



Religious Education in Schools:

Ideas and Experiences from around the World

The **International Association for Religious Freedom** (IARF) is pleased to offer this booklet of essays from educators around the world on the topic of religious education.

The booklet was prepared as an assistance to delegates attending the UN's "International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance, and Non-Discrimination," held in Madrid, Spain from **23-25 November 2001**.

In part, this project also commemorates the 20th anniversary of the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, adopted by the UN's General Assembly on 25 November 1981.

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Editor's Note

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The IARF hopes that the following review of how religious education has been addressed in various countries will provide historical insights, new understandings about obstacles that are faced, and fresh ideas about how religious education programs can be improved. Ultimately, we hope that readers will find some innovative ways to help young people to value their own identities and to better respect those of others. Perhaps by focusing on such education now, religious persecution can be prevented at a later time. We applaud the launch of such a dialogue at Madrid.

In undertaking this project, we have made a special effort to ensure that various religious viewpoints have been expressed and to ensure that essays were collected from all corners of the globe, including Africa, Europe, the Americas, and Asia. While we attempted to have a more equitable gender balance among our authors, as well as more contributions from the Middle East, we were, nonetheless, pleased with the diverse viewpoints compiled for this booklet under a variety of editorial limitations and tight schedules. We especially appreciate the time taken by the authors to submit essays as well as their patience with the editing process. We trust that this effort has resulted in a product which is enjoyable to read, is informative, and provides a global perspective on religious education.

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(Note: IARF's views do not necessarily correspond with the personal opinions expressed by the authors.)

The Contribution of Religious Education to Religious Freedom: A Global Perspective

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As the manner and extent to which religious education is included in state education varies from country to country, it is difficult to formulate a global perspective. Nonetheless, this essay will attempt to provide some general frameworks and to chart potential ways forward. In reviewing some general models, we can say that the approach to religious education in different countries varies in accordance with several factors:

1. The religious affiliation of the society, whether mono-religious or multi-religious;
2. The relation between the religious and the secular within each country;
3. The historical tradition of each country; and,
4. Conceptions about the nature and purpose of state school religious education.

Religious Affiliations:

The religious affiliations of a country are a primary consideration in determining how a religious education program might look. Countries such as Greece are considered mono-religious in that the country is predominately Greek Orthodox and the state religious education is the same. On the other side of the spectrum, however, are countries like England where there has been a pluralistic Christian tradition since 1689 and a significant multi-religious presence since WWII. While religious education was initially non-denominational Christian in England, a multi-faith approach gradually developed and, according to the 1994 Religious Education Model Syllabuses, six major world religions are now taught.

Religious and Secular Relationships:

The relationship between the religious and the secular elements in a society also determines how religious education might develop. For example, we can compare the United States of America with France and Turkey. The secularity of the U.S. Constitution is not historically hostile to religion, but it represents a separation of church and state in the interests of securing the freedom of religion from state control. On the other hand, the secularity of the modern French education system is influenced by the 1789 revolution, which was hostile to the church. The result is that religion is not taught in state schools in France. This anti-religious secularity is also apparent in Turkey following the founding of the modern Turkish State by Ataturk in 1923. Although Islamic religious education is still taught in this predominantly Muslim country, it has become the focus of the struggle between those who wish to maintain the secular character of the Turkish state and those who wish to restore an Islamic one.

Historical Traditions:

The historical experiences of each country are also likely to modify the factors noted

above. Because Roman Catholicism and Protestantism were more or less equally present in most of the German provinces, for example, religious education in the state schools took either a Protestant or Catholic form. The appearance of large numbers of foreign nationals in Germany has challenged this system. Additionally, the incorporation of the former provinces of East Germany, where church traditions were weakened under the communist government, led to the emergence of various patterns of multi-faith religious education combined with education in ethics and values, e.g. the Brandenburg Syllabus. Another example of the impact of history upon religious education may be found in several countries of post-colonial Africa. The 19th century Christian missions saw no value in the primal religious traditions and religious education in many sub-Saharan African states after independence was firmly Christian. However, the recent and more positive evaluation of primal religion is leading to the introduction of these traditions into religious education, often accompanied by an expansion of the Christian curriculum to include other world religions, e.g. Botswana.

Defining Religious Education:

Finally, we need to look at how a country defines the nature and purpose of religious education. These perspectives have been influenced by modern philosophies of education from Rousseau to Dewey, by new interpretations of human rights including the rights of children, and by progressive re-interpretations of religion on the part of theologians and religion scholars. In addition, the huge impact of modernity upon contemporary social and intellectual life cannot be overestimated. New conceptions of human maturity have also undoubtedly influenced religious education. These include the value of critical thought, the ethical significance of freedom of choice, and the impact of scientific rationality. At present, the negative impact of financial globalisation is encouraging a new interest in the character of spirituality as a necessary feature of the lives of individuals and societies.

It is against this enormous variety, and in the light of the complex ways these many strands inter-weave to form distinctive national patterns, that we must ask, “What is the contribution of religious education to religious freedom?” From what we have said it is clear that there can be no simple answer to this question. Immediately one is faced with several additional questions: “What kind of religion? What kind of religious education? And, what kind of freedom?” Answering these difficult questions requires a more detailed examination of how religious education is conceptualised. My colleague Michael Grimmitt has usefully distinguished between ‘learning religion,’ ‘learning about religion,’ and ‘learning from religion.’¹ We may use these distinctions to describe the main types of religious education which exist in our worldwide survey.

Learning Religion:

‘Learning religion’ describes the situation where a single religious tradition is taught as the religious education curriculum and is taught from the inside, so to speak. The

teachers are expected to be believers in the religion themselves and the object of the instruction is to enable pupils to come to believe in the religion or to strengthen their commitment to it. This type of religious education may also be described as proceeding from faith to faith. Typically, a specific religious group controls the curriculum and the methods of teaching rather than these being controlled by the education system itself, which is often perceived as being dominated by humanist norms and values. In situations where there has been a strong anti-religious secular movement, one can understand the desire and the need on the part of a religion to retain control over its own instruction rather than falling into the hands of an unsympathetic secularity.

This type of religious education tends to be challenged, however, when religious pluralism appears in the society. This may be due to immigration of people belonging to another religious tradition, or it may be that people in a certain society begin to drift away from their traditional religion. It may also be, on some occasions, that a more or less unified and monolithic society begins to respect the hopes and ideals of its minority faiths.

When plurality in such formerly monolithic societies does appear, two possible reactions may be observed. First, religious education may be abandoned altogether and the state education system may become completely secular. When this takes place, it is expected that nurture into religious faith will be confined to the homes of the children or to the religious communities themselves. The second possible reaction may be described as a pluralization of learning religion in which students are offered a system of parallel instruction. In other words, children from each faith are educated in separate classrooms and receive instruction from a representative of that faith. For example, the Muslim children are educated by the Muslim teachers, the Orthodox children by the Orthodox teachers, and so on.

The freedom that this kind of religious education offers is too restricted. It offers freedom to the religion which is being taught and a freedom of non-competitive transmission, but it does not enhance the freedom of the student. Why? Because it does not expand the cognitive horizons of the student, who is left with a single freedom – whether to respond to the transmitted religion or not. A variation of the ‘learning religion approach’ is ‘faith-based’ religious education, which seeks to present various religions, but still from the point of view of one religion. It is upon faith in that one religion that this approach is based, although it attempts to be plural on this basis.

Learning About Religion:

There is, however, another possible reaction to the onset of pluralism (and this corresponds to Michael Grimmitt’s second distinction) which we may describe as ‘learning about religion.’ Instead of religion being taught from the inside, in the situation that I described as being from faith to faith, religion is now taught, as it were, from the outside. There are courses in some American high schools, for example, on

the Bible as literature. The essential point is that the Bible is not taught as a religious book or as a sacred book of a certain community of faith, but as literature. That is, from a different, non-religious perspective. Sometimes this kind of religious education may be called 'education in comparative religion' and may be based upon anthropology. Sometimes, indeed, the subject is called 'religious studies,' and often it follows one or more of the various disciplines evolved by the study of religion such as the history of religions or (more frequently) the phenomenology of religions,² or (more recently) the ethnography of religions.³

This approach may be called 'learning about religion' because of its descriptive and historical approach. It tends to appear as a reaction against the mono-religious 'learning religion' situation and is often motivated by the desire to create a purely educational form of religious education, one which will not be open to the charge of indoctrinating or giving an unfair advantage to any particular religion. A disadvantage of this 'learning about religion' approach is that it tends to focus upon the content of religions and, therefore, the pupils are often not motivated to study it. Moreover, religious education of this type tends not to grapple with the life-world of the pupil, and often makes little or no explicit contribution to the pupils' search for moral and spiritual values.⁴

However, this kind of religious education, 'learning about religion,' has a significant role to play in the prevention of religious intolerance. Because it empowers the student with critical skills for interpreting religious phenomena, it tends to release students from unexamined beliefs and helps them to break down the stereotypes of other religious traditions. Unfortunately, some religious traditions have negative images or beliefs of other religions built into their own self-understanding. Progressive religious traditions are looking for ways to emancipate themselves from these features of negativity towards others. While that process of reform is essentially the responsibility of the spiritual leadership of each religion, there is no doubt that learning about religion in the state school curriculum can make an invaluable contribution.

Providing the example of England and Wales, all school children, regardless of their faith or lack of it, are taught about religion in the same classroom by the normal classroom teacher in both the primary school and by specialist teachers in the secondary school. Syllabuses are developed at the local level and consist of studies in the major world faiths, or of themes arising from them. The philosophy or rationale of the subject may vary from school to school depending to some extent on the training of the teacher and the characteristics of the local syllabus. However, in most parts of England and Wales, some form of 'learning about religion' is a common element.

Learning From Religion:

Because the approach above does present certain limitations, a third kind of religious education has also emerged. This may be called 'learning from religion.' The difference between 'learning from religion' and the first option of 'learning religion' is

that in the latter case pupils are expected to participate in the beliefs and practices of the religion being taught. Alternatively, in the ‘learning from religion’ approach, the distance between the pupils and the religious content, which is typical of ‘learning about religion,’ is strictly maintained. Yet, at the same time, the life-world of the pupil, rather than the internal structure of the of the religion, and the second kind (‘learning about religion’) is controlled by the scientific study of religion, the third kind of religious education (‘learning from religion’) becomes a discipline within educational studies. It is for this reason that ‘learning from religion’ is receiving increasing attention and support from professional religious educators throughout religion, tends to inform the curriculum.⁵ The question at stake is to what extent, and in what ways, children and young people can gain educational benefit from the study of religion. This becomes the kind of religious education that has as its principal objective the humanisation of the pupil, that is, making a contribution to the pupils’ moral and spiritual development.

In the first two kinds of religious education, ‘learning religion’ and ‘learning about religion,’ religion is taught for its own sake, whether as an object of faith to which the children are summoned, or as an object worthy of critical study. However, in the third kind, ‘learning from religion,’ the central focus switches to the children as learners.⁶ Whereas the first kind of religious education (‘learning religion’) continues to be controlled by the self-understanding the world.

A recent example of ‘learning from religion’ may be found in the Gift to the Child project carried out at the University of Birmingham. Teachers select units of material from various world religions for study by children, aged 4-11 years. These units might consist of a statue, a picture, or a passage of Holy Scripture. Of each item, the question is asked, “What gifts might it offer the children?” For example, Ganesha, the elephant-headed deity celebrated in southern Asia, might offer a stimulation to the curiosity of the children, challenge their values, deepen their distinctive sense of identity, and impart empathy for others. When this happens, the children may be said to have learned from religion.⁷

The Role of Religious Education Today:

The distinctions between various approaches to religious education that we have been discussing are certainly of great importance in understanding the nature and purposes of modern religious education. However, they remain somewhat domestic in their outlook. In other words, they are the kind of issues that are discussed by the religious education professionals. They are concerned with the self-understanding of the subject as this relates to the self-understanding of religion. They are concerned with the relationships between religion and education and relationships between the pupils and the content of religious education. Important as these issues are, they are not, in themselves, sufficient to justify the inclusion of religious education within a publicly funded state education system.

If we take the first of the three types of religious education which we discussed,

‘learning religion,’ then we might well claim that it is the business of each religion to ensure its own transmission to the next generation. If the community at large is going to pay for religious education of this kind through government revenues, then the public might well ask why such religious education couldn’t take place under the direct sponsorship of the religious communities themselves. Why should the school do the work of the mosque or the church? And what about those children who do not come from a religious family background at all? Is it right and proper that they should be affiliated to a religion, possibly without their parents’ approval? In any case, we have seen that the contribution that this kind of religious education makes to the struggle against religious intolerance is strictly limited.

As for the second approach ‘learning about religion’ we could imagine that, from the point of view of the state, such an approach would be preferable in that it places religious education on the same footing as the other subjects of the curriculum -- making it available to the same norms of critical inquiry and pedagogical skill as everything else which the school teaches. Such religious education at least aims to contribute to the general knowledge of the pupil and, insofar as religions remain important in the modern world, it could be considered part of the general education of all young people. Moreover, we have seen that this kind of religious education makes a significant, but not a comprehensive, contribution to the struggle against negative religious stereotypes.

However, this ‘learning about religion’ approach still leaves much to be desired from the point of view of the state. The curriculum is under pressure and, although there is no doubt that religion is an extremely important aspect of modern living, it might be argued that education in mathematics and science is more significant from the point of view of the modern state. Of course, we have the question of mutual understanding and toleration between different religions. Religions play a central part in these inquiries and on the whole question of community and race relationships. However, as we start to talk about the contribution of religion to these life-areas, we are already moving away from religious education as ‘learning about religion’ toward our third understanding of the subject, ‘learning from religion.’ For young people to become more tolerant of others through the study of religion is to learn from religion.

Indeed, the great strength of the third approach is that, in speaking of the benefits which young people and society may derive from the study of religion, one is moving away from the domestic concerns of the religious communities, and the internal questions about the best way to study religion, into the wider issues with which government and the community at large are rightly concerned.

A Case Study:

How would the ‘learning from religion’ approach apply to an issue of contemporary concern? Let us take the example of the pressures of financial competition, which influences every aspect of government policy. Such competition has an immediate impact upon the workplace and on individuals and tends to create social and

community values that are not those of the moral and spiritual dimensions of our species. Globally, the inexorable pressures of financial competition are eroding the human values of freedom and love, of inter-personal solidarity, and the living of an ethical life. Perhaps, then, it is not an exaggeration to say that money and materialism have become the idolatrous deities of our culture.⁸

These financial forces are, however, being challenged and it is in this context that we must interpret the worldwide interest in spirituality and in an education which will encourage the genuine humanity of our young people. The dilemma is that we need to have an education that promotes their spiritual and moral welfare. But, if we are successful in this attempt, then we may not be successful in the education of young people for ultimate advantage in a competitive financial world. The values can often be incompatible.

But how can education promote moral and spiritual ideals? It is at this point that the world religions must be recognised as the principal foci of disciplined and coherent human moral and spiritual life. This does not mean that the religions are necessary to ethical life, or that you cannot be good without religion. Nor does it mean that the religions are themselves always good. We know that religion today is extremely ambiguous and that religion can become a promoter and a facilitator of unjust systems. Nevertheless, the world religions contain the seeds of human protest. They remain, along with a humanised art, literature and science, the main resources that we have for the rehabilitation of human life.

If the religions are to cooperate in such an endeavour, they must rise above the competition into which they themselves have been drawn in recent centuries. The religions must no longer be supremely concerned with their own progress and with their own advantage vis-à-vis other religions. Religious competition itself must also be pacified and this can only be done by the religions themselves as they renew their inner life and rediscover their true missions.

We see, then, that the contribution of religious education to religious freedom is highly diverse. On the one hand, a narrow, traditional approach may lead to a kind of mental closure and a failure to make contact with the contemporary world. At its best, however, 'learning from religion' is a unique resource for the advancement of human freedom.

END NOTES

1 For his most recent discussion, see M. H. Grimmitt "Contemporary Pedagogies of Religious Education: What are They?" in his edited volume *Pedagogies of Religious Education*; McCrimmons Publishing, Great Wakering, England, 2000, pp.24-52.

2 The most influential person in this development was Ninian Smart. See his *The Phenomenon of Religion*; Macmillan, London, 1973. For the application of this approach to religious education see his *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion*; Faber and Faber, London, 1968.

3 Robert Jackson, *Religious Education: an Interpretative Approach*; Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1997.

4 In case I should convey a misleading impression of his work, I should emphasize the fact that, in his interpretative approach, Robert Jackson fully recognises the contribution to be made by the study of religion to the lives of children. He describes this as the edification aspect of religious education.

5 Michael Grimmitt *Religious Education and Human Development*; McCrimmon Publishing, Great Wakering, England, 1987.

6 Edwin Cox “Educational Religious Education” in John M. Hull (ed.) *New Directions in Religious Education*; Falmer Press, Lewes, England, 1982, pp.53-57. This article first appeared in 1971.

7 John M. Hull “Religion in the Service of the Child Project: The Gift Approach to Religious Education,” in Michael Grimmitt (ed) *Pedagogies of Religious Education*; McCrimmons Publishing, Great Wakering, England, 2000, pp. 112-129.

8 John M. Hull, “Christian Education in a Capitalist Society: Money and God” in David F. Ford and Dennis L. Stamps *Essentials of Christian Community*; T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1996, pp.241-252. A number of my articles on the spirituality of money are translated into German in *Gott und Geld*; KIK Verlag, Zurich, 2000.

Religious Education in Northern Ireland: Towards New Relationships

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As it is perceived by the wider world, religion in Northern Ireland has been notorious for provoking some of the worst excesses of sectarian antagonism. Yet, sometimes, it has also been known for its positive engagement with the processes of reconciliation, healing, and hope. Indeed, some courageous and often unsung work has been carried out by people of various faith communities working right across, and in spite of, traditional sectarian barriers. However, it is still unfortunately the case that a very large sector of education remains separated out along perceived religious lines. Northern Ireland's schools have traditionally been separately associated with one or other of its dominant Christian traditions, Catholic or Protestant. The vast majority of children (well over 90%) attend the school associated with their own cultural-religious community. While some have argued that this separateness has provided a secure religious and community ethos to counter the years of civil unrest – a “safe haven” as it has often been termed – others have argued that it has merely compounded the region's social and political divisions and has contributed to ignorance, prejudice, and sectarianism. Although it is true that the phenomenon of separate, divided schools is just one symptom of a separate, divided society, it is no less true that this particular symptom has become closely intertwined with the cause.

Northern Ireland, along with other parts of the United Kingdom, Ireland, and many European countries, continues to include Religious Education (RE) in its curriculum. The Christian churches have traditionally sought to exercise significant influence over the nature of religious teaching. Schools in the Catholic tradition are overtly confessional in their approach, while many teachers from the Protestant community seem to have adopted what might be termed a “non-denominational neoconfessionalism.” Overall though, there is some ambivalence about the purposes of RE in schools. Is it the role of schools to teach and nurture faith, or should the purpose of religion in school be to promote awareness and understanding? This is a crucial issue in an increasingly plural global society and any discussion of religious education must take account of the potential dangers when religious bodies appear to have an interest in the control of schools and, in particular, of the curriculum.

It is the view of this author that religion does have a valid place in education and that religious values can be a positive and formative influence on the quality of that education. However, this should never be at the expense of educational independence and freedom of thought and choice. Religious organisations should stand well back from the impression that they wish to use education simply to control or manipulate a community. Most importantly, they must recognise the need for inclusion, respect, and fairness to all -- not least to minorities and those who ascribe to no religion. In a diverse world, it is essential to uphold certain key human and religious values as a basis for understanding and peace. These values include, among others, freedom, respect, and mutual justice.

If religious bodies, especially the more powerful ones, can adjust to this new paradigm then they surely have much to offer. Learning about and from religion is a window to cultural understanding, to human motivation, to ethical discourse, and to the deepest musings of humankind. Schools need not be a battleground of conflicting ideologies, as some have feared. Rather, they should be a place of challenge, dialogue, and, in a non-sectarian sense, of spiritual development. At its best, openness to religious diversity promotes honest enquiry and encounter and can lead to new relationships.

Types of Religious Education in Schools:

In view of the ideals above, what is the present situation in Northern Ireland?

Northern Ireland's educational legislation currently permits different types of schools with different approaches to religious teaching in schools. 'Maintained' schools, almost all of which are Catholic schools, are permitted to teach the particular tenets of their denominational tradition and include a certain proportion of representatives on governing bodies. 'Controlled' schools, many of which were originally administered by the Protestant Churches until the early 1930s, may only teach religion in a "nondenominational"

manner and are permitted a smaller proportion of representatives on governing bodies. There is a small number of 'Independent' Christian Schools (Protestant-fundamentalist in outlook) which are completely privately funded and which, therefore, do not come under the terms of the mainstream legislation, primarily because of their desire to define the nature of their own religious provision.

More significantly, there is a small but growing sector of 'Integrated' schools (currently catering for about 5% of the school going population), which are committed to serving all the communities of Northern Ireland and, therefore, to providing both confessional and general religious education. These schools have adopted a policy of cooperating as much as possible with all church and religious groups while fiercely guarding their independence from any specific religious control. Religious education in these latter schools is normally based on the principle that children from different traditions should do as much as possible together. Even where separate teaching is required (for example, in preparation for the Catholic sacraments), this should never be done in a secretive or closed manner. The 'Integrated' schools have met with some opposition from traditional church hierarchies, but many people regard them as an important indication of ways to create a more stable political environment in Northern Ireland. 1

Northern Ireland's Core Syllabus:

The Department of Education for Northern Ireland formally adopted a "Core Syllabus for Religious Education" in 1993. At the time, there was a fairly high degree of public welcome because of the involvement of the four largest Christian denominations in the process. These four churches – the Catholic Church in Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Church of Ireland (Anglican) and the Methodist Church in

Ireland – were invited by government in 1991 to act jointly to prepare a syllabus and to appoint members of a Working Party. It was agreed that the “core” would include those areas on which all could agree and that additional material – such as confessional Catholic teaching in preparation for the sacraments – could be taught “outside the core” where legislation permitted.

It was also decided that the ‘Core Syllabus’ would be an exclusively Christian syllabus. The ‘Core Syllabus’ has three main elements or “Attainment Targets.” These are designated as 1) The Revelation of God (teaching about God, the Bible and the life and teaching of

Jesus); 2) The Christian Church (from its New Testament origins to the present day); and 3) Morality (respect for God, self, others, and the environment). When this syllabus was developed, some concern was expressed about the terminology of the first of these areas, “The Revelation of God” as its assumptions seemed to be based on the common, but over-simplistic and inaccurate belief, that everyone in Northern Ireland had an identity which was either “Catholic” or “Protestant” in the broadest sense. The existence and presence of other religions was simply ignored. Indeed, despite its origins in a process of inter-church cooperation, the syllabus also gave only superficial attention to issues of difference and dialogue between the Irish churches themselves. Other criticism of the syllabus centered on its very didactic nature and its lack of engagement with attitudinal development. Dr. Philip Barnes of the University of Ulster, for example, commented that the syllabus did “not encourage pupils to think for themselves about religion, and its narrow focus prevent(ed) the development of the necessary skill of assessing religious beliefs, experiences and commitments – a skill much needed in our increasingly plural world.”²

As for the teaching of other faiths in the ‘Core Syllabus,’ it was determined that, if any school wished to teach about other religions, this should be done “outside the core” and then only by the express agreement of the school’s Board of Governors. This latter decision was justified on the grounds that there was “no demand” for teaching about other faiths and on the stipulation in earlier legislation that religious education shall be “instruction based upon the Holy Scriptures according to some authoritative version or versions thereof.”³ Despite protest from various groups and individuals, including representatives of the minority faith communities in Northern Ireland, the Christian exclusivity of the syllabus was upheld. A government minister at the time officially encouraged schools to exercise their option to teach about other religions, but, in practice, very few schools have done so. Often, they have taken the pragmatic position that the syllabus is already too content-heavy without adding further material. The absence of a world religions element in RE is particularly marked in the ‘Controlled’ schools (which mainly serve the Protestant community). In the Catholic post-primary RE programme, however, there is a small but significant section on other religions which is taught in each school year.

In its introductory material, the Syllabus Working Group was respectful in tone in relation to other faith and encouraged pupils to develop an attitude of “sensitivity towards people of Christian traditions other than their own, towards people of others

religions, and people who do not believe in any religion.”⁴ The difficulty with this approach, however, was that there was no clear basis being provided in the syllabus for the knowledge and awareness on which to base such sensitivity. The exclusive nature of the RE syllabus in Northern Ireland has been further compounded in recent years by the decision to omit the world religions option from the Northern Ireland GCSE⁵ Religious Studies course on the grounds that there was little demand for it. An option to study religions other than Christianity does remain part of the Advanced Level GCE Religious Studies course, but it is only taken up by a very small percentage of students. It is hard to avoid the impression that the ‘Core Syllabus’ was little more than a cooperation of convenience designed to ensure that RE remained in the control of the churches. There has been little ongoing cooperation since the Syllabus, and there has been strong resistance to any proposals which might seek to change the underlying assumptions of the original ‘Core Syllabus.’

Following the failure of efforts to persuade government and the churches to broaden the Northern Ireland Syllabus beyond its Christian parameters, one unanticipated outcome was the decision of members of the minority faiths, together with some Christians of various traditions, to establish the Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum. One of the key commitments of the Forum has been to continue to lobby for a much more inclusive approach to Religious Education, and a public statement was issued in January 2001 calling for:

“a better-informed and more sensitive awareness of religious diversity in our schools” and for “all educators, including those from the churches and the other faith communities, to commit themselves enthusiastically in dialogue and partnership to this task of developing an education system which contributes to the establishment of a fair and just society in Northern Ireland for all sections of the community.”⁶

A Different Vision:

Despite the difficulties and disappointments associated with the official ‘Core Syllabus,’ there have been some encouraging developments in the RE field over the past twenty or more years. These developments have been aimed at overcoming the separation, ignorance, and sectarianism which continue to challenge life in Northern Ireland. While space prohibits providing further detail, the work of the late Dr. John Greer and his colleagues at the University of Ulster was of note. They devised programs for children to explore a variety of Christian traditions. This initiative led to the establishment of new models of in-service teacher education whereby teachers from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds shared together their concerns and insights. The joint peace education program of the (Protestant) Irish Council of Churches and the (Catholic) Irish Commission for Justice and Peace has also devised a range of resources for exploring religious and cultural diversity and for developing skills in inter-personal, inter-group, and inter-community relationships. The inter-school and youth programmes of the well-known Corrymeela Community of Reconciliation have, over more than three decades, provided opportunities for challenge and encounter

across the religious divide. The recent work of the Irish School of Ecumenics on dealing with sectarianism seems likely to provide another valuable resource in this field.

Many of the groups and individuals working voluntarily in education towards a vision of a more peaceful society, including those motivated by religious values, came together in the 1980s to develop a more cohesive approach which could be taken up by schools of all kinds. Gaining the broad support of government, they developed models of Education for Mutual Understanding which were eventually incorporated into the statutory schools curriculum.⁷ Throughout the 1990s, a range of curricular strategies was developed to deliver the objectives of this program, although with variable support and levels of effectiveness. Notwithstanding the hard work and good practice of some teachers, it is generally agreed that too much emphasis was placed on interpersonal and inter-group contact, but too little on developing the knowledge and skills necessary to promote relationship-building and understanding of diversity.⁸ Severe limitations in the availability and provision of teacher training in education for diversity and peace have been evident throughout this period. At the time of writing, these strategies are being further developed and strengthened at an official level in relation to proposals to introduce Personal Education and Local and Global Citizenship into the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

Inspired by examples of similar cross-cultural work in other parts of the world, some religious educators have argued that, if religion is seen to be part of the problem in any society, it also needs to be addressed as part of the response to that problem. Teaching materials and programs have been developed to initiate awareness of Protestant and Catholic beliefs and practices, to encourage examination of attitudes and stereotypes, to build trust and mutual respect, and to promote open, honest discussion of divisive issues such as sectarianism and violence. Similar processes, although on a smaller scale, have been adopted in relation to awareness of world faiths.⁹ Some schools have involved the use of educational trails to study places of worship and their associated cultural and religious communities. Training models have been developed to encourage teachers to adopt an inclusive approach to religious education in which the integrity of pupils, teachers and the religions being studied are respected in all their diversity.

Encouraging an Open Approach:

At its best, such work seeks to promote greater openness in the teaching of religious issues in schools. Skilled teachers can encourage open discussion of issues which have traditionally been avoided as “too sensitive.” Inter-school seminars and workshops, often organised by educational support organisations and NGOs, can provide additional resources and opportunities for such discussion. However, despite the support from some religious educators, it is no less true that some of the sharpest opposition has come from others in this field. It is still possible to encounter considerable antagonism from some teachers of religion with very different value systems who regard cross-denominational and inter-faith teaching with suspicion.

Religious education based on the values of openness and mutual respect seems to many people to be absolutely crucial in the context of a plural, but divided society like Northern Ireland. The ways in which religion is taught in such a society are highly significant, but this is more than just an academic or professional debate about pedagogical styles. In a society like Northern Ireland, religion in schools is capable of being either very creative or very malign. The churches in Ireland undoubtedly have a valid historical and contemporary interest in schools and in religious education, but this should be seen as a responsibility rather than a right. However, if the churches can choose to be partners with other faith communities in the envisioning and building of a more open and peaceful society, then there are grounds for hope. A more open and honest approach to dealing with religious diversity has the potential to enable Northern Ireland's peoples to engage in a more constructive relationship with each other in order to build and sustain a more stable future.

END NOTES

- 1 It is important to point out that all the 'Controlled' and 'Maintained' and most of the 'Integrated' schools – that is, the vast majority of all schools – are now fully government funded.
- 2 L.P. Barnes, 1997, "Reforming Religious Education in Northern Ireland: A Critical Review," in *The British Journal of Religious Education*; Vol.19:2, Spring 1997, Derby, Christian Education Movement, Page 81.
- 3 HMSO, 1986, Statutory Instruments No. 594: Education and Libraries Order 1986; Article 21, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, Belfast.
- 4 DENI, 1992, Educational (Cross-Curricular) Themes: Objectives; Department of Education for Northern Ireland/HMSO, Bangor.
- 5 This is the leaving examination for ages 16+.
- 6 NIIFF, 2001, A Statement on Religious Education, agreed by the Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum, January 10th 2001.
- 7 CCEA, Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage: Guidance Materials; Council for Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment, Belfast, 1997.
- 8 A. Smith & A. Robinson, Education for Mutual Understanding: the Initial Statutory Years, Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster, Coleraine, 1996.
- 9 See, for example: M. Ryan, Another Ireland: An Introduction to Ireland's Ethnic and Religious Minorities; Stranmillis University College, Belfast, 1996.

The Many Dimensions of Religious Instruction in Turkey

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Institutional education in general, and religious education in particular, is highly centralized in Turkey. This approach began with the Unity of Education Law, which was first drafted in 1924 and preserved in subsequent legal reforms and constitutional changes. Based on this law, all educational institutions, including military and medical schools, were brought under the control of the Ministry of Education. Additionally, all traditional religious schools, or medreses, were abolished and a divinity school was established to educate scholars and experts in religious subjects. In addition, a certain number of secondary level schools were opened to train personnel for religious services in society.

In order to understand why such a law was considered necessary, one must first look at the state of educational institutions of the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There were mainly four kinds of educational institutions in the Empire. These included medreses, mekteps, minority schools, and foreign (missionary) schools. Medreses were the places where traditional religious sciences were studied. They were the most common among the schools, but also the most resilient towards modern developments. Mekteps, on the other hand, were established by the Ottoman State and they were modeled after secular European educational institutions. In addition, there were schools which were run by the non-Muslim minorities of the Empire. Finally, there were schools which were opened and run by foreign missionaries. As it was felt that the minority and foreign schools played a role in the disintegration of the Empire, the memory of this role was fresh in the minds of those who formed the educational policy of the New Republic.

Threats to the Republic:

The founders of the Turkish Republic in the early 1920's considered the multiinstitutional education that had developed in Turkish society to be threatening. On the one hand, there was a growing tension between traditionally-minded medrese graduates and the secularly-oriented mektep graduates. On the other hand, there was a similar tension between these two groups and the graduates of minority and foreign schools. Thus, the Unity of Education Law was intended to end these tensions and strengthen the social fabric of the society. The Law was also motivated by the nationalist ideology of the new State. Historically, Turkish nationalism developed later than, and in response to, other nationalist movements within the Empire. The new policies of the Republic made Turkish the sole language of instruction, the alphabet was changed from Arabic to Latin letters, and the Turkish language was "purified" from Arabic and Persian words.

Contrary to its letter as well its spirit, the Unity of Education Law had been understood, or interpreted, as totally excluding religious instruction from public

schools. Therefore, within three years following the Law's enactment, all courses concerning religion (including Arabic and Persian) were extracted from the curriculum of public schools. Since medreses were closed, there were no private schools which would provide religious instruction. And the secondary level schools, which were intended to train religious functionaries for religious services, were closed down within years of their establishment due to the lack of "interest."² This situation was seen and criticized as an anti-religious educational policy. In order to confront this criticism, the Prime Minister of the time (1925-1937), Ismet Inonu, claimed that "This (practice) should not be considered as anti-religious." He called for a program of "national education," which was to be distinguished from "religious or international education." However, it was clear that religion was given no place in this new educational policy.

In 1927, all courses concerning religion were excluded from the curriculum of primary, secondary, and high schools on the basis that non-Muslims also live in Turkey. Between the years 1927-1949, no religious instruction was permitted in schools. The negative consequences of this educational policy began to catch the attention of statesmen and politicians by the time of the second World War. For the first time, in 1949, and after nearly a quarter of a century, the Ministry of Education allowed a course on religion in 4th and 5th grades of primary school. The course was optional, depending upon a written request from parents, and it was taught outside the regular hours. The public response in favor of this initiative was overwhelming. Less than 1% of the students opted out of the course.

Reintroducing Religious Education:

In 1956, as a result of multi-party democracy, a new government (the Demokrat Parti) was established. Being more sympathetic towards the religious sentiments of society, this new government introduced a religion course into secondary schools. This time, if the parents wanted to exempt their children from the course, they had to apply to the school with a written request. After nearly ten years, in 1967, the religion course was introduced to the 1st and 2nd grades of high school. Students, however, were enrolled for the course with the written request of their parents. In 1975, the course was extended to the third (last) grade of the high schools. And, finally, following the military coup in 1980, the religion course became obligatory for all secondary level schools. The status of the religion course in public schools was also constitutionally secured. The exact title of the course was, "The Culture of Religion and Knowledge of Ethics."

There are various explanations for the gradual integration of religious education in the curriculum of public schools between the years 1949-1982. These explanations include the need to provide the public with sound religious knowledge; the impact of the second world war, which made the need for religion and morality more sensible; the threat of communism; the erosion of traditional and moral values; and, finally, the threat of terrorism which claimed approximately 20 lives per day before the military coup of 1980.

Currently, religious education courses begin at the 4th grade of primary school and continues throughout secondary and high schools. From the 4th to the 8th grade, classes consist of two hours per week. At the high school level, there is one hour of class per week. Thus, a student who has graduated from high school receives 8 continuous years of religion courses. There are no fixed books for the course. Rather, each school decides which book to follow -- provided that the book for each level is approved by the Ministry of Education. Nearly half of the content of these courses concerns religion and Islam with remaining topics ranging from secularism to humanism and from ethical values to etiquette. The major world religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism are included in the content of the course.

Critiques of the Curriculum:

There have been, and still are, various criticisms directed to the course, “The Culture of Religion and the Knowledge of Ethics.” Some of these criticisms are aimed at the course itself and others toward the way it is taught. Primarily, the course is criticized as being against the principles of secularism, i.e., the separation of religion and state. Though this is a valid point, it ignores the fact that the Unity of Education Law does not allow for non-secular schools to provide religious education. Furthermore, the course aims to give information about religions in general and Islam in particular. Finally, it is not only a course on religion, but also on ethics. When these points are taken into consideration, the claim that the course is against secularism loses its strength. In any event, since non-secular schools are not allowed in Turkey, religious education must be given by the State in public schools. The discussions concerning the status of the course are, therefore, likely to continue as long as it remains obligatory.

The course has also been criticized for not being “objective” enough. According to the program issued by the Ministry of Education in 1992, the general purpose of the course was “to strengthen Atatürkism, national unity, human love from a religious and ethical perspective, and to educate students about virtues and ethics.” However, concerns were raised that a course on religion must focus on religion itself and not make it supplementary to other issues. Because of this view, the new program, which has been developed by the Ministry in 2000, aims to make religion and ethics the central concern of the course.

Promoting a New Program:

The new program of the “Culture of Religion and Knowledge of Ethics” integrates the course with the purposes and principles of general education such as to educate human beings to be critical and active participants in the educational process. It also aims to look at the significance of religion in the individual’s life, i.e. teaching that religion is a phenomenon which is primarily concerned with the relationship between the Creator and human beings and showing that religion can contribute to the culture of universal tolerance and peace. In this respect, the course emphasizes the need for tolerance and respect for other religions and traditions, looks at various understandings and

interpretations of religion, and stresses the universal aspects and values among various faiths. In addition, the new program is concerned with all educational phases of the course. This includes developing further programs, improving the quality of the course materials, and educating field teachers, etc.

There have been recent efforts to improve the status of religious education in the public schools. The Ministry of Education has a specific department under the title, "The General Directory of Education of Religion." This department is involved with the implementation and development of the content of the course. In addition, The Divinity School of Ankara University has started a new program to train field (religion) teachers for public schools. There is ongoing cooperation between the Directory and divinity schools in order to develop a program for the instruction of religion which is open to contemporary theoretical developments and is sensitive to the practical needs of the society.

In Summary: Religious Education in Transition

Turkey is one of the few countries which has experienced various alternative approaches in religious education in the 20th century and it has tried to learn from its mistakes. Turkish society experienced the negative consequences of an extreme secular educational policy which allowed no religious education at all in public schools. It became obvious, however, that neither nationalism nor modernity could substitute for religion. Religion, either as an expression of individual piety or as an institutional organization, could not be suppressed or ignored. The current situation of religious education in Turkey is less than ideal. It is not realistic, for example, that one or two hours per week can be satisfactory in fulfilling the genuine need for religion. However, increasing the number of course hours does not necessarily seem to be the answer. Less central and more flexible educational policy can better accommodate religion within the framework of general education. This development, however, would require certain legal and constitutional changes.

The way we understand and teach religion may be the source of some of the problems still experienced in Turkey. In this respect, our understanding of religion needs critical evaluation. One way to accomplish this is to look at one's own religious beliefs and convictions at a distance. Another way is to try to see our beliefs and convictions from the perspective of a person who does not share them with us. In my opinion, both a critical approach and a dialectical process are essential to establishing an environment of peaceful coexistence.

Finally, the modern world is facing serious problems: the ills of industrialization, economic exploitation, environmental pollution, the possession of nuclear arsenals, population growth, famine, etc. In addition, intolerance, hatred, and terrorism are still major concerns for humanity. Religion can cure some of these ills by educating human beings to have a strong sense of individual responsibility and a well balanced notion of social justice.

END NOTES

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Mualla Selcuk for bringing to my attention some recent changes and developments in the programs of religious education. Prof. Selcuk is a professor at the Divinity School of Ankara University (The Department of Religious Education). She is also the Head of the General Directory of Religious Education in Turkey.

2 These were intended to be vocational schools and came to be called 'Imam Hatip Liseleri.' The history of these schools and their status in the current Turkish educational system is not included in this essay.

On the Place and Role of Religious Education in Russian Schools: Retrospection and Forecasts

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Since a federal law on education was passed in 1992, its restrictive statements on the inadmissibility of the activities of religious organizations in state schools have been interpreted by educational agencies as a prohibition on the teaching of religion. As recently as a year ago, educators were indicating that teaching of religious subjects in state schools in Russia was in violation of the Russian Constitution. Yet, this position has been changing rapidly. On 24 April 2001, a round-table meeting titled "Religious Education in Russia: Problems and Prospects" was held at the parliament of the Russian Federation. The final document produced from this meeting was considered a breakthrough where the importance of spiritual education in schools was concerned. Participants agreed that spiritual upbringing and religious education in Russia's schools should be given a priority status among other educational issues. They agreed, in principle, that the secular character of Russia's state (municipal) school system should not exclude education based on a religious outlook, including the teaching of various historical-religious systems of knowledge.

It has become increasingly clear to many in Russian society that the failure to build a socialist system in Russia was not due to some ideological or economic miscalculation, but rather to the failures caused by an irreligious ideology. Based on this change of thinking, it now seems possible that the basics of the traditional creeds and values of our country (in some form) may soon be included in the programs adopted by general education schools. In many respects, our future depends on our success in combining the idea of a pluralistic democratic state, as formulated in the Constitution, with the spiritual ideals and traditional religious values forming the basis of the great union of various cultures, peoples, and creeds which is Russia. Perhaps, then, this is an opportune time for the majority Russian Orthodox Church,¹ jointly with other religious denominations and creeds, to become an independent fullfledged partner in education and the spiritual consolidation of our society.

The Historical Roots:

Russia is entering a new historical epoch which is different from both the Soviet period and the long history of Czarist Russia. Russia has lived through a long reign of state-supported atheism and the effects of this history on society's attitudes toward religion cannot be underestimated. Besides the fact that the number of religious believers has sharply decreased, the recent generations have not had the same feelings of kinship with their parish. When the Russian Orthodox Church stops becoming the necessary and organic element of a way of life, it tends to lose the widespread support of the people. Additionally, as a consequence of Russia's Communist history, citizens are wary of any penetration of the Church into public life. This is especially true as it relates to religious education in schools. Parents are often afraid that some

kind of new ideological control may enter schools under the guise of religious education and children may once again be told what is permitted and what is not. This kind of distrust naturally leads to resistance among professional pedagogues against the inclusion of religious education in Russia's school programs.

Also, there have never been theological departments in Russian universities -- as there are in Western Europe. With European education forced on Russia by Peter the Great, seminary theology and academic science found themselves on different levels of public life. This development resulted, to a considerable extent, in the isolation of clergy from public life and the polarization of spiritual and secular principles in Russian culture. Today, despite a great number of intellectuals joining the clergy, this separation is still in place in both public and clerical consciousness. In the meantime, a traditional Orthodox way of life is often perceived as a necessary attribute of religiosity, maybe even as a criteria for being a believer. This attitude, however, deepens secular society's distrust of the Russian Orthodox Church while intensifying its rejection of the world, which is a strong element in Eastern Christianity.

Hazards of Indoctrination:

While it is still too early to estimate the future extent and form of religious education in Russia's schools, there is some danger that ideology will enter schools under the guise of religious and spiritual education. The likelihood of such a scenario is confirmed by the increasingly close co-operation between the Ministry of Education and the Moscow Patriarchy. For example, there is a new concept of moral upbringing and spiritual education which has been developed, on the order of the Ministry of Education, by the Orthodox Church-sponsored Pokrov Institute. The official position of the Russian Orthodox Church concerning religious education is reflected in its recently adopted social doctrine (Item 14.3) which reads, "From the Orthodox viewpoint, it is desirable that the whole system of education be built on religious grounds and be based on Christian values".

While expressing its respect for secular schools and its preparedness to build a relationship with such schools on the basis of respect for the freedom of man, the Church believes that "the forcing upon students of anti-religious and anti-Christian views and the affirmation of the monopoly of the materialistic view of the world is inadmissible". However, this well-substantiated position does not provide any answers as to whether or not the Church finds the forcing upon students of Christian ideas and views admissible.

A report prepared for pedagogical readings in St. Petersburg in November 2000 by the Pokrov Institute would imply that this is the aim of Russian pedagogy. In this report, an attempt was made to substantiate, on the basis of domestic pedagogical tradition, the moral admissibility and social usefulness of involving students in religious education regardless of their free will. The aim, noted the report, was to promote the spiritual consolidation of Russia and the instilling of patriotism in her students. The authors of the report seemed to omit, however, the issue of how this

proposed indoctrination was compatible with the principles of the freedom of conscience, tolerance, and pluralism. According to this new concept, the basic principle and objective of moral upbringing and spiritual education is the attaining of the likeness of Christ. Unfortunately, there was little in the report addressing how traditional Christian values might be conveyed to atheists, Muslims, and Jews. Perhaps our society has not yet matured enough to understand that the setting of such pedagogical objectives, while living in a multi-denominational and multi-religious democratic state, leads to the creation of a number of additional problems. Also, it may not be clearly realised that the tactless enforcing of a system of religious values on people may result in the profanation and depreciation of the values one is trying to transmit. This approach may also result in the turning of religious education into the means of indoctrinating students and forcing upon them a rigidly regulated system of an outward semblance of values rather than becoming the means for students to develop their own abilities and to broaden their outlook.

A critical revision is also needed of both the methods and overall principles of pre-Revolutionary religious education. Despite the fact that religious education has been in the hands of the Russian Orthodox Church for centuries, there has been a universal explosion of ungodliness, the desecration of churches, and ill feeling towards the Church. Today, neither the leaders of the Church, nor religious pedagogues, display the will to analyse old mistakes and bring the principles of spiritual education in harmony with the realities of contemporary pluralistic society. At the same time, our society has received too serious a lesson of scepticism and nihilism, and has been too much inoculated with European enlightenment, to accept bold religious indoctrination. That's why many parents, even Orthodox believers, are not likely to allow their children to be indoctrinated in school in the spirit of Orthodox patriotism in the way similar to the recent indoctrination in Marxism-Leninism. At the slightest political fluctuations, or the appearance of the negative results of Orthodox indoctrination, we might find ourselves in the same sad condition. That is, in a society characterised by a totally irreligious system of school education.

A New Way:

Many people in our country find the current irreligious condition normal. Yet the number is growing of those who realise that the deliberate impoverishing of the spiritual world of a child, which inevitably results from the lack of familiarisation with religion, can never be the means of protecting the child's freedom of conscience because it means the violation of another fundamental right of a child to receive education. It will be a great loss for Russia's children if either the path of indoctrination or an irreligious school education is pursued. In the former case, while trying to preserve the national identity and the consolidation of our society, we potentially lose democratic principles and freedoms. In the latter case, while trying to preserve freedoms, we lose all connection with our national spiritual tradition and, along with it, the ability to understand the spiritual identities, cultures, and historic legacies of other peoples. Such are the extremes. I believe that the best path lies somewhere in the middle.

In whatever way the organization of religious education in Russian schools is developed, its future depends on whether it will become truly professional or subservient to some political cause. These realities are already understood by many teachers, priests, and religious believers of various denominations and creeds. A movement of pedagogues and believers whose motto is "Spirituality without Indoctrination" has already appeared in St. Petersburg. This initiative brings together teachers of humanities and methodologists from the city's leading universities and high schools together with priests, etc. Their tasks include exchanging professional experiences, enhancing the qualifications of teachers, and fostering joint efforts in methodological research as it relates to religious pedagogy. Additionally, their work includes promoting and introducing various programs of religious education in schools that may maximise student's knowledge of the world of religion and their national spiritual tradition without infringing on their fundamental rights and freedoms.

The participants of the movement believe that the alternative to indoctrination is not the absence of religious education in schools, but, rather, the consistent and wellconsidered introduction of it. They also clearly understand that an attempt to pass religious education in school into the hands of the Russian Orthodox Church will not cause any reconciliation. In fact, it may have the opposite effect of aggravating the differences between secular and spiritual systems of education which have historically formed in our country and this is already happening in some places. This situation is likely to remain until the Church begins to realize that there is a difference between educational and missionary purposes.

A Unique Russian Pedagogy:

Russia needs to develop its own domestic school of religious pedagogy, which, while coordinating its activities with clergy, should remain consistently secular. On the one hand, we must use the experience of religious education accumulated by secular schools in democratic countries. On the other hand, we must rely on our country's own pedagogical and spiritual resources, i.e. correlating foreign experiences with the historical, cultural and religious peculiarities of Russia and attaining cooperation between traditional denominations and creeds.

The mechanical following of Western pedagogical models and approaches would only be likely to aggravate the situation now existing in our national spiritual life. In Great Britain, for example, young school students attending the same class are taught six different religions. This system works in Britain because those children naturally belong to different, and rarely interacting, subcultures. British teachers believe that, for a little child to be able to love his or her strange next-door neighbour, the understanding, even minimal, of that neighbour's religion is essential. In Russia, this approach is not yet appropriate. So, while creating our own system of religious education, we must pursue other more urgent issues, such as the reconciliation of generations and learning to overcome the rupture in our national spiritual tradition by helping the young to understand where their forefathers were right and where they

were wrong.

We have fallen much behind Western countries where secular religious pedagogy is concerned. Yet this temporary backwardness is no reason for us to forsake our own beliefs and the search for our own way. It is important that we choose a model of religious education that can be adjusted to the religious and legal situations now existing in our country while still meeting the needs of our society. Since much of Russia remains Orthodox Christian, and because Christian Orthodoxy is Russia's ethnological core, this fact must be reflected in the programs of religious education. Religious education may never be quite abstract, i.e. separated from historically formed features of certain traditions. And there is no need to try and achieve the "equality" of religions. Of course, no child should be deprived of a chance to get acquainted with religious traditions other than his or her own and should never receive a distorted or partial view of those other traditions. We must also make sure that students belonging to religious minorities can receive religious education based on their own traditions. Taking Russia's historic experience into account, school programs should also pay attention to atheistic views. There is nothing wrong with having our children receive impartial knowledge of the ideas of irreligious Humanism and Communism.

Indeed, the future of religious education in Russia will largely depend, not just on how school programmes are composed, although that is important, but also on what ideas and values this education will be built on. The most important objective of a scientifically developed system of religious pedagogy must be the formulation of the main ideas, purposes, and principles of such education. We must determine our position, declare our priorities, and decide what values we will rely upon when building a new civic society. These priorities should include the creative development of each person to his or her fullest potential, the reinforcement of our national and religious self-identification, and an ability to remain true to our traditions. The question we must ask (and answer) is whether the exploitation of religious feelings toward political and social ends is permissible and, if yes, to what extent? This exercise includes a clear evaluation of the phenomenon of indoctrination. If, while answering the above questions, the public and professional pedagogues become divided and unable to find common ground, then, in accordance with the essence of pluralism, several pedagogical schools and trends must be developed. In such matters, there is no place for forcible unification.

END NOTES

1 Approximately 60-65% of those in Russia identify themselves as Orthodox Christians (Pravoslavnaya Missiya Segodnya, St.Petersburg, 1999). Some foreign sources estimate the number of Orthodox Christians in Russia to be somewhat lower at 45% (according to The Eastern Christian Churches by Ronald G. Roberson of Chicago University). We can, in any case, say with some assurance that about half of the population of Russia identifies with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Multiple Voices: Challenges Posed for Religion Education in South Africa

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Since 1991, the Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa (ICRSA), based at the University of Cape Town, has been involved in policy research, pilot projects, curriculum development, and text production to create a space in South African public schools for a religion education¹ program that will meet the needs of an emerging democratic nation.² Certainly, we are not alone in this work. While there are some detractors who want to maintain separate programs of single-faith religious nurture in the schools, there is also considerable interest and expertise all over the country in a framework that honors the diversity of South Africa itself. These resources are being drawn upon to create new curricula, new textbooks, and new teacher-training programs for multi-religious education. Recently, we have been encouraged by support from the national Department of Education for these new initiatives in teaching and learning about religions and religious diversity.³

Rather than reviewing religion education in the country as a whole, as many essays in this booklet have done, I will focus instead on the different ways that religion education has been taught in South Africa's classrooms. As our work on new models, methods, and materials for religion education in South Africa has developed, we have become acutely aware of the multiplicity of voices that can be heard in the process of fostering inter-religious communication in the classroom. Briefly, reviewing our work over the past decade, we have identified four types of voices -- evident in the actual teaching of religion -- that raise different challenges for religion education in this region.⁴ Some of the advantages and disadvantages of these approaches will be reviewed.

Authorial Voices: The Challenge of Representation

In the first South African textbook for inter-religious education, *Festivals and Celebrations*, designed for pupils aged ten to twelve, we adopted the strategy of using 'authorial voices.'⁵ What do we mean by this term? 'Authorial voices' assumes a conventional approach to education in which an omniscient authority conveys information. In the book noted above, five authors, from different religious backgrounds, are the dominant voices. They describe the sacred calendars, holy days, and religious rituals of South Africa's religious communities. These voices provide information on important traditional African rituals; on the Hindu Navaratri and Deepavali; on the Muslim Ramadan and Eid ul Fitr; on the Jewish Passover and New Year; and on the Christian Easter and Christmas. According to the promotional literature for this book, the "information, images, and pupil's activities are fun but at the same time respectful." The quality of respect is evident in the book's commitment to accuracy of representation.

While having certain merits, the use of 'authorial' voices raises the challenge of

representation in at least two senses. On the one hand, coming from different religious backgrounds, the authors appear to be representative of the various religious constituencies reflected in the book. To refer again to the promotional literature, "Each section is written by a practising member of that particular faith or tradition, for whom the festivals and rituals have deep personal meaning." However, is this a requirement for textbooks in inter-religious education? Does each voice come from a recognised representative of the religion that is being featured? Who decides that the authors are in fact representative of the various religious constituencies they claim to represent? Even if the authors describe religious practices that hold for them "deep personal meaning," they are still confronted with the limits of description itself. For example, 'authorial voices' tends to fix and freeze the fluid repertoires of religious life into descriptive patterns that can be easily conveyed and assimilated.

In recognising the problem of representation posed by this approach, *Festivals and Celebrations* is based on an innovative teaching and learning method that takes description only as a point of departure. The descriptions provided by the "authorial" voices become a kind of working script for the performances and improvisations of pupils. Working individually and in small groups, the pupils themselves assume responsibility for the process of teaching and learning. Rather than being required to listen passively to an inter-faith forum, pupils are encouraged to engage actively in their own explorations of religious diversity. By assuming the roles of researchers, writers, presenters, and respondents, pupils are also producers of knowledge in this participatory process.

Gatekeeper Voices: The Challenge of Authenticity

In our second textbook, *Sacred Places*, the voices of 'gatekeepers' feature prominently in a richly illustrated tour of churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, and the sacred sites of African traditional religions.⁶ In this textbook, the official perspectives of religious 'gatekeepers' provide the primary frame of reference for a tour of sacred places. Such official voices seem to satisfy the interest of religious practitioners in ensuring authentic self-representation of the religious traditions that are included in educational programs. In contrast to our authors, who are among the laity in their communities, these 'gatekeepers' are members of the clergy, formally charged with the responsibility of maintaining standards of religious authenticity. While issues of self-representation are crucial to learning about religion, they are not always exclusively determined or permanently fixed by the official spokespersons of religious communities. Hence, this approach also has limits. As Judith Everington has observed, the multiplicity of interpretations and perspectives that constitute a religious tradition cannot always be reduced to a single essence or a set of fundamentals determined by a panel of 'gatekeepers.' In contrast to such official formulations, Everington proposes that "an authentic representation of a tradition is one which is effective in portraying the richness of its internal complexity and diversity."⁷ Hence, 'gatekeeper' voices do not necessarily resolve the challenge of authenticity.

In the South African context, the notion of authenticity is especially important as it has been linked by apartheid ideologues with a commitment to "self-determination." Such "self-determination," however, has led to the forced separation of people under a promise to preserve the purity of distinct languages, cultures, and religions. Even in our current situation, some critics of religion education continue to advocate a kind of religious apartheid in which pupils from different religious backgrounds will be nurtured in their "own" religion in public school programs. Such a policy of religious apartheid in public school education can further entrench differences and divisions in the name of religious authenticity.

As Judith Everington has found, we need "to recognise the fluid nature of the 'boundaries' of religious tradition, the internal diversity of each tradition and the processes by which traditions are internally contested and are continually growing and changing."⁸ Alas, 'gatekeeper' voices (and, in our case, the gatekeepers of educational policy) are often interested in defending rigid boundaries around religious traditions. As such, they can frustrate the educational aims and objectives of learning about religious diversity.

Polyphonic Voices: The Challenge of Diversity

A third textbook, *African Religion and Culture Alive!*, began to address the challenge of diversity through the use of fictionalized voices. This approach attempted to engage students with the complexity of multiple perspectives in learning about religion.⁹ The term "polyphony," of course, is drawn from Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the multiple, disparate, and hybrid voices at play in literary works of fiction.¹⁰

The actual creation of the text noted above grew out of an ongoing conversation among three educators, from different backgrounds, who came together to explore the repertoire of African traditional religion as a living heritage of religious and cultural resources. Relying on a tape recorder, as well as on mutual respect, collaboration, and friendship, the three authors transformed their own voices into as many as eight different dramatis personae. In this text, the polyphony of multiple voices evokes the fluid and vital character of a religious tradition that is simultaneously the most ancient and the most modern religion in South Africa.

In educational theory, the principle of polyphony clears a space for one of the greatest achievements of the classroom, the cultivation of a capacity for surprise and laughter. Unfortunately, what Bakhtin called the "European popular culture of laughter," has been vigorously suppressed by educational theory and practice, as Norbert Elias demonstrated, through rationalised and embodied discipline.¹¹ Experiencing laughter as a challenge to their authority, missionaries and educators have often condemned pupils in South African schools to a serious regimen of silent memorisation.

Alternatively, the use of fiction can open up a free space of conversation that includes laughter. In the text of *African Religion and Culture Alive!*, for example, humor is generated by the recurring problems that the fictional character of "the Professor"

encounters with his automobile. Although these problems are based on real problems, they become, in the fictionalised context of the text, vital opportunities for pupils to connect their exploration of African religion with the immediate situations and circumstances of the world around them in ways that are enjoyable. As our promotional literature claims, we strive for "information, images, and pupil's activities [that] are fun but at the same time respectful." Our experiment in producing a fictionalised, polyphonic text for teaching and learning about African traditional religion suggests one avenue in which respect and laughter can merge into a more exciting educational process of discovery.

Dialogical Voices: The Challenge of Participation

In view of the above approach, it still remains a challenge to make fictionalised voices more real. By making fictional voices "real," I mean that we are seeking to move from the creative modelling of conversations to the faithful recording of actual intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue as resources for texts in religion education. We call this fourth category of voices 'dialogical' because it arises out of a process of ongoing research that has involved inter-religious inquiry and conversation.

Let me offer a practical model. We undertook a project a few years ago—the Pupil's Project—in which young people were not the targets, but the producers of educational material. As they visited different religious communities, the pupils reflected on what they learned. Their observations were recorded. On videotape, their insights and confusions were on display for a year in an exhibit at the South African Museum. In the process of editing that video, we were struck by both the seriousness and the fun of the project. Some of the children's observations, I am sure, would not have been approved by the official "gatekeepers," such as one girl's observation that a sacred place of prayer looked exactly like a "Barbie Doll house."

Other observations, however, should give 'gatekeepers' and other defenders of the faith pause for reflection. For example, the children consistently wondered about gender relations in the religious communities that they visited. Repeatedly, they observed that men and women were separated "so the men would not be distracted." The 'gatekeepers' must certainly wonder about the significance of that research finding by the children! In sum though, this approach has offered a unique and more creative way for students to raise fundamental questions about various belief systems.

Conclusion: Generating Questions

The challenge of participation in a multi-religious society leads us to draw together the different types of voices in the process of teaching and learning. While 'authorial' and 'gatekeeper' voices continue to be heard, they are orchestrated through a 'polyphonic dialogue' in which the pupils themselves provide the primary material for the religion education program. In this kind of dialogue, textbook 'authorial' voices do not ask all the questions and 'gatekeepers' do not give all the answers. Both questions and answers (which generate more questions) are produced

by participating in the learning process. As pupils are encouraged to engage in research outside of the classroom, participation involves a broader conversation about religion. Through such participation, pupils can explore the diversity of religious life in South Africa through sacred times and places, through stories and rituals, and through the different ways of imagining what it means to be human.

END NOTES

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- 4 An earlier version of this discussion appeared in David Chidester, "Man, God, Beast, Heaven, Light, Burning Fire," in Trees Andree, Cok Bakker, and Peter Schreiner, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Contributions to Inter-religious and Intercultural Education*; Münster and Berlin, Comenius Institute, 1997, pgs. 161-67.
- 5 Janet Stonier, Nokuzola Mndende, A. Rashied Omar, Saraswathi S. Pillay, and Azila Reisenberger, *Festivals and Celebrations*; Juta, Cape Town, 1996.
- 6 Janet Stonier and Tracy Derrick, *Sacred Places*; Juta, Cape Town, 1997.
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- 8 *Ibid.*, 71; see Robert Jackson, "Religion Education's Representation of 'Religions' and 'Cultures,'" *British Journal of Educational Studies* 43, 3, 1995.
- 9 Chirevo Kwenda, Nokuzola Mndende, and Janet Stonier, *African Religion and Culture Alive!*; Via Afrika, Cape Town, 1997.
- 10 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (trans.) Hélène Iswolsky; Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984.
- 11 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The Development of Manners, Changes in the Code of Conduct and Feeling in Early Modern Times*; Urizen Books, New York, 1978.

A Holistic Approach to Teaching Islam to Children: A Case Study in Northern Nigeria

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Before starting a discussion of religious education in Nigeria, and Islamic education in particular, it is worth providing an initial overview of the ethnic and religious groups in the country. Generally speaking, Muslims and Christians in Nigeria have lived in peace with one another and there has been a fair amount of inter-marriage, especially in the southwest where there is roughly an equal population of both faiths. In the north, the majority of Christians are from minority ethnic groups who are comparatively recent converts from African traditional religions. On the other hand, the bulk of Hausa/Fulanis, Kanuris, Nupes, etc..., have been Muslims for centuries. When so called “religious disturbances” take place in Nigeria with worrying frequency they usually occur in the north between the indigenous ethnic groups who converted to Christianity and the Hausa “settlers” who have long lived in their midst. In more recent times, the conflict has also involved Christian Ibo settlers from the southeast who have long settled in the north. Insulting statements about Islam made by Ibo religious and political leaders have also fueled the recent conflicts over the extension of the scope of Shar’iah (Muslim) law in many of Nigeria’s northern states.

About 2 years ago, the Government set up a body called the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council where Christian and Muslim leaders would have a chance to meet. While these leaders are well-educated and can come to some mutual understandings among themselves, they often find a lot of ignorance, intolerance, and criticism of compromise among their followers.¹ While there are some non-governmental bodies who have promoted inter-religious dialogue and harmony with limited successes, there is a great need to build on these efforts in all parts of the community.

The Place of Religious Education:

When the British extended their control over Nigeria during the 19th and 20th centuries, a system of Islamic education had already been in existence for centuries in the Muslim Emirates of what is now northern Nigeria. Overall, the British established a cordial relationship with the Emirs under a system of indirect rule and, when modern schools were set up in the colonial period, Islamic religious knowledge was included as a subject of study in the northern states. Christian religious education was included in the southern states in the same way.

In due course, both Islam and Christianity were taught in both the north and the south and large numbers of students took them as examination subjects for the West African School Certificate. When periods for religious instruction came up, however, Muslims and Christians would go to separate classes taught by teachers of their own respective religions. Teacher training colleges and universities introduced appropriate courses at various levels.

In the early 1980s, the Government carried out a major revision of the educational system. All subject syllabi were revised and more weight was given to moral education based on religious values. There was at this time, however, an attempt by secularists to eliminate “Religious Knowledge” -- both Christian and Islamic -- in favor of “Moral Education.” Both Christian and Muslim bodies resisted this effort on that grounds that Christian and Muslim parents wanted their children to be brought up “in the religion of their parents.” Since this time, there have been no major changes. Each syllabus contains minor elements of information about other religions and about African traditional religion.

Understanding Islam:

As my own experience is with Islamic education, I will share some thoughts on potential improvements to Islamic education in this region. Some years ago I had the interesting experience of working with the NERC (Nigerian Educational Research Council) panel set up to revise the National syllabus for Islamic Studies. We began with examining Islamic education at the primary level. Initially, our group was composed of about fifteen or more people, including professors, lecturers, and teachers drawn from Universities, Colleges of Education and Schools, as well as some of the Grand Kadis of State Shari'ah Courts of Appeal. We began by listing the things children at primary level should be expected to learn.

It soon became apparent that we were looking upon these children as bottomless receptacles into which were to be poured as many buckets of information as possible about Islam. The children must learn to read the Arabic text of the Qur'an, the children must memorize X - number of Surahs, the children must memorize the 99 Names of Allah, the children must memorize the compulsory and Sunnah acts of Ablution and Prayer. They must also memorize some Hadith and some du'ā', and the names of the Prophet's father, mother, wet-nurse, uncle, and so on and so forth.

In effect, the children's first experience of Islam was to be based almost entirely on the memorization of many sounds and words of unknown meaning, of actions of unknown significance, and of facts of no obvious relevance to the question of what Islam is and what it means to be a Muslim. This is, after all, the way most Muslims who are born into the religion are taught about Islam and they tend to feel it is the only way in which it can be passed on to the next generation. The children are, therefore, naturally under the impression that Islam is something you memorize and hopefully are able to repeat when asked ...the alternative being some whacks with a stick.

Across most of Africa, and indeed in many other parts of the world, this is how the majority of children learn Islam. So when we wonder why so many Muslims have such little understanding of Islam, we have only to look at the Qur'anic schools and their modern variants — the ‘Mallams’ in the Primary schools — to understand why. The curriculum is extremely narrow and the method is more suitable for training parrots. Learning "Islamic Studies" has not helped the growing child to understand anything. It has not given him/her any insight and he/she is not encouraged to ask

questions. By the time these children become teenager, they are quite likely to drop the subject and therefore to grow up as a "religious illiterate." It is such people with a very weak understanding of Islam who can most easily be led astray - whether by the modern secular culture, or by other religious or extremist groups. They also become the nominal Muslims who sometimes rise to high positions where they constitute an obstacle to all attempts to improve our society in line with moral principles.

The Need for Meaningful Islamic Education:

It is therefore a matter of great importance that Islam should be taught in a way that is meaningful to the learner, which assists his/her understanding of the meaning and purpose of life and guides him/her to think and act as a Muslim in all his/her affairs. These are the challenges before the curriculum developer, textbook writers, and teachers.

Islam is a religion whose divine revelation requires us to think, to observe, to inquire, to investigate, to test statements, to reflect and to understand. The whole of the Qur'an is full of challenges for people to use their reason. Islam is not a religion of blind faith. This should be reflected in the way we teach it, using references to the Qur'an where it tells us to consider the creation (e.g. Surah 27:59-64) and draw lessons from our reasoning. Even young children soon start to use their reason, as any parent knows from the daily asking of questions beginning with "why?" Children are very curious and, in teaching Islam, we should make use of that curiosity and try to satisfy their wish to find out. For example, children may ask why we pray in the way we do. Some teachers may rightly say that "That is the way the Prophet showed us," but they may also add a lot of reasons why the Islamic form of prayer has other moral, spiritual, and social benefits.²

In this respect, it is important not to regard Islamic Studies in isolation from other knowledge which the child learns — whether from other school subjects, or from the home, or from watching television. Teachers of Islam should themselves read widely and broaden their general knowledge so as to be able to relate Islamic values to the child's other experience and knowledge. For example, Islamic moral values can be related to themes in the poems, novels, and dramas studied for English Literature. The same can be done for events in history. In the sciences, there is a wealth of materials — including pictures and video cassettes — which illustrate references in the Qur'an to natural phenomena, the behaviour of animals, the heavenly bodies, human embryology, and so on.³ The moral dimension is also of great importance. Islam teaches that human beings are all in a state of loss unless they attain to faith and do good (Qur'an Surah 103). We are taught that it is also obligatory to promote what is morally right and to try to stop or resist what is morally wrong. The Qur'an and Hadith go on to define specific examples of good and bad deeds.

These are not arbitrary commands and prohibitions, but are directly related to what may in the short or long term help us or harm us. Sometimes the reasons are stated in the Qur'an, e.g. "But (since) good and evil cannot be equal, return evil with that which

is better, so that the person between you and whom there was enmity may become like a close friend" (Qur'an 41:34). Or, in respect of charitable giving, "And neither allow your hand to be shackled to your neck, nor stretch it to the utmost limit (of your capacity), lest you find yourself blamed (by your dependants) or even destitute" (Qur'an 17:29). Sometimes the reasons are not stated, but can be deduced by investigation or reflection. For example, in Qur'an 2:71 where the Prophet is told, "They will ask you about intoxicants and gambling. Say: In both there is great evil as well as some benefit for man; but the evil which they cause is greater than the benefit which they bring..."

Therefore, children should be encouraged to think about and discuss what may be the benefit or harm of certain actions. Faith which is supported by reason is doubly strong. It gives a child a feeling of confidence in his/her faith if he/she can point out the benefits of Islamic practices, duties and prohibitions, and answer any questions that may be raised. In order to prepare children for such reasoning, they should be encouraged to ask questions about what they don't understand and they should be given reasonable answers. Moreover, a child who has been taught to reason grows up equipped to discuss religious and moral issues with people of all faiths and philosophies. Side by side with classroom teachings, students need to broaden their general knowledge of Islam and of other religions. In the modern world, we need to interact peacefully, not only with our immediate non-Muslim neighbors, but also with people of other beliefs. Fruitful dialogue with them needs to be based on true understanding.

The Importance of Role Models:

In teaching moral values to children it is advisable to illustrate such values by either using true stories drawn from the life of Prophet Muhammad and his companions, or from the earlier prophets, or from respected Muslims. The teacher may also use fables or other fictional stories as parables to illustrate the point. Children - and indeed even adults - find it easier to appreciate moral conduct when it is demonstrated in the behaviour of a particular person, rather than as a set of abstract principles.

This point is important. Surveys conducted to find out why some non-Muslims embrace Islam, and why some born Muslims grow to become committed Muslims, often indicate that the change took place because they came to know a committed Muslim and admired his or her behaviour and wanted to become like that person. Ideally, the teacher should be that role model and he or she should strive to be worthy of emulation by pupils or students. However, we have to acknowledge that many teachers of Islamic Studies do not have an inspiring personality or outstanding moral conduct. Many teach as a job of work in order to earn a salary because Islamic Studies was the only subject they did well in while at school. Therefore, it is important that teachers make use of examples of great Muslims, male and female, and tell interesting stories to inspire the young to emulate them.

Fitting the Parts Together:

We have referred to the need to relate Islamic Studies to other areas of knowledge and to develop an integrated approach where faith and reason support one another. We sometimes neglect the need to inter-relate the various aspects of Islamic Studies so that the learner can perceive not only the parts of it, but the whole structure. And, how do the parts fit into the whole? (For example, how are moral values reflected in Islamic economic principles or in our treatment of the environment?) This approach is often overlooked, with the result that young people may know quite a lot of detail about various aspects of Islam, but still fail to understand what it is all about.

The reason for this lack of a unified perspective is the way the subject is broken up into little pieces in order to spread the syllabus over the term, over the year, and over the whole course of studies. For example, a secondary school student may learn Islamic Studies among ten or more other subjects three times a week for a period of 40 minutes. On Monday for 40 minutes he learns a bit of Qur'an or Hadith, or some moral teachings. Perhaps he learns about the Isnād and Matn of a Hadith. On Wednesdays he has 40 minutes of Fiqh and learns what are the things that spoil fasting. On Friday for 40 minutes he has Sīrah and learns about the Battle of Uhud. What does the child make of these fragments of knowledge? How can he/she know their significance within the framework of Islam if he/she has no concept of the framework of Islam?

It is rather like doing a jigsaw puzzle when you have not seen the picture you are trying to put together. For example, if you were given a piece of jigsaw puzzle you might not know what it is. You could not know its use or where it belongs in the overall picture. However, if you were shown the whole picture, you would better understand the function of the small piece you were looking at and where it fits into the bigger picture. Now the way our children learn Islamic Studies, by merely repeating what the teacher says without understanding and without knowing how one thing relates to another, is like giving the piece of puzzle to the child and saying "copy this." He may copy what he sees 10 times and copy it well. He may reproduce it in an examination, but the child still does not understand it or grasp how it fits into the whole. When a person converts to Islam out of conviction that it is the true religion, he learns about it in quite a different way. He will start perhaps with a book that gives a general outline of Islam. When he meets some new information, or something he doesn't understand, he asks questions or reads more until he is satisfied. Thus, his understanding and his conviction grow together in a natural and organic way.

When the convert reads about the life of the Prophet Muhammad, he reads it continuously and has finished it in a day or a week, leaving a strong impression on his mind. The Muslim schoolchild, on the other hand, will find the life of the Prophet split up into little units so that it could take months or even years to cover them all. The overall impression and the magnitude of the Prophet's achievement is not perceived because it is like watching a film in slow motion with constant interruptions.

In effect, as trained teachers will have realized, we are talking about the Gestalt Theory of Learning Psychology. The Concise Oxford Dictionary describes this as

"Perceived organized whole that is more than the sum of its parts, e.g. a melody as distinct from the separate notes of it," from the German word "Gestalt" meaning form or shape. Islam has a unique structure and is characterized by a perfect balance — balance between this world and the Hereafter, between faith and reason, between Allah's grace and human responsibility, between male and female, between work and worship. This is one of the most attractive features of Islam, which Muslims should be taught to appreciate -- to see Islam as a whole and balanced way of life.

END NOTES

1 In a country with very poor economic conditions, there are vast numbers of uneducated and unemployed young men who will readily join in any cause – religious, ethnic, or political – when there is an opportunity for killing and looting.

2 e.g. punctuality, orderliness of lining up, unity and solidarity, showing humility before God, following a leader but correcting him if he makes a mistake, etc.

3 Examples: Qur'an 41:11; 36:36; 15:22; 21:30; 23:14; 10:62

Introducing ‘Life Education’ in Taiwan

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It was recently reported in the Taipei Times that there are as many as seven or eight suicides per day in Taiwan among students.¹ In response to this increasingly serious problem, the Minister of Education Ovid Tzeng said that young people were clearly growing up unable to cope with life’s pressures and frustrations. He added that teachers had some responsibility “to educate students about life and how to cherish it.” Minister Tzeng then declared 2001 as “Life Education Year” and the Ministry of Education promised to develop new teaching materials that emphasizing the value of life.

At the time of these developments, many educators argued that the issues of life and death could best be dealt with in a religious education program. After all, one of the main aims of religious education is to promote pupil’s own search for commitments by which to live and to find meanings in wrestling with life’s ultimate questions.² According to the 1974 Private School Law in Taiwan, however, religious education (in terms of a confessional approach) cannot be a required course and students, according to this law, should not be forced to take part in religious activities in schools.³ As the Government is understandably concerned about religious indoctrination in schools, religious education is not part of the formal curriculum in the public schools in Taiwan. However, there may be a new way to teach religious education within the ‘Life Education’ curriculum that is now emerging. This essay will give some background to religious life in Taiwan, review the new plan for ‘Life Education’ in Taiwan, and examine how religious education might fit within that framework.

Religious Life in Taiwan:

Many people would unhesitatingly say that Taiwan is a religious society. There are more than 16,000 temples and churches on the island and more than half the inhabitants responding to a survey on religion indicated that they were believers.⁴ Buddhism is very popular, as are various folk religions, Taoism, Confucianism, and Christianity. Although very few academic organizations provide multi-faith religious education training for teachers in schools, there have been five more academic institutes or departments of religious studies in Taiwan since 1999. These five universities are National Chengchi University (without any religious affiliations), Chung Yuan Christian University, Fo Guang (Buddhist) University, Nanhau (Buddhist) University, and Tunghai (Christian) University.

What is Life Education?

Before ascertaining how religious education might be incorporated into the ‘Life

Education’ program noted above, we must first define the latter term. ‘Life Education’ consists of a school’s planned provision to promote its pupils’ personal, social, and spiritual development. This program includes learning from religious education in a multi-faith approach, education about death and life, character education, career education, and physiological health education. 5 These aims correspond with the educational ideas of the Republic of China’s Constitution, which emphasizes that education and culture are a means to develop people’s national consciousness, autonomous consciousness, moral consciousness, physical health, and social and life intelligence. 6

Dr. Ying-Hau Chen, a member of the Examination Yuan from the Ministry of Education, called for the school environment to be strengthened to guide pupils in exploring the meaning of life, cherishing their own lives, having consideration for others, and having respect for the environment.7 Thus, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan has drawn up plans for a four-year Life Education Program, which will primarily target secondary school pupils.

The Life Education Curriculum:

Acknowledging that the curriculum of secondary schools is undeveloped in the areas of philosophy, life and death questions, and human values, the Ministry of Education announced its intention to promote ‘Life Education’ in all Taiwan’s schools. As outlined by the Ministry of Education, the Intermediate Range Program of Promoting ‘Life Education’ (2001-2004) requires all schools to provide pupils with a curriculum that:

1. Encourages them in exploring the meaning, the ends and the ideals of life;
2. Balances their moral, intellectual, physical, social, and artistic development;
3. Equips them with the ability to make moral judgments;
4. Helps them practice ethics in their life;
5. Promotes their emotional intelligence and competence in problem-solving and getting along with others; and,
6. Broadens the pluralistic learning environment and helps them to develop multiple-intelligences and potential.

The Glory Foundation in Taipei and Private Sheau-Min Girls High School in Taichung have already developed some practical curricula. The main headings of the curricula are summarized in the table below:

Table of the Main Themes in ‘Life Education’ Curriculum

Unit Title	Grade	Unit Title	Grade
1. Appreciation of life	J1st	7. Cultivation of conscience	S1st
2. Appreciating oneself	J1st	8. Human relationships	S1st
3. Life in troubled times	J2nd	9. Thinking &	S2nd

		developing intelligence	
4. Adaptation & existence	J2nd	10. Dignity in life & death	S2nd
5. Respect for/enjoyment of work	J3rd	11. Care & justice in society	S3rd
6. Religion & human life (8)	J3rd	12. Global ethics & religion	S3rd

J: Junior S: Senior

The curriculum of ‘Life Education’ is based on pupil-centered learning, which aims to meet a student’s physical, mental, and spiritual development needs. In other words, teachers should be experienced in instructing every individual pupil by using different teaching strategies and content. The teaching approach generally encompasses various activities like role playing, use of games and videos, narration/instruction, stories, discussion, and experiential learning. In particular, the last approach, ‘experiential learning’ has been stressed in Taiwan since ‘Life Education’ was adopted.⁹

Teaching about Religion in ‘Life Education’:

Although ‘Life Education’ now seems to have come to prominence in the curriculum of secondary schools in Taiwan, there has not been a growing awareness of the simultaneous importance and need for religious education as such. Due to a general disregard of the value of religious education, society abounds with materialistic greed. People are lost in a competitive environment that is dominated by worldly desires. In this environment, religion can have a great influence on one’s thinking and attitudes towards life and can promote people’s spiritual development. Thus, there is reason to believe that ‘Life Education’ should include religious education.

According to the table of the ‘Life Education’ curriculum outlined above, the unit of religious education could be offered in the third grades of both junior high schools and senior high schools. These two units offer good examples of how religious education could be taught in public schools. The aim of religious education being introduced in junior high schools is, firstly, to guide pupils from the observations of natural phenomena by scientists throughout the ages to an awareness of different religious viewpoints on these subjects. Secondly, religious education is meant to help pupils understand the diversity of religions and to understand how faiths, values, and traditions have influenced individuals, societies, and cultures. By the same token, pupils can learn the various meanings of death and life from the viewpoint of various belief systems.

At the senior high school level, in turn, religious education can develop a young person’s awareness of the fundamental questions of life raised by human needs and problems. It can also help young people explore controversial personal and social issues, such as premarital sex, abortion, prejudice, and discrimination -- in the expectation that they can learn how to deal with such controversies knowledgeably, sensibly, and morally. Finally, religious education can offer youth an insight into the values and concerns of other peoples and help them to have a positive attitude toward the various

practices of religious groups.

Challenges to Overcome:

In sum, 'Life Education' in Taiwan is part of an educational reform program that intends to create new forms of society based on a revitalized moral culture. However, it has to be acknowledged that 'Life Education' can neither be forced on pupils for the solution of all social ills nor dictated by government officials and educators. It is also likely that a commitment to 'Life Education' will be regarded only as a momentary, occasional event. If that is the case, "Life Education Year" will doubtless pass off quietly after a few short-lived sparks. Additionally, there are other current challenges. Firstly, because 'Life Education' is seen as a cross-curriculum, non-subject, it is likely to be ignored by core-subject teachers and school managers. Secondly, a central problem with the introduction of a new curriculum like 'Life Education' is that these reformulations lack a framework of concepts and questions that will empower teachers to engage in further curriculum development. Furthermore, the rationale for 'Life Education' is based upon reflection on the social ills currently facing society. As such, it is subject to contemporary educational and social shifts.

Despite these challenges, we must endeavor to make sure that these new initiatives have a longer-term impact on the educational establishment in Taiwan. At a minimum, more educators and teachers are gradually becoming aware of the importance of a holistic approach, i.e. the growth of a person's intellectual, emotional, social, artistic, creative, and spiritual potentials. Religious education, which is an important aspect of life for many people, also has a role in such a 'Life Education' curriculum. Hopefully, more students will gain from such a program as a means to enrich their lives.

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Finding the Balance: Religious Education in Australia

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While there is legal provision for non-denominational religious education in government schools in Australia, in which religion is part of the ordinary secular curriculum taught by departmental teachers, it has never been practiced in this way. A second provision, a denominational one, has in fact been the practice in religious education since the foundation of the Australian states in the 19th century. This form of religious education is also referred to as “confessional” and is the norm in some European countries. This essay will look at how religious education has evolved in Australia and will suggest some new approaches. Of particular importance are the views and perspectives of Australia’s indigenous communities and how these might be better integrated into a religious education curriculum.

Practical Realities of State Support:

The second provision noted above gives the churches a right to enter the government schools to instruct children in their particular denominations. It is sometimes called “right-of-entry” denominational religious education, where the aim is to initiate children into the particular faith tradition and to promote the development of a spiritual life in the context of that faith tradition. In Australia’s state schools, visiting church representatives -- priests/ministers or volunteer instructors -- provide about 30 minutes of religious education per week. Initially, only Christian churches were involved, but, eventually, it was possible for non-Christian religions to participate. In practice, this option might be availed of once every two weeks or less frequently. Such classes are more widespread and consistent at primary school level. At the secondary school level, the coverage is not as extensive and may take the form of religious seminars conducted with students about once per school term, i.e. twice a year.

In some situations, a variety of different Christian denominations will work together cooperatively to sponsor an inter-denominational religious education program. A teacher paid by these churches would in effect become a full time teacher in a government school and teach religion classes on a regular basis on behalf of the churches. This has been an option that has been followed by a number of the Evangelical Churches. Some of the mainline churches, particularly the Catholic Church, have been slow to enter such arrangements because of a concern about the Evangelical and Pentecostal theology of the inter-denominational teachers.

Accrediting ‘Religion Studies’:

Following a release of a number of government reports on the place of religion in state schools in the 1970s,¹ most of the states in Australia developed a matriculation level religion studies course for years 11 and 12 of schooling. These courses (also referred

to as Religious Studies, Studies of Religion, and Religion & Society) were designed to be appropriate for any school and all students. They were non-denominational in the sense of not being concerned with the handing on of a particular religious tradition and were, thus, a part of the “general” religious education provision for state schools. These programs were primarily concerned with the study of world religions (as in similar courses developed in the United Kingdom).

While designed primarily for state schools, these courses did not end up being implemented in anything more than a handful of state schools across the country. The programs were, however, taken up enthusiastically by church schools, particularly Catholic schools. Religion studies became increasingly popular in Catholic schools because it became a fully accredited matriculation-level subject, which could be used by students as part of their qualification for university entry. Previously, the Catholic schools had maintained religion as a core subject in the curriculum from kindergarten through to year 12, but the subject had no academic accreditation and did not count either for the final school certification, or for university entrance. From the 1970s on, however, this changed and the school’s religion studies course at the senior level acquired the status of “other approved studies.”

Opposition to ‘General’ Religious Education:

For a variety of reasons, non-denominational religious education, which includes the study of world religions, has not fully developed within government schools in Australia. The dominant provision of “right-of-entry” religious education was acceptable and this was thought to satisfy most needs. Even though there were reports that this approach was ineffective, as well as unpopular with students and state teachers, there has been a hesitancy to oppose it for fear of offending the churches. Although church authorities saw that there were significant problems, they still saw the importance of a ‘church presence’ and were, therefore, reluctant to relinquish their access to state schools.

There was also no training of state school teachers for religious education. Because of the competition for space within the curriculum, it was very unlikely that a new subject like religious education would gain a place, given the lack of academic infrastructure. Consequently, in this situation, there was no career path for a government school teacher who might be interested in teaching religion.

Finally, there have been problems with defining religious education. In trying to establish a new identity for religious education in the state school setting, there has been a tendency to define this against denominational religious education.² In other words, a ‘general’ approach to religious education needed to be differentiated from the purposes of a community of faith. The study of world religions has been claimed by a number of educators, principally in state schools, to be different in method and content from say a ‘faith nurturing’ or ‘catechetical’ method and Biblical/theological content.³ This thinking gave the impression that the new ‘educational’ religious education was different in purposes, process, and content from its denominational counterpart.

Encouraging a Critical Approach:

The terms 'confessional' and 'non-confessional' are useful for differentiating the context of religious education. However, these terms tend to create an artificial dichotomy as regards the process of the classroom teaching of religion. For example, in a confessional context (say an Anglican or Catholic school), it may be appropriate to have prayer and liturgy from within that religious tradition. However, the classroom religion lesson in the church school takes place within a forum with educational expectations. Teachers cannot presume that all students are committed or practising members of the church.

Teachers also cannot presume that students should be ready to make personal (faith) responses in the classroom because this puts inappropriate psychological pressure on them and does not respect their freedom and privacy. The religious tradition can be presented and studied, as content is studied and considered critically in other learning areas, but attempts to 'require' assent from students would not be ethical on the part of the teacher. Such an approach is also potentially counterproductive because students are particularly sensitive to teaching which does not respect their personal freedom.

Partially to address the above concerns, state religion studies were set up for state schools to provide what was said to be "different" from what church-related schools were aiming for in their religious education. However, in reality, it was only the church-related schools which took up the so-called "state" religion studies (for some of the reasons cited, especially academic accreditation). There has not been a lot of attention given to the similarities and differences in religious education in state and church school contexts and there are still some ambiguities about how different the two approaches are in practice. Ultimately, an open, inquiring, critical study within religious education should be the modus operandi in both state and church schools. In a number of church school contexts, the idea of open, research-focused, critical, inquiring study is well accepted. An open approach to world religions in both the denominational and state religion programs does exist, although the content can often be too descriptive.

The Relevance of Religious Education to the Spiritual Life:

Regrettably, for many young people, the content of religion studies courses appears to be preoccupied with useless, factual/descriptive details which reinforce the view they already have that religion has little relevance to contemporary society, or to their own lives. The courses would be more educationally relevant if they were more issue-oriented -- that is, dealing with what the students and the community see as the real spiritual/moral issues of the day.⁴ Examples of such topics might include: The values, or lack of values, underpinning economic rationalist thinking; current debates about the role(s) of women in religion; the development of ethnic and religious identity and its influence on human behavior; the impact(s) of the new physics on ideas about God and creation; and, understanding current controversies in other religions like Judaism

and Islam.

For different reasons, the religious education programs in both church and state schools seem too tame.⁵ In the former, too much attention seems to be given to traditional teachings and practices, which, to the students, appear to be preoccupied with matters of institutional maintenance. Not enough attention is being paid to what is more relevant to the lives of students and the community. In brief, this view proposes that religious education in both state (religion studies) and church-related (denominational religious education) -- in Australia and probably in other countries -- needs to take on more content and language that reflect the contemporary importance of young people's search for meaning and identity.

Working with Indigenous Communities:

Ultimately, the study of religions should promote awareness and understanding of the nature and purpose of the religious or spiritual quest within different religions. It should also promote reflection, on the part of the pupil, on the implications that the adoption of a religious view of life would have for his/her own understanding of self and for his/her development as a person.

Attention to the education of indigenous peoples in various countries has, in recent years, stressed the importance of encouraging them to embrace their own cultural and spiritual traditions. To help heal the social and psychological damage that has resulted from the clash between their cultures and the dominant western culture and lifestyle, they have been encouraged to deepen their familiarity with their spiritual heritage and to repair the links between the land, culture, and personal/social identity. The eroded sense of identity and cultural dignity of indigenous peoples needs to be restored by developing and nurturing self-esteem. In Australia, the study of Aboriginal culture is now presumed to be important not only for the Aborigines, but also for white Australians. A place for the study of Aboriginal spiritual beliefs is thus essential for any Australian religion studies course.⁶

The value in affirming the identity and culture of Aborigines (and indigenous people in general) should also apply to the religions of other ethnic groups. Both in theory and practice, such an affirmation has not been as forthcoming as it might be because it is feared that this could be interpreted as the state fostering religion through public education. It is, however, in the interests of the national community to help educate its children in the culture and spiritual traditions of their respective group(s). Whether or not individuals are practicing members of a particular church or religion, it is of value to the community as a whole for them to be familiar with, and have some access to, their particular religious heritage. It is a legitimate aim of religion studies to help students acquire a better understanding of their identity through the study of religions. However, to give exclusive attention to one tradition, whatever that may be, is inappropriate. A balance needs to be maintained and this is a balance that Australia still struggles to find.

END NOTES

- 1 G.M. Rossiter, *Religious Education in Australian Schools*; Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra, 1981. This book, while an old one now, still provides the most comprehensive account of the history and practice of religious education in all types of schools in Australia -- both state, independent and church-related.
- 2 M.L. Crawford and G.M. Rossiter, "The Nature of Religious Education in Public Schools: The Quest for an Educational Identity," *Panorama: International Journal of Comparative Religious Education and Values*, 1994, Vol. 5, 1, pgs. 77-94. This article looks how developing an 'educational,' as opposed to a 'denominational' identity, influenced the form of state school religious education in the United Kingdom and Australia.
- 3 Department of Education South Australia, *Aims for Religious Education*; Department of Education South Australia, Adelaide, 1976.
- 4 K.E. Nipkow, *Pre-conditions for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Learning: Observations and Reflections from a German Perspective*; Australian Catholic University Moral and Religious Education Project, Sydney, 1991.
- 5 Rossiter, G.M., "Historical perspective on the development of Catholic Religious Education in Australia: Some implications for the future," *Journal of Religious Education*, 1999, Vol. 47, 1, pgs. 5-18.
- 6 Study of Aboriginal culture also enters into some other parts of the curriculum, i.e. in the social sciences.

Learning to Live with Difference: Teaching About Religion in Public Schools in the United States

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"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ."

Religious Liberty Clauses of the
First Amendment to the United States Constitution

The "no establishment" and "free exercise" clauses of the First Amendment provide the constitutional basis for what Thomas Jefferson described as "a wall of separation between Church & State."¹ These clauses set the ethical, legal, and pedagogical contexts for any discussion of religion and American public education.

In the United States, "public" schools and universities are funded and administered by state and local governments. As such, they are subject to the constitutional separation of church and state and, therefore, they must remain "neutral" with regard to religion.² Unlike "private" and parochial schools, which may promote religious beliefs and practices, the "no establishment" clause prohibits the "public" schools from doing so. This prohibition was made clear in a series of famous "school prayer" cases in the 1960s when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that school-sponsored religious exercises, such as organized group prayer and devotional Bible reading, were violations of the "no establishment" clause of the First Amendment.

At the same time, however, the Supreme Court sought to make it clear that learning and teaching about religion in the public schools is perfectly consistent with constitutional principles. Indeed, as Justice Tom Clark wrote in the case of *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963),

". . . it might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study of its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible and of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment"

This essay looks more closely at the religious liberty clauses in the U.S. Constitution, considers their ethical and legal implications for public schools, and touches on some pedagogical guidelines for teaching about the world's religions in ways that are consistent with First Amendment principles. This framework for understanding religion and public education in the U.S. should prove useful for other societies that seek to educate their citizens about world religions while, at the same time, maintaining a separation between religious and governmental institutions.

Living in a Pluralistic Democracy:

From its inception more than two hundred years ago, the United States of America has been a pluralistic society. It is now, and always has been, constituted by many different religious, political, racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. As a democracy, the United States has sought to distribute political power among all citizens rather than concentrating it in the hands of a few. Regardless of whether one judges the day-to-day life and practice of contemporary American society to be more or less democratic, most will acknowledge that democracy - government of the people, by the people, and for the people - is a definitive ideal (even if not always a definitive reality) of American history. Furthermore, the American experiment is an effort to try out the idea that free people from many backgrounds are capable of governing themselves and living together peacefully. The ultimate success (or failure) of the American experiment in pluralistic democracy is contingent upon citizens' commitment to it and upon their ability to secure the conditions that are necessary for its success.

While many societies throughout history and around the world have been plagued by religious, ethnic, and political violence, the United States has by and large avoided this fate. Nonetheless, over the past several decades, America has been wracked by "culture wars" in which public debate has increasingly become reduced to antidemocratic and intolerant caricature and slander of one's political and religious opponents. In many places, public school students and teachers have found themselves caught up in clashes and controversies over religion in textbooks and curricula, religious holidays, sex education, and school funding, among other issues. As Charles C. Haynes has written,

Extremes have surfaced on all sides, and any notion of a common vision for the common good is often lost in the din of charge and counter-charge. As alienation and frustration deepen, public education is weakened and our future as one nation of many peoples and faiths is called into question.

At issue for this nation, as for much of the world, is the simple, but profound question that runs through modern experience: How will we live with our deepest differences? Nowhere is the need to address this question greater than in public education. Not only are schools the storm center of controversy involving religious differences, they are the principal institution charged with transmitting the identity and mission of the United States from one generation to the next. If we fail in our school policies and classrooms to model and to teach how to live with differences, we endanger our experiment in religious liberty and our unity as a nation.³

In an effort to identify the principles that will enable Americans to continue to live with

their deepest differences rather than being torn apart by them, a growing number of citizens and educators have called for a renewed commitment to the religious liberty principles of the First Amendment as the foundation on which the American experiment is built.

Finding Common Ground and the Three R's of Religious Liberty:

According to the Williamsburg Charter,⁴ the religious liberty clauses of the First Amendment provide the "golden rule" for civic life in a pluralistic democracy. The Williamsburg Charter is a document that was published in 1988 and signed by more than 200 national leaders representing a broad range of religious, non-religious, civic, and educational groups. Even though the individuals and groups who signed the document oppose one another on many issues, they were nonetheless able to agree that commitment to the First Amendment was something that they all shared in common as American citizens. Among the Charter's aims was to set forth the guiding principles within which people with strong differences can contend with each other in a robust but civil manner.

Foremost among these guiding principles are what the Charter described as the three R's of religious liberty: rights, responsibilities, and respect. Rights are the freedoms or liberties that are necessary for the expression of our full dignity as human beings. Religious liberty, or freedom of conscience, and the freedom to believe whatever we choose to believe (as well as the freedom to choose not to believe) is among the most precious rights that human beings possess. A society is only as just and free as it is respectful of this right for its smallest minorities and least popular communities.

In addition to the defense of individual rights, the success of a democracy also depends upon the willingness and ability of its citizens to accept their civic responsibilities. Responsibilities are duties or obligations that we owe to ourselves and to our fellow citizens. Chief among these is the responsibility to guard for others those rights that we wish guarded for ourselves. In response to what many view as American society's obsession with individual rights at the expense of a sense of social responsibility, the Williamsburg Charter stresses that the health of a democratic society depends upon the linkage of rights and responsibilities and upon the ability of citizens to balance the pursuit of self-interest with the pursuit of the common good.

The third R, Respect, has to do with the manner in which we conduct ourselves in conflicts and debates with our fellow-citizens, including those fellow-citizens with whom we most seriously disagree. Conflict and debate are vital to democracy. A society without vigorous debate and disagreement is most likely not a very democratic society. But how we debate, not only what we debate, is critical for the health and well-being of a democracy. Respect, or civility, is a fundamental condition for maintaining the health and well-being of a democratic society.

A shared commitment to the three R's of religious liberty can provide the basis upon which citizens with deep religious differences can negotiate their differences with

civility and work toward the creation of "a common vision for the common good in public education."⁵ This approach to finding common ground has had remarkable success in building consensus among very disparate interest groups on a range of controversial questions that arise in public education. An outstanding example of this success is the publication of *Religious Liberty, Public Education, and the Future of American Democracy: A Statement of Principles*.⁶ This five-page document was sponsored jointly by a wide-ranging coalition of educational, religious, and civic organizations. It sets forth a vision of religion in the public schools that is both consistent with First Amendment principles and academically sound:

Public schools may not inculcate nor inhibit religion. They must be places where religion and religious conviction are treated with fairness and respect. Public schools uphold the First Amendment when they protect the religious liberty rights of students of all faiths or none. Schools demonstrate fairness when they ensure that the curriculum includes study about religion, where appropriate, as an important part of a complete education.

We can better appreciate the significance of this consensus statement when we remember that co-sponsors included such organizations as the Christian Coalition and People for the American Way, which are often opponents in litigation over the place of religion in public life. That such otherwise disparate organizations can come together to co-sponsor a consensus statement relating to the role of religion and public education in American democracy is a testament to the ability of First Amendment principles of religious liberty and freedom of conscience to unite Americans across religious, ideological, and political divisions.

Rationale for Teaching About Religion in U.S. Public Schools:

After years of either ignoring or actively avoiding religion whenever possible, due in large part to misunderstandings by educators of Supreme Court decisions and the desire to avoid controversy, there are signs that public school systems in several parts of the country are beginning to recognize the importance of the comparative study of religion. In California, for example, the State Board of Education has adopted a curriculum that explicitly calls for more attention to be given to the study of religion and ethics. The History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools K-12 stresses the importance of religion in human history and states that "students must become familiar with the basic ideas of the major religions and the ethical traditions of each time and place." It further adds:

To understand why individuals and groups acted as they did, we must see what values and assumptions they held, what they honored, what they sought and what they feared. By studying a people's religion and philosophy as well as their folkways and traditions, we gain an understanding of their ethical and moral commitments. By reading the texts that people revere, we gain important insights into

their thinking. The study of religious beliefs and other ideological commitments helps explain both cultural continuity and cultural conflict.⁷

In California, the world history curriculum for sixth, seventh, and tenth grades deals explicitly with the religions of India, China, and the Middle-East. Teaching about religion in the schools makes an indispensable contribution to historical and cultural literacy. It is simply impossible to achieve an adequate understanding of human history and culture (literature, art, music, philosophy, law, ethics, politics) without knowing the role that religious beliefs, practices, and communities have played and continue to play in human life. Put simply, we learn a lot about human beings (ourselves and others) by studying their religious experiences, stories, symbols, rituals, doctrines, values, and institutions.

The cross-cultural and historical study of religion is also an integral part of education for citizenship in a pluralistic society. As we have seen, a basic requirement of citizenship in such societies is respect for religious liberty or freedom of conscience. This respect must be extended to members of all religious communities as well as to those who are members of none. Yet such respect is often difficult to sustain without some objective knowledge of the histories, beliefs, and customs of the diverse peoples and traditions of the world. Without this knowledge, it is all too easy to caricature and trivialize the religious beliefs and practices of our fellow citizens, especially if they happen to be from a religious, racial, or ethnic community that is different from our own. A civil society cannot long survive in such a climate of ignorance and misunderstanding.

Examining Worldviews:

By describing the study of religion in U.S. public schools as cross-cultural, historical, and comparative, we are saying that it does not focus on one particular or dominant religious tradition, but rather looks at a range of different religious traditions in different times and places. When we engage in the comparative study of religion, we are interested in better understanding the “worldviews” that have shaped the lives of individuals and of entire civilizations.

As Ninian Smart has written, worldviews are “systems of belief which, through symbols and actions, mobilize the feelings and wills of human beings.” He goes on to say that “human beings do things for the most part because it pays them to do so, or because they fear to do otherwise, or because they believe in doing them. The modern study of religion is about the last of these motives.”⁸ He adds:

. . . a main part of the modern study of religion may be called ‘worldview analysis’ – the attempt to describe and understand human worldviews, especially those that have had widespread influence – ranging from varieties of Christianity and Buddhism to the more politically oriented systems of Islam and Marxism, and

from ancient religions and philosophies such as Platonism and Confucianism to modern new religions in Africa and America” 9

As we have seen, public schools may teach about religion in a way that is "objective," neutral, fair, and balanced, but they may not inculcate, promote, or inhibit religious beliefs and practices of students. When teaching about religions in the public schools, we are not seeking to demonstrate which religion is true and which is false, which is better or which is worse. Rather, we are trying to understand more about human beings—ourselves and others—by studying their religious beliefs and practices.

Ideally, the comparative approach does not just provide students with information about the world's religions. It also equips them to more fully exercise their responsibilities as citizens in a religiously pluralistic world that is plagued by abuses of human rights, by vast disparities of wealth and power between individuals and nations, by the degradation of the environment, and by seemingly unending religious, racial, and ethnic conflict and violence. Lessons or courses taught from this perspective ...

... advocate that students employ empathetic understanding to enter imaginatively the context and worldview of other traditions and, further, that after taking up these standpoints of ‘the other,’ they enter into a respectful dialogue of equals where each exposes his or her own cultural assumptions to the standpoint of ‘the other’ and works to solve shared socio-moral problems through the fusion of moral horizons and the forging of practical agreements. Students are encouraged to become co-participants in a dialogue where they represent imaginatively the ‘voices’ of other traditions.¹⁰

This type of teaching provides important intellectual and moral background and context for many of the issues and controversies that arise in other areas of the curriculum and in civic life. A sympathetic awareness of diverse worldviews and values is a first step toward building the understanding, cooperation, and larger “sense of the whole” that will be required in order to address many of the global issues that students will be facing as citizens in the next several decades.

END NOTES

1 Jefferson in Charles C. Haynes, *Religion in American History: What to Teach and How*; Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia, 1990, p. 48.

2 While the First Amendment originally applied only to the federal or national government of the U.S., the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteeing equal protection to all U.S. citizens and subsequent Supreme Court decisions have applied it to the state and local governments as well.

3 Charles C. Haynes and Oliver Thomas, eds., *Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Education*; The First Amendment Center, Nashville, 1998.

4 Reprinted in Haynes and Thomas, pgs. A.1-A.14.

5 Haynes and Thomas 1998, p. 1.7.

6 First Amendment Center, Nashville, 1995, pg. 3.

7 California State Department of Education, History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve, Sacramento, 1988, pg. 7 and 13.

8 Ninian Smart. Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs; Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1983, p.1.

9 Worldviews, p.5

10 Sumner B. Twiss, "Curricular Perspectives in Comparative Religious Ethics: A Critical Examination of Four Paradigms," The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics, 1993, p. 257.

Education and Religious Freedom in Latin America

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The dramatic changes that have taken place in the legislation, attitudes, and practices relating to religious freedom in Latin America have all affected the way in which religious education has been conceived in this diverse region, especially over the past century. These changes are principally linked to three significant developments, which this essay will review in greater detail:

1. The spread of the ecumenical spirit in the Catholic Church, resulting from the reforms instituted at the Second Vatican Council, especially decrees on religious freedom;
2. The dramatic increase in the numbers and militancy of evangelical Protestantism throughout the region; and,
3. The adoption of new or amended constitutions which include guarantees of freedom of religion and which have limited, or ended, the privileged legal status of Roman Catholicism in the region.

The History of Conquest:

From the time of the establishment of Spanish rule, Catholicism was the official religion of Latin America. The “conquistadores” brought with them Dominican and Franciscan missionaries. This practice justified the spread of Spanish rule because it brought Christianity to the indigenous populations. They attempted, not always successfully, to define the indigenous religions as idolatrous. While some leading churchmen, such as Bartolome de las Casas and Juan de Mariana, questioned the legitimacy of the spread of Christianity by force, the Church remained closely linked to, and supportive of, Spanish rule. The “patronato,” or right of patronage, which gave the Spanish monarch the right to choose bishops for the episcopacy, assured that church leaders would be loyal to Spain. In turn, the civil authorities supported the Christianization of the natives, the rooting out of previous religious practices, and the enforcement of religious orthodoxy. The Church controlled education, established universities, and became a central part of life in Latin American society.

At the beginning of the 19th century, however, the influence of the French and American revolutions was felt among the leaders of the independence movement. The support of the continuation of Spanish rule by the hierarchy and the Pope, as well as French-inspired anticlericalism, provided the basis for a struggle between liberals who wished to diminish the privileges of the Catholic Church and conservatives who saw it as a bulwark of the traditional order. The liberal reformers in Mexico in the mid 19th century took over Church lands and abolished the special legal status of the Church. While they also established state-sponsored educational programs challenging the Church’s monopoly, the influence of the Catholic Church continued to be strong. The degree of legal and constitutional commitment to Catholicism, which at this point was

adamantly opposed to religious freedom, largely depended on whether liberals or conservatives controlled the government.

By the 20th century, most countries had included guarantees of religious freedom in their constitutions, but legal and/or constitutional provisions still recognized the special position of Catholicism as the national religion. In a few cases, such as Argentina and Venezuela, state support was still provided to the Catholic Church. On the other hand, the 1917 Mexican Constitution expropriated all Church property, forbade Church schools, and even prohibited the wearing of clerical garb. In the 1920s, the Mexican government persecuted and, in some cases, killed Catholic priests.

As public education was expanded, and Latin America opened to foreign investment and cultural influence, commitment to religious freedom gradually spread. This commitment was enhanced by the adoption of the UN Declaration of Human Rights after W.W.II – a document which included religious freedom as one of its central provisions. Subsequently, the writings of the French Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, influenced students and intellectuals and provided the ideological basis for the establishment of Christian Democratic parties in the 1950s. These political parties were committed to democracy, human rights, and religious freedom and, as such, rejected the conservative Catholic “integralism,” which advocated state support for Catholicism.

The Vatican’s Role in Religious Freedom:

During and after W.W.II, the papacy began to give greater support to democratic ideas. With the publication of *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) in 1963 by Pope John XXIII, the Catholic Church formally endorsed democracy and religious freedom. The commitment to democracy was reiterated in the decree *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World) and the Decree on Religious freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*), adopted by the Second Vatican Council in 1965. The Council also called for ecumenical dialogue and improved relations with other faiths and even with atheists. The shift from support for established religions to commitment to religious liberty had been anticipated in the theory and practice of Christian Democratic parties in Europe and Latin America. Nonetheless, these developments were also important as a repudiation of the traditional conservative endorsement of a privileged position for Catholicism. It also meant that religious instruction at church and in religious schools in Latin America became supportive of freedom of religion and church hierarchies made special efforts to reach out to the representatives of other faiths in ecumenical cooperation.

The Spread of Evangelical Protestantism:

While liberation theology, which argued that the Bible requires a special concern for the poor, received support among students and intellectuals beginning in the late 1960s, it had only limited success among the lower classes. Instead, this class tended to move in large numbers to evangelical Protestantism all over the region. Where the

mainline Protestant Churches had been content with maintaining their adherents and assuring good relations with the Catholic Church, the Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches actively spread their faith, especially among the recently-arrived poor who had migrated from the countryside to the burgeoning shantytowns in the large cities. The Gospel message, as interpreted by the evangelicals, called for self-discipline, sobriety, family values, and active participation in a supportive community that drew its inspiration from the Bible.

Religious surveys began to indicate that Protestants, mainly evangelicals, made up about 15% or more of the population. In El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, and Brazil, evangelicals formed political parties and coordinated efforts to achieve political and legal recognition. Although the Catholic Church had developed good relations with the mainline Protestants, it found it more difficult to work with the evangelical community, especially the Pentecostal Church. A meeting of the Latin American bishops in 1995 in Santo Domingo denounced the “sects” and the “ravaging wolves” preying on the faithful. In turn, the evangelicals preached their Gospel message outside Catholic churches arguing that much of traditional Catholicism was idolatrous. Yet, despite the rancor, the militancy of the evangelicals made it evident that Catholicism no longer had a religious monopoly in Latin America.

New or Amended Constitutions:

A third development that favored religious liberty was the adoption of new or amended constitutions that expanded the guarantees of religious freedom and reduced or eliminated the special legal or constitutional position of one religion over others. While much of Latin America had been under military rule from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s, the return of civilian rule provided an opportunity to revise or replace earlier constitutions, including provisions on religion.

In 1992 in Mexico, most of the restrictions on church activity and property-holding were removed, although members of the clergy continued to be prohibited from participating in politics. It was not until 1994 that the Argentine Constitution was amended to eliminate the requirement that the president and vice-president must be Catholics and that Congress should promote the Christianization of the indigenous Indian populations. Nonetheless, the article declaring that the Argentine Government “supports the Roman Catholic religion” remains -- probably because the Catholic bishops still receive a small government subsidy. Colombia ended its concordat with the Vatican that had also included the requirement that the Government of Columbia approve new bishops. Chile extended the special legal status of the Catholic Church to the other churches and synagogues. In Cuba, the restrictions on believers were removed from the Constitution and from the statutes of the Communist Party in the early 1990s. There was a considerable increase in religious activity by both Catholics and Protestants during and after the papal visit to Cuba in 1998, although it remains true that actively religious Cubans are still suspect and Cuban education is hostile to religion. Only Argentina, Bolivia, and Costa Rica, while guaranteeing religious freedom, make special mention of the Catholic religion in their constitutions. In the

first two cases, there has been strong public criticism of these provisions.

There are still instances of religious discrimination in Latin America, especially on an unofficial basis. However, the main social and legal barriers to religious freedom have been removed as a result of the developments described above. Understanding this history and these developments helps us to better understand the role of religious education.

Promoting Religious Diversity:

Instruction in Catholicism had been an integral part of the curriculum in the public schools of some of the more Catholic countries of Latin America, such as Columbia and Argentina. However, in recent years, it has been offered on a voluntary basis. Provision has been made in some countries, Colombia and Chile for example, to offer instruction in Protestantism as well. A particularly strict separation of church and state is still observed in Mexico. Conversely, in many countries, government money still provides significant support to Catholic universities. In the case of Chile, government funds are provided to non-profit schools of all kinds on the primary and secondary level.

Overall though, Catholic schools have largely come to endorse and promote religious freedom and good ecumenical relations. In cases in which a civic education program is offered in public schools, the constitutional and legal provisions favoring religious freedom are described and supported. Many Latin American countries also offer voluntary religious instruction in public schools.

While Latin American students still learn little or nothing about other world religions, the expansion of religious freedom means that discrimination against non-Christians is less likely and public ceremonies have become more ecumenical in including not only evangelicals, but also representatives of the Orthodox, Jewish, and Muslim faiths.¹ In this instance, as in others, the globalization of culture has also produced the beginnings of globalization of religious understanding in Latin America.

The development of religious pluralism in what had been a predominantly Catholic culture, as well as the acceptance of religious freedom and the abandonment of a privileged position, has resulted in societies that are more and more responsive to the creation and promotion of religious freedom in all the countries of Latin America. There are still inter-religious tensions, particularly concerning proselytizing by evangelicals. However, the educational systems and the overall culture of Latin America have now moved from the sometimes-contested dominance of a single religion to the acceptance and even promotion of religious diversity.

END NOTES

¹ Except in Argentina, there are not significant numbers of Jews in most Latin American countries and the Middle Eastern population is largely Christian.

Responses to the United Nation’s Study Paper on “The Role of Religious Education in the Pursuit of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination”

John Taylor

International Association for Religious Freedom

The International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), founded in 1900, and drawing membership from adherents of a wide range of world religions, is committed to promote the upholding of religious freedom as a fundamental human right and believes that development and implementation of preventive strategies against intolerance and discrimination are important strategies and responsibilities for governments, schools, religious communities, and individuals. As such, IARF has a special interest in the study prepared under the guidance of the UN’s special rapporteur on the question of religious intolerance. The study itself took its departure from a questionnaire sent by the special rapporteur in 1994 to governments. The questionnaire inquired about policies and practices for religious education in primary and secondary schools. The resulting document, “The role of religious education in the pursuit of tolerance and non-discrimination,” together with the Madrid Conference on this and other themes, present timely challenges which are compatible with IARF’s 2001-2007 Strategic Plan.

It is no accident that the program priorities for IARF have been worked out in a similar timeframe to the preparation for the Madrid Conference. Certain issues such as the preventive role of religious education against intolerance and discrimination are not new, but they have gained new prominence as they have been chosen as the theme to mark the 20th anniversary in November 2001 of the UN 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

The study provides an important definition of the meaning of religious education:

“Religious education should be conceived as a tool to transmit knowledge and values pertaining to all religious trends, in an inclusive way, so that individuals realize their being part of the same community and learn to create their own identity in harmony with identities different from their own. As such, religious education radically differs from catechism or theology, defined as the formal study of the nature of God and of the foundations of religious belief, and contributes to the wider framework of education as defined in international standards.”

The history and present strategic plans of IARF are grounded in liberal, nondogmatic traditions and in commitments to promote tolerance and non-discrimination which exist in many religious and non-religious cultures. This understanding of the role of IARF accords closely with the belief of the special rapporteur “that prevention can be ensured mainly through the establishment of a culture of tolerance, notably through education, which could make a decisive contribution to the promotion of

human rights values and particularly attitudes and behaviours which reflect tolerance and non-discrimination - hence the role of schools.” His emphasis on values, attitudes and behaviours must apply within the school, in society, and within religious communities themselves.

The results of the UN questionnaire indicated that political policies and social practices related to religious education vary widely from situations where religious education is provided in state schools on a compulsory or optional basis to situations where religious education is limited to a confessional syllabus. A considerable role has been played historically, and still today, in many parts of the world by religious communities themselves in providing religious education in both state and private schools. International prescriptions have permitted instruction in subjects such as history of religions and ethics if it is given in a “neutral and objective way” and also require “exemptions or alternatives” where instruction in a particular religion or belief is provided.

The booklet which IARF has produced for the Madrid Conference, which reviews religious education programs around the globe, reflects this diversity of approach as governments and citizens struggle to uphold their own traditions in the context of an emerging global culture. The differences in historical, scriptural, social, artistic and liturgical traditions call for different approaches, but that is seen as a potential advantage since, as noted in the report, “recognition of diversity in human experience and expression is a fundamental starting point for promoting respect for human rights and responsibilities.”

The section in the UN’s report on “The Content and Style of Education in the field of Religion and Conviction which can Enhance Tolerance” is especially interesting in the value that it places on children’s own experiences and the curiosity of young people about human diversity, especially in multi-cultural societies. This emphasis on the need for young people to make their own discoveries and choices can be a pointed challenge to the IARF strategy to promote networks of young people who share visions and develop leadership across different continents and cultures.

The absence of such leadership and education often leads to the dangers of ignorance, not only about important parts of one’s own culture, but also about those of one’s neighbours. A lack of religious education is not only due to atheistic restrictions, but also to the desire to safeguard pupils against the misuse by religious communities of religious education for purposes of proselytism or exclusivism. While fears that religious education could be used for propaganda or proselytism do exist, there are safeguards in place in most countries and these should not, in turn, be used to restrict fundamental freedoms.¹

While IARF much applauds the UN special rapporteur’s efforts to focus on prevention, M. Gianfranco Rossi, representative of IARF to the UN at Geneva, reiterated the importance of tolerance and freedom being exemplified by actions in school and at home. He has suggested that the final document out of the Madrid

Conference make more explicit reference to the need for schools to guarantee and protect the freedom of religion. In particular, he referred to the need to respect parental convictions and to protect children who are themselves from religious minorities. Rossi has pointed to the frustration and sense of exclusion still felt in some places by religious minorities.

Although the UN's report may reflect a general commitment by governments to promote tolerance and non-discrimination, it may fall to ordinary citizens and nongovernmental organizations to show sympathy and solidarity with those who fall victim to intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. In its Strategic Plan, IARF hopes to identify situations of victimization in 5 to 10 countries and to offer practical help, not least in terms of preventive strategies whereby minorities may remove some causes of misunderstanding or where majorities better respect international and national standards and, very often, their own religious principles. The plans for IARF to provide informational and educational resources might well include the giving of publicity to religious education materials or syllabi which help to overcome injustices and exclusions. The expected recommendations from the Madrid Conference could have an important place in such a strategy of communication.

END NOTES

1 It is in the interest of promoting responsible religious practices that the IARF has undertaken an effort to develop a Voluntary Code of Conduct for religious communities and groups. Adherence to good practice can reinforce the educational work for tolerance.

Biographies

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John Taylor taught Islamic Studies at the University of Birmingham, England. He has also served as Director of the World Council of Church's program on "Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies" and as Secretary General of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. He presently represents the International Association for Religious Freedom at the UN's Geneva office.