mounts of decline in 5-18 years shared community experience and of professionally inhibited unthinking about any religious ingredients. More promotional initiatives are needed with teacher educators, head teacher associations, governors, SACREs and politicians. Christian horizons deserve to be stretched, other principal religions and affiliations recognised as belonging, and personal enthusiasms shared.
[***www.moraleducation.net***](https://www.moraleducation.net)Of the three portals, this is the one with greatest world-wide promise. Its subject matter tests the boundaries of ME and is both hugely informative and encouraging of reflection on ME’s whys and wherefores. Its users come from most every country. Although it is well known by some members of AME and APNME, more needs to be done to extend this awareness and use to all. The guarantee of dedicated portal assistance with social media promotional initiatives along with enhancing visual ingredients will be a game-changer over the next five years.

**A last word?**
One of the gifts of the internet is that there is never a last word. Instead, there is both invitation for further communication and ready opportunity for this to happen. Capacity for enacting this to best advantage is a continuing challenge. So is capacity for the voluntary energies which support portal sites in the absence of explicit funding. RE and ME themselves have so much to give and gain with the internet, perhaps most especially where they promote the systematic development of critical intelligence. In sum, one further word: discernment.

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