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## **Is Diversity Changing Religious Education? Religion, Diversity and Education in Today's Europe<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

The study of religious diversity as part of public education has become an important issue in recent times across Europe and in the wider international arena. In a sense the events of the events of September 11, 2001 in the USA, their causes, ongoing global consequences and associated incidents are a symbol of this shift in attention. However, arguments for policy changes encouraging the study of religious diversity in public education were being advanced well before 9/11. In one inter-governmental body, the Council of Europe, the shift from argument to policy development was held back by a reluctance to address a complex and controversial area reflected in different histories of religion and state within member countries and by a reluctance to acknowledge issues concerning religion as a mode of discourse within the public sphere. As noted in a Council of Europe document, the attacks on the World Trade Centre and other targets in September 2001 acted as a 'wake up call', bringing the issues directly to the attention of influential international bodies and precipitating action at the level of public policy (Council of Europe, 2002).

I will note the initiatives taken by key international bodies, namely the United Nations (including UNESCO), the European Union (and European Commission), the Council of Europe, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe in encouraging the development of studies about religions (and beliefs) in public education. The main impetus for these initiatives lies in a combination of expressing respect for human rights in the public sphere (through the development of tolerance and respect for freedom of religion or belief, for example) and in fostering social cohesion through combating ignorance and developing understanding and tolerance for difference. Next I will give a sketch of current provision in Europe in relation to 'religious education' (understood in some rather different ways in different national systems of education), noting some tensions between certain concepts of religious education and 'teaching about religions'. Finally I will consider issues of pedagogy, using some examples from Europe.

### **The United Nations and UNESCO**

The United Nations (UN) is a global association of governments whose stated aims are to facilitate co-operation in international law, international security, economic development, social progress and human rights issues.<sup>2</sup> In 2001, before the events

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1 Some of the material in this chapter appeared in *Numen* 55 (2008) 151–182.

2 <http://www.un.org/> (accessed 4 September 2007).

of September 11, the International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination was held under the auspices of the then United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Mr. Abdelfattah Amor. The Final Document of the Conference took the view that that education, especially school education, should contribute to promoting tolerance and respect for freedom of religion or belief. Its recommendations included the strengthening of a non-discriminatory perspective in education and of knowledge in relation to freedom of religion or belief.<sup>3</sup> The document influenced a number of initiatives, including the work of the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief through its programme on Teaching for Tolerance (eg Jackson & McKenna, 2005; Kaymakcan & Leirvik, 2007; Larsen and Plesner, 2002).<sup>4</sup>

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)<sup>5</sup> has been involved in human rights and intercultural education over a long period. In 1974, UNESCO's General Conference adopted Recommendations Concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms that have shaped its work in this area.<sup>6</sup> The Dakar Framework for Action 2000-2015 is the basis of UNESCO's priorities, and refers directly to the role of schools in promoting understanding among religious groups, emphasising the importance of governmental institutions in developing partnerships with religious groups in educational contexts.<sup>7</sup> Also, UNESCO's Interreligious Dialogue Programme aims to promote understanding between religions or beliefs and supports education in the field of interreligious dialogue through the publication of pedagogical material.

To return to the UN more broadly, in 2005 the UN Secretary-General launched an initiative, co-sponsored by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey, for an 'Alliance of Civilizations' to respond to Huntington's idea of a clash of civilizations. He established a high level group of distinguished people with the task of producing practical recommendations to counter the 'clash of civilizations' view. The report, (presented in November 2006), includes the recommendation that 'Education systems, including religious schools, must provide students with a mutual respect and understanding for the diverse religious beliefs, practices and

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3 Final Document of the International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, Commission on Human Rights, Report by Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Executive summary, 14 March 2002, E/CN.4/2002/73. See also Larsen & Plesner (2002:12-13).

4 <http://www.oslocoalition.org/t4t.php> (accessed 22 November 2007).

5 UNESCO's remit is to encourage international peace and universal respect by promoting collaboration among nations ([www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)) (accessed 4 September 2007).

6 Recommendations Concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, (1974), [http://www.unesco.org/education/nfsunesco/pdf/Peace\\_e.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/education/nfsunesco/pdf/Peace_e.pdf) (accessed 18 March 2008).

7 The Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments, adopted by the World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf> (accessed 2 September 2007).

cultures in the world'.<sup>8</sup> This takes the view that ignorance is often a cause of hostility towards religions, and that educational materials should be developed reflecting a consensus view. This recommendation influenced the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's decision to develop guiding principles on teaching about religions and beliefs for use in its participating states (see below).

## **European Union (EU) and European Commission (EC)**

In 2005, the Council of the European Union (heads of state and the President of the European Commission) adopted a resolution on the response of educational systems to racism and xenophobia which emphasises the value of using teaching materials that reflect Europe's cultural, ethnic and religious diversity.<sup>9</sup>

The former European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, now the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), published a number of reports on racism and xenophobia in the EU, which included recommendations on promoting interreligious dialogue, including through education.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the most important recent initiative offered by the EC is its support for research in the field of religions and education. Through the Framework 6 programme, the EC has sponsored research into varieties of teaching about religions or beliefs that promote dialogue and address conflict. The project is entitled 'Religion in Education: A contribution to dialogue or a factor of conflict in transforming societies of European Countries?' (REDCo). The research proposal was submitted as part of the EU Framework 6: 'Citizens and governance in a knowledge based society' research field, under Research Priority Area 7: 'New forms of citizenship and cultural identities'. The Project was designed to contribute to section 7.2.1., 'Values and religions in Europe'.

The project's main aim is to establish and compare the potentials and limitations of religion in the educational fields of selected European countries and regions. It brings together scholars from nine universities in Germany (2), England, Norway, the Netherlands, France, Spain, Estonia and the Russian Federation. The project aims to identify approaches and policies that can contribute to making religion in education a factor promoting dialogue in the context of European development. Its work includes a series of discrete national studies, European overviews (Jackson et al., 2007), cross-European studies (including qualitative (Knauth, Jozsa, Bertram-Troost & Ipgrave, 2008) and quantitative studies of adolescents' attitudes towards the study of religions in schools) and comparative studies. The Project began its work in March 2006 and is scheduled to end in March 2009.<sup>11</sup> As

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8 Report of the High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations, 13 November 2006, Chapter VI, para. 6.8, available at [http://www.unaoc.org/repository/HLG\\_Report.pdf](http://www.unaoc.org/repository/HLG_Report.pdf) (accessed 18 March 2008).

9 Response of Educational Systems to the Problem of Racism, Resolution of the Council [of the European Union], 23 October 1995, Official Journal C 312 of 23.11.1995, available at <http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c10413.htm> (accessed 18 March 2008).

10 See, for instance, the report EUMC, Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia, (EUMC, Vienna, December 2006), [http://eumc.europa.eu/eumc/material/pub/muslim/Manifestations\\_EN.pdf](http://eumc.europa.eu/eumc/material/pub/muslim/Manifestations_EN.pdf) (accessed 4 September 2007).

11 <http://www.redco.uni-hamburg.de/web/3480/3481/index.html> (accessed 4 September 2007).

well as being of value in its own right, the project is likely to provide a platform for future European research in the field of religions and education.

## **Council of Europe (CoE)<sup>12</sup>**

The values of freedom of religion or belief and education for tolerance are embedded in Council of Europe documents, such as article nine of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms<sup>13</sup> and article twelve of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.<sup>14</sup> However, it is only post 9/11 that the Council of Europe has become directly involved in developing ideas for handling religion in the context of public education. Two main initiatives have been taken, one within the Directorate IV (Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport) and its work on intercultural education, and the other through the auspices of the then Commissioner for Human Rights.

### The religious dimension of intercultural education

Within the Council of Europe, a view of intercultural education has gradually emerged, concerned with developing competences and attitudes enabling individuals to respect the rights of others, developing skills of critical empathy and fostering dialogue with others from different backgrounds (Council of Europe, 2002). This approach was developed in projects in subjects such as history and education for democratic citizenship but did not include attention to religion. Religion was avoided because of the different relationships between religion and state across Europe, because of the diversity of current arrangements in member states on the place of religion in schools (reflecting histories involving religious conflict) and especially because, as a public body, the Council has to maintain neutrality with regard to the expression of views on religions.

However, at the political level, the atrocities of September 11, 2001 triggered a shift in policy. Through the Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe formulated its response to include safeguarding fundamental values and investing in democracy. In relation to the latter, the then Secretary General, Walter Schwimmer,

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12 The Council is an inter-governmental organisation founded in 1949 and based in Strasbourg, France. It comprises 47 member states currently and its aims include protecting human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law and seeking solutions to problems such as discrimination against minorities, xenophobia and intolerance (Council of Europe 2004b). The Council's work leads to European conventions and agreements in the light of which member states may amend their own legislation. The key political bodies of the Council are the Parliamentary Assembly, the Committee of Ministers and various specialist conferences of Ministers.

13 The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, available at <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/005.htm> (accessed 4 September 2007).

14 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, available at [http://www.coe.int/t/e/human\\_rights/minorities/2.\\_framework\\_convention\\_\(monitoring\)/1.\\_texts/PDF\\_H\(1995\)010%20E%20FCNM%20and%20Explanatory%20Report.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/minorities/2._framework_convention_(monitoring)/1._texts/PDF_H(1995)010%20E%20FCNM%20and%20Explanatory%20Report.pdf) (accessed 4 September 2007).

affirmed that intercultural and interfaith dialogue would become a key theme for the Council, proposing:

...action to promote a better understanding between cultural and/or religious communities through school education, on the basis of shared principles of ethics and democratic citizenship. (Council of Europe, 2002)

9/11 is thus a symbol for the study of religion to emerge as a new priority for European public policy on education. This priority was, in effect, an extension of previous efforts to combat racism and promote democratic citizenship within the Council agreed at the Vienna Summit in 1993.<sup>15</sup> However, the Council had ‘...no overall intercultural concept, strategy or recent normative text capable of easy extension specifically to cover religious diversity as well’, recognising that ‘existing activities do not deal with issues of religion in education’, and concluding that ‘a new activity is required; and the importance and complexity of the subject indicate making it a full-scale project’ (Council of Europe, 2002).

In early 2002, the Council set up a working party to examine the issues, prior to the establishment of a project suggesting methods and approaches for integrating the study of religion into intercultural education in the public domain. The key condition for including religion as a cross-European topic in education was that, despite different views on religion at the personal and societal levels, all could agree that religion is a ‘cultural fact’ and that knowledge and understanding of religion at this level is highly relevant to good community and personal relations and is therefore a legitimate concern of public policy. This was not an attempt to *reduce* religion to culture, but a recognition that the presence of religions in society was the lowest common denominator with which all European states could work in an educational context.

The Working Party’s proposals, following discussion at a forum on intercultural education, religious diversity and dialogue in Strasbourg in September 2002, were adopted in modified form by the Committee of Ministers. European experts in religious and intercultural education met in Paris in June 2003 to identify the key issues in relation to religious diversity and intercultural education, to examine their implications for pedagogy and to make policy recommendations for the Education Ministers’ conference on intercultural education to be held in Athens in November 2003. At this workshop there was an initial suspicion by some of the intercultural educators of the aims of specialists in religious education. It became clear that, as a result of their academic specialisation and national focus, many in each field were ignorant of the work of the others; there was especially an ignorance of work done on open and impartial approaches to the study of religions in schools. Once intercultural educators became aware of the range of ideas that had been developed in presenting religions impartially, a genuine dialogue was established, and fruitful collaborative work followed.

In relation to policy, the view was taken that, whatever any particular state’s system of religious education, children should have education about religious and secular

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15 [http://www.coe.int/T/e/human\\_rights/ecri/5-Archives/2-Other\\_texts/2-Vienna\\_Summit/Declaration/Declaration\\_Vienna\\_Summit.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/e/human_rights/ecri/5-Archives/2-Other_texts/2-Vienna_Summit/Declaration/Declaration_Vienna_Summit.asp) (accessed 15 May 2006).

diversity as part of their intercultural education. The 2003 Athens Conference of the European Ministers of Education endorsed the project.<sup>16</sup> Issues related to the project were discussed at a high profile conference for educational decision-makers, professionals and representatives of civil society, held in Oslo in June 2004 (Council of Europe, 2004a).

The Council then appointed a group of specialists in religious and intercultural education to collaborate in producing a reference book for educators, administrators and policy makers to deal with the issue of religious diversity – theoretical perspectives, key concepts, pedagogies and wider questions of religious diversity in schools, including school governance and management in Europe’s schools (Keast, 2007).

The Steering Committee for Education also submitted a recommendation to the Committee of Ministers on the management of religious diversity in schools, based on the project’s approach. The draft Ministerial recommendation’s aim<sup>17</sup> is to ensure that governments take into account the religious dimension of intercultural education at the levels of *education policy*, in the form of clear education principles and objectives, *institutions*, especially through open learning settings and inclusive policies, and *professional development of teaching-staff*, through the provision of adequate training.

The recommendation provides a set of principles that can be used by all 47 member states. These include the following:

- agreement that religion is at least a “cultural fact” that contributes, along with other elements such as language and historical and cultural traditions, to social and individual life;
- information on and knowledge of religions and philosophies fall within the public sphere and should be taught in order to develop tolerance as well as mutual understanding and trust;
- religious or philosophical conceptions of the world and beliefs develop on the basis of individual learning and experience, and should not be entirely pre-defined by one’s family or community;
- an integrated approach to religious, moral and civic values should be encouraged in education;
- intercultural dialogue and its religious dimension are an essential precondition for the development of tolerance and a culture of “living together” (Council of Europe, 2007).

The document recommends that the governments of member states should draw on the principles in their current or future educational reforms, in order to promote

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16 For more detailed information see the webpage entitled The Europe of Cultural Co-operation, available at [http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural\\_co-operation/education/intercultural\\_education/-overview.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_co-operation/education/intercultural_education/-overview.asp) (accessed 4 September 2007).

17 The final recommendation was approved by the Committee of Ministers in December 2008. The text (the key material is in the appendix) can be read at [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Rec\(2008\)12&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=DBDCF2&BackColorIntranet=FDC864&BackColorLogged=FDC864](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Rec(2008)12&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=DBDCF2&BackColorIntranet=FDC864&BackColorLogged=FDC864)

tolerance and the development of a culture of “living together”, and should bring these to the attention of relevant public and private bodies.<sup>18</sup>

### Proposal for a European Centre

A second initiative made within the Council of Europe was prompted by the then Commissioner for human rights, Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles, who set up a series of annual meetings, including representatives of religions in Europe, academics and politicians from member states to discuss the role of religious bodies in promoting human rights and addressing social issues. These seminars began in 2000, turning their attention to religious education at the meetings in Malta (2004) and Kazan in the Russian Federation (2006).

The Maltese consultation discussed the possibility of establishing a basic programme for teaching about religions in all member states, and considered the establishment of a European Centre for Religious Education focusing on human rights (McGrady, 2006). The recommendations of the Maltese seminar were considered by the Parliamentary Assembly in 2005,<sup>19</sup> which made recommendations to the Committee of Ministers, including the provision of generic, adaptable study modules for primary and secondary schools, of initial and in-service teacher training in religious studies, and the establishment of a European teacher training institute for the comparative study of religions. All of this was to be done with the objective of promoting understanding, not instilling faith (sections 13-14).<sup>20</sup> The 2006 seminar, held at Kazan in the Russian Federation (22-23 February), took the discussion further.<sup>21</sup>

The 2005 recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly were discussed by the Committee of Ministers on May 24<sup>th</sup> 2006. The Ministers welcomed the recommendations in principle, but set them in the context of various policy statements on developing intercultural dialogue (within and beyond Europe), including the religious dimension. Attention was drawn to the Council’s project on the intercultural education and religious diversity (see above), especially to its reference

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18 The draft policy recommendation and the project book were discussed at the first of 3 regional debates organised by the Council of Europe (held in Athens, 8-9 October, 2007) designed to consider the implications of the project recommendations for policy development in particular states.

19 <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta05/EREC1720.htm> (accessed 4 September 2007).

20 Parliamentary Assembly, 4 October 2005 Recommendation 1720 (2005) <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta05/EREC1720.htm> (accessed 9 June 2006).

21 The conclusion to the seminar report states that:

‘In the majority of Council of Europe member states the new generations do not even receive an education in their own religious heritage, much less that of others. For this reason, it had previously been suggested to establish an Institute capable of contributing to the development of teaching programmes, methods and materials in the member states. At the same time this Institute would serve as a research centre on these matters. It should also be a training centre for instructors, a meeting place and a forum for dialogue and exchange. Course content should be defined in close collaboration with representatives of the different religions traditionally present in Europe’ (Anon, 2006).



book (Keast, 2007), which encourages impartiality, open mindedness and a critical approach.

Although not stated explicitly, the Committee of Ministers considered that the recommendations from the Parliamentary Assembly, relating only to teaching about religions, were too narrow in relation to the establishment of a European Centre. The Chair of the Education Steering Committee reiterated the Committee's interest in setting up a network, centre or 'pôle' of excellence for the training of education staff in the Council of Europe's fields of competence, such as education for democratic citizenship and human rights and intercultural education, noting that training for teachers on education about religion could be featured as part of the Centre's programme.<sup>22</sup>

A feasibility study was commissioned, which recommended the establishment of such an interdisciplinary Centre.<sup>23</sup> Subsequently, a major international conference on 'Dialogue of Cultures and Inter-Faith Co-operation' (the Volga Forum) included in its final declaration a statement expressing the participants' support for the project 'aiming at setting up, in the framework of the Council of Europe, a pôle of excellence on human rights and democratic citizenship education, taking into account the religious dimension'.<sup>24</sup> The decision has now been taken to establish an interdisciplinary centre, including the dimension of religion, with support and funding from the Norwegian authorities. The permanent base for the Centre is planned to be the Centre for the Study of Holocaust and World View Minorities at Bygdøy/Oslo, but the Centre will be based initially at Oslo University College and will be called the European Wergeland Centre, named after Henrik Wergeland (1808-1845), one of Norway's most famous poets, an upholder of rights for Jews and an advocate of social justice. The Centre will begin its work early in 2009. It is envisaged that the Centre will deal with research, information sharing and with the training of educators.

## **The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)**

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (formerly the Helsinki process) has 56 participant states, including most European states plus the USA and Canada. It is engaged in setting standards in fields including military

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22 <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc06/EDOC10944.htm> (accessed 13 June 2006).

23 The present author was commissioned to undertake the study, which was presented to the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Education on October 19, 2006.

24 The conference was held in Nizhniy Novgorod in the Russian Federation, September 7-9, 2006, under the auspices of the Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation, the Inter-Faith Council of Russia and the Council of Europe. The quotation is from the 'Volga Forum Declaration', Final Document of the International Conference 'Dialogue of Cultures and Inter-Faith Cooperation', paragraph 4.

[http://www.strasbourg-reor.org/modules.php?name=News&new\\_topic=42&file=article&sid=352](http://www.strasbourg-reor.org/modules.php?name=News&new_topic=42&file=article&sid=352),

[http://www.coe.int/T/DC/Press/news/20060908\\_declaration\\_volga\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/DC/Press/news/20060908_declaration_volga_en.asp) (both accessed 12 October 2006).

security, economic and environmental co-operation, conflict resolution and human rights issues. In relation to human rights, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) works in the areas of election observation, democratic development, human rights (including the right to freedom of religion or belief), tolerance and non-discrimination, and law. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights is therefore well placed to play a role in facilitating dialogue and understanding between different religions and beliefs and in making educational policy recommendations.

The group brought together to produce the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* (OSCE 2007) includes members of the ODIHR's Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief.<sup>25</sup> These include authorities on international law (with experience in dealing with legal questions related to the exercise of religious freedom), education and the social sciences. Additional experts in the fields of religion, education and pedagogy were brought in to assist in the preparation of the guidelines. The group as a whole reflects a range of different religious and non-religious positions, helping to ensure that the perspective of different religious and belief communities is taken into account and that the guiding principles are balanced and inclusive. The *Toledo Guiding Principles*, launched in Madrid on November 28, 2007, includes chapters on the human rights framework and teaching about religions and beliefs, preparing curricula, teacher education and respecting rights in the process of implementing courses in teaching about religions and beliefs.

The rationale for the Toledo Guiding Principles is as follows:

The Toledo Guiding Principles have been prepared in order to contribute to an improved understanding of the world's increasing religious diversity and the growing presence of religion in the public sphere. Their rationale is based on two core principles: first, that there is positive value in teaching that emphasizes respect for *everyone's* right to freedom of religion and belief, and second, that teaching *about* religions and beliefs can reduce harmful misunderstandings and stereotypes.

The primary purpose of the Toledo Guiding Principles is to assist OSCE participating States whenever they choose to promote the study and knowledge about religions and beliefs in schools, particularly as a tool to enhance religious freedom. The Principles focus solely on the educational approach that seeks to provide teaching *about* different religions and beliefs as distinguished from instruction in a specific religion or belief. They also aim to offer criteria that should be considered when and wherever teaching about religions and beliefs takes place. (OSCE 2007: 11-12)

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25 The connection with Toledo comes from the fact that the first drafting meeting took place in May 2007 in Toledo and from that city's historic association with religious tolerance.

## Religious Education in Europe: the Present Picture

We have seen then that there is a very strong impetus, derived from inter-governmental bodies such as the UN, the Council of Europe, the EC and the OSCE, for European states to initiate policies introducing 'teaching about religions (and beliefs)' in European schools. In linking possible new policy initiatives to current practice and future developments, we need to review the range of policies to the study of religions to be found in different European states. Such a review shows that the role of religion in education has been seen rather differently in the various European states (Kodelja & Bassler, 2004; Kuyk et al., 2007 Schreiner, 2002; Willaime & Mathieu, 2005). On the basis of these sources one might make some points about the diversity of policy in Europe from different perspectives. One might, for example, distinguish between the different ways in which states accommodate religion within their educational systems and develop policy accordingly. There are 'confessional' systems in which religious bodies have responsibility for religious education. For example, in Germany, the churches have a supervisory responsibility for religious education, but within a constitutional framework of equal rights and non-discrimination. The 'confessional' system is different in the Netherlands, where schools can teach the religion of the sponsor, and different again from, say, Slovakia, where schools teach what is recognised as the religion of the state. In some instances, as in Poland, religious education is an optional subject, taught by insiders, according to the tenets of particular denominations (mainly Roman Catholicism). Teachers' qualifications are defined by the church in question, in agreement with the Ministry of National Education and Sport (Eurydice, 2006). Then, there are non-confessional systems where religious bodies have no role in public education. For example, in public education in France, there is no subject devoted specifically to the study of religion, and any teaching covering religion in subjects such as history, French or philosophy must be purely informational (Estivalèzes, 2006). Sweden offers another example of non-confessional religious education, with no direct involvement from religious bodies, but where the subject is seen (in contrast to France) as closely related to the personal development of young people (Larsson, 2000). There are also 'mixed' systems, as in England and Wales, where the majority fully publicly funded schools have an impartial form of religious education, while mainly state-funded voluntary aided schools may teach the religion of the sponsoring body (Jackson, 2007; Jackson & O'Grady, 2007).

A distinction is sometimes made between educating into, about and from religion (Hull, 2002). Educating *into* religion occurs when a single religious tradition is taught by 'insiders', often with the objective of socialising pupils in the religion or strengthening their commitment to it. Educating *about* religion, in contrast, uses descriptive and historical methods, aiming neither to promote nor to erode religious belief. Educating *from* religion involves pupils in considering different responses to religious and moral issues, in order to develop their own point of view on matters relating to religion and values. On this classification, the Italian system would be an example of educating into religion (Gandolfo-Censi, 2000), the Estonian system would exemplify educating about religion (Valk, 2000),

while the English community school system would combine educating about and educating from religion (QCA, 2004).

Cutting across these approaches are different views of childhood and autonomy and different views of the role of the teacher that can be found in the educational traditions of particular states. Moreover, each approach is capable of manipulation for ideological purposes. Some approaches to 'educating into religion' might allow a considerable level of agency and autonomy to children. Others might be very authoritarian. In the case of 'educating about religion(s)', there may be bias, in some education systems, towards or against particular viewpoints. For example, it has been argued that the ostensibly non-confessional 'culture of religions' subject in the Russian Federation actually promotes Orthodoxy and nationalism (Willems, 2007).

What is crucial is that the general view of the UN, and the policies on teaching about religions developed by the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, should be brought into close dialogue with current national policies across the continent. The first regional debate on 'the religious dimension of intercultural education' (held in Athens, 8-9 October, 2007) did exactly this, disseminating the project findings and relating them to current policies in selected member states. The conference also brought together key members of the Council of Europe project writing team with drafters of the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* and key researchers from the EC REDCo Project. This is a model of collaboration that perhaps could be adopted by the proposed Council of Europe Centre.

## **Religious Discourse in the Public Sphere**

As noted above, one of the reasons for the Council of Europe's not dealing directly with religions within public education was a concern that issues of religion do not belong in the sphere of public institutions. This view is close to that of *laïcité* as expressed in French law and policy, where the State is required to be neutral in religious matters but guarantees the free exercise of religious worship and the organisation of religious institutions. Recently, the social theorist Jürgen Habermas has stated a view that cuts across the simple public/private distinction (Habermas, 2006). Habermas distinguishes between the *formal* public/political sphere, consisting of parliaments, courts, ministries etc, and the *informal* or public/political sphere, which is held to be an appropriate setting for communication between religious and non-religious people. Thus, Habermas maintains that, while political institutions should remain neutral with regard to religion, at the level of discourse between secular and religious citizens (and between citizens of different religious persuasions), religious language and argument can and should be used. Fundamentally, understanding is developed through communication or dialogue. Habermas's view is that it is up to religious people to explain their language, and the values associated with it, to others through dialogue in appropriate settings within the informal public/informal political sphere. Through such communication, 'secular' people can learn something about values *from* religious people, while some religious people might learn to re-express their language more meaningfully

in the context of late modernity. Habermas has his critics, but his general argument presents a theoretical case that is consistent with the policy shifts that have taken place in the inter-governmental institutions discussed above and it offers some pointers towards the types of procedure and pedagogy that would operationalise their policy initiatives.

In this respect I would argue that the publicly funded school is a microcosm of the informal public/political sphere and is an entirely appropriate setting for education about religions to take place, provided certain conditions and safeguards are met. The arguments of the inter-governmental organisations – based mainly on human rights and social cohesion – provide a set of reasons for teaching and learning about religions in public education, but they do not go much further than this. They convey a general view that the processes of policy making and curriculum development should be inclusive and dialogical, accepting that bodies formulating curricula should include different interest groups (for example, educators, representatives of religious groups and academic specialists), and that curricula and teaching should aim at impartiality and fairness in representing different positions. However, Habermas's argument takes us further, in that it suggests that citizens from different kinds of background should interact with one another, listen to one another and engage with one another's positions, in developing understanding and participating in the democratic process. If the public school is a microcosm of the informal public/political sphere, there is a need for arrangements within the school that promote this mode of communication. These would include its ethos and view of relationships within the school and with outsiders (especially its attitudes to social diversity) and its pedagogical approaches. Both procedures and pedagogies need to foster communication between those from different backgrounds.<sup>26</sup>

As already noted, there is a good deal of work to be done at the interface between bodies such as the Council of Europe and individual states, and at the level of individual states in developing policies and pedagogies reflecting the level of integration encompassed in international declarations whilst also recognising individual cultural differences. Thus, not all states may be ready to employ fully dialogical pedagogies or pedagogies encouraging students to discuss their own positions and personal views, especially those maintaining the view that religion fundamentally belongs in the private sphere.

## **Pedagogical Approaches**

Nevertheless, there are several recent pedagogical approaches to religious education that are consistent with critical and reflexive approaches to citizenship and intercultural education. These have been developed in several northern European countries, although some related work is going on in Australia (Lovat, 2002) and South Africa (eg Chidester, 2003; Jackson, 2004: Chapter 6; Kwenda et al., 1997).

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26 I have written about the school in this way in Jackson 2004, Chapter 10.

The interpretive approach, developed at the University of Warwick in England, aims to help children and young people to find their own positions within the key debates about religious plurality (Jackson, 1997; Jackson, 2004: Chapter 6). Drawing on methodological ideas from cultural anthropology, it recognizes the inner diversity, fuzzy edgedness and contested nature of religious traditions as well as the complexity of cultural expression and change from social and individual perspectives. Individuals are seen as unique, but the group tied nature of religion is recognized, as is the role of the wider religious traditions in providing identity markers and reference points (see Jackson [2008] for a response to Wright's criticisms [Wright 2008] of the approach). Pedagogically, the approach develops skills of interpretation and provides opportunities for critical reflection in which pupils make a constructive critique of the material studied at a distance, re-assess their understanding of their own way of life in the light of their studies and review their own methods of learning.

The Warwick RE Project is a curriculum development project that applies the interpretive approach, converting ethnographic source material into resources for use by children in class. (eg Barratt, 1994a, b and c; Jackson, Barratt & Everington, 1994; Mercier, 1996; Wayne et al., 1996). In designing experimental curriculum materials to help teachers and pupils to use this approach, the project team drew on ethnographic research on children related to different religious communities and groups in Britain, and on theory from the social sciences, literary criticism, religious studies and other sources (Jackson, 1997: Chapter 5). The intention was to provide a methodology that was epistemologically open and, within the limits of using books as learning resources, conversational in tone. The framework for teaching and learning encouraged sensitive and skilful interpretation, opportunities for constructive criticism (including pupils' reflections on their own use of interpretive methods), and reflection by students on what they had studied. The interpretive approach has been developed by others, to meet particular classroom needs (Jackson, 2004: Chapter 6; Krisman, 1997; O'Grady, 2003) and is being developed by a group of practitioner researchers from schools and universities working together as a 'community of practice' (Ipgrave, Jackson & O'Grady, 2009).

Having much in common with the interpretive approach, is a group of dialogical approaches to religious education developed independently by Julia Ipgrave in Britain, Heid Leganger-Krogstad in Norway and Wolfram Weisse and his colleagues in Germany. All claim the relative autonomy of the individual, but recognize the contextual influence of social groupings, such as family, peer, ethnic and religious groups. There is common agreement that the personal knowledge and experience that young people bring to the classroom can provide important data for study, communication and reflection. All also introduce further source material; religious education does not only consist of the analysis and exchange of personal narratives.

Julia Ipgrave conducted research on the inter-influence of children from Muslim, Hindu and Christian backgrounds in her multicultural primary school in the city of Leicester (Ipgrave, 2002), and developed an approach to RE based on her findings and on the process of conducting the research. Her pedagogy capitalizes on children's readiness to engage with religious questions and their ability to

utilize religious language encountered through interacting with children in school. The teacher often acts in the role of facilitator, prompting and clarifying questions, and considerable agency is given to pupils, who are regarded as collaborators in teaching and learning. Ipgrave finds that her approach raises children's self-esteem, provides opportunities to develop critical skills, allows underachievers to express themselves and generates a climate of moral seriousness through the discussion of basic human questions (Ipgrave, 2001, 2003; Jackson, 2004: Chapter 7).

Ipgrave's research project developed a threefold approach to dialogue which has been incorporated into the pedagogical work derived from it. Primary dialogue is the acceptance of diversity, difference and change. Secondary dialogue involves being open to and positive about difference – being willing to engage with difference and to learn from others. Tertiary dialogue is the actual verbal interchange between children. The basic activity here is discussion and debate. Throughout, the approach encourages personal engagement with ideas and concepts from different religious traditions and children are encouraged to be reflective about their contributions and to justify their own opinions. They are also encouraged to consider how they arrived at their conclusions, to recognize the possibility of alternative viewpoints and to be open to the arguments of others. Ipgrave extended this approach through the use of email communication between children from different backgrounds in schools in Leicester and East Sussex (McKenna, Ipgrave & Jackson, 2008).

Heid Leganger-Krogstad developed her dialogical approach in northern Norway. RE moves between the child's personal experience and wider social experience and between the past – in terms of tradition and history, especially the children's own 'roots' – and the future. There is a gradual broadening of children's experience as they relate their personal concerns to selected cultural material, extending their horizons beyond family and locality to the region and nation and, in turn, to wider European and global issues. Pupils' individual concerns and questions are related to broader social and cultural issues, with 'local' issues acting as a bridge. Children's dialogue, whether 'within' their own culture – in recognising its internal diversity – or 'between' cultures is seen as a key element in developing what Leganger-Krogstad calls metacultural competence, the ability to handle new and unfamiliar cultural material with skill and sensitivity (Jackson, 2004: Chapter 7; Leganger-Krogstad, 2000, 2001).

Developed in the multicultural city of Hamburg, Wolfram Weisse's approach to what he calls 'intercultural/interreligious learning', combines elements of religious education and education for citizenship (Weisse, 1996a and b, 2003). Weisse's approach, ethically grounded in human rights codes, aims to foster communication within multicultural societies. Weisse sees issues such as relativism, undermining faith and challenging the absoluteness of Christianity as part of the debate that young people should engage in:

'While the spectrum of topics points to the many similarities between the religions, dialogue in RE is also designed to demonstrate the differences between religious traditions. Individual positions are not found by mixing different views, but by comparing and contrasting them with one another. Religious education should make dialogue in the classroom possible by allowing participants to refer to their different religious backgrounds ... Dialogue in the classroom fosters respect

for other religious commitments, can confirm pupils' views or help them to make their own commitments whilst also allowing them to monitor their commitments critically.' (Weisse, 2003, p. 194)

Pupils practise the skills of listening, of comparing and contrasting their own views with those of others, and of empathy. Difference is recognized, and pupils are encouraged to find their own epistemological standpoint. Weisse recognizes that dialogue in school can lead to conflict. This is regarded as normal, and conflicts are worked through as part of religious education, with students sometimes having to agree and accept that differences cannot be resolved. (Weisse, 1996b, p. 275-6, 2003).

Although there are some differences in these pedagogical approaches, they all share closely related stances on the analysis of cultural and religious discourse and views about the agency of pupils.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is a clear drive from international and European inter-governmental institutions for the adoption of studies of religions, or studies of religions and beliefs, in publicly funded schools. Policy recommendations and guiding principles from such organisations are being considered by governments and educators in relation to current provision for 'religious education' in its various forms. In converting new or adapted policies into practice, educators will need to consider the use of appropriate pedagogies. While mixed approaches, meeting the needs of specific national systems and local situations, are likely to be needed, the interpretive approach, in its various forms, and related dialogical approaches, are suggested as flexible methodologies for addressing religious diversity in contemporary societies – and issues related to it such as cultural racism and stereotyping.

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