



WORKING PAPER

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN A MULTICULTURAL
SOCIETY**

LITERATURE REVIEW:

INTERNATIONAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this overall literature review is not to provide a detailed analysis of the situation at national level, such as is provided in the national literature reviews. Rather, the purpose of this comparative literature review is to provide context for the national reviews, both in terms of looking at the international context within which the national reviews sit (drawing, for example, on pan-European and American research) and to provide some more thematic reflections within which to frame the national situations. The studies described here have been chosen as representing important viewpoints within the study of religion and education.

There are three main parts to this literature review. The first will examine the concept of religious socialisation, in relation to both home and school. The ensuing two sections follow the template of the national literature reviews, using the lens of the religious socialisation debate to look in more detail at the areas covered by the national literature reviews, to bring these local elements into the wider discussion.

Religion has become a topic of increasing importance in Europe over the past decade. As described by Jackson (2007), religion has recently come into focus among European institutions, as an important constituent of understanding and supporting of intercultural education and citizenship education in schools. While the aftermath of the 11th of September attacks in the US made recognition of multi-faceted voice of religion in the classroom urgent, religion has since become a central issue in the struggle for dialogue (Mercer and Roebben, 2007).

Debates within the field of religious education are encapsulated within a recent international volume (Bates, Durka and Schweitzer, 2006) which describes the ‘tensions between multiculturalism and intercultural learning, between learning about religion and learning from religion, between pedagogy and theology, context and tradition, initiation and critical thinking, universal human rights and particular religious convictions’ (Mercer and Roebben, 2007).

It is clear from this and from the literature discussed below that the issue of religion in society and religious education appears to be fraught with tension. While it is perhaps the nature of religion to be able to offer everything but certainty, what does ring

out from the studies discussed below is the ongoing importance of religion in framing both modern society as a whole and individuals within it.

PART ONE: RELIGIOUS SOCIALISATION

The concept of religious socialisation, the process by which individuals learn and gain their religious understanding and values, is currently in a state of flux. As demonstrated by Collet Sabe (2007), 'The deep crisis of the traditional socializing institutions (school, family and churches) has its counterpart in the crisis of the way socialization processes have been working up till now' (p. 97). With this in mind, it is important to examine here current data around religious socialisation in the home and in the school, and to take this forward into an exploration of individual religious identity and religious education.

1.1. Religious socialisation in the home

Cunnane (2005) examines religious education in relation to home (the primary socialisation agent), school and parish (as secondary socialisation agents). This section will examine the role of home and its extension into the parish, while the role of the school will be discussed below. In relation to each of these settings, Cunnane (2005) examines three different themes - educator, teacher and moral educator. In relation to the family, Cunnane (2005) argues that the family 'educates simply by being a family, through its successes and failures, growth and development through life' (Beza, 2008, p. 404). The family teaches by the way it models life, and is a moral educator through the manner in which family members interact on a daily basis.

In terms of parish life, Cunnane (2005) argues that the parish educates by modelling a way of life to its community, and by challenging its community to be instruments of social change. It teaches by undertaking the responsibility to provide the setting for learning and teaching that will cultivate the academic development of the community. Finally, the parish teaches morality by being 'a virtuous community and a community of character' (Cunnane, 2005, p. 170).

A study of the values of young people in England and Wales, undertaken a decade ago, can serve as a point of reference for the development of religious socialisation in the home. Roberts and Sachdev (1996) describe the findings of the Young People's Social Attitudes Survey, in which Roberts (1996) explores the young people's attitudes to churchgoing and religious beliefs, and to some moral dilemmas. She demonstrates that the largest group of young people (45%) agreed that they believed in God now, and

always have. Furthermore, 13 per cent agreed that they believed in God now but did not previously, 17 per cent did not believe in God but used to, and 16 per cent did not believe in God and never had. However, over half (54%) of the young people stated that they did not belong to a specific religion; and of those professing belief in God, just 12 per cent agreed that they went to church or a religious service once a week or more. Roberts (1996) also indicates that widely reported gender differences in religious belief and attendance among adults (Greeley, 1992) were also found among young people, as girls were more positive regarding religion than boys. For example, 61 per cent of boys, in comparison with 48 per cent of girls, did not see themselves as belonging to a specific religion.

On the issue of right and wrong, Roberts (1996) presents the young people's responses to a variety of moral dilemmas relating to money. She reports that the young people were more likely to keep five pounds they found lying in an empty street than to keep 100 pounds. She therefore suggests that the young people 'have a scale of 'wrongness', and that little sins are more acceptable than big ones' (p. 136).

From this, then, it is clear that some religious socialisation continues in the home, and religious differences among adults recur among young people. We now turn to consideration of religious socialisation in school.

1.2. Religious socialisation at school

Cunnane (2005) argues that the educational role of schooling is to provide literacy and academic instruction. The teaching of religious education in school is therefore to be academic, teaching the subject material of religion. Beza (2008) views this as essential, as it provides an understanding of one's own religion. The school is a moral educator whereby children learn morality from each other, and from the adult lives of the teachers and other staff.

However, the extent to which schools continue to perform this role is questionable. Mercer and Roebben (2007) describe a recognition among RE scholars of the need for 'a solid educational project in which children and adolescents learn to perceive, understand and live up to religious diversity in their immediate neighbourhoods' (p. 438). They highlight how, within Europe, schools are best placed to

deal with this challenge, although further literature demonstrates that schools might not in actual fact be meeting the challenge effectively.

They also describe how young people are 'leaving behind an impassionate and irrelevant church' (the 'drift from the churches' described by Kay and Francis, 1996) and are instead 'asking for a new language and a new experience' (p. 448). The question becomes, then, what the role of the secular school is within this. Perhaps the answer, as described in Bates, Durka and Schweitzer (2006), lies within a 'hermeneutics within a broad concept of humanity' (Mercer and Roebben, 2007, p. 448), a hermeneutic of relationship and dialogue with oneself.

It is clear, then, that some religious socialisation continues in the home, and while schools may be well placed to explore this further in relation to young people's individual identities, the hermeneutic tools to do this may not be fully developed in schools. With this in mind, then, we continue to an exploration in greater detail of the nature of religious identity, and further to an examination of religious education provision in schools.

PART TWO: RELIGION AND SOCIETY

It is impossible to consider the role of religion in modern society without addressing issues of secularisation. It is an omnipresent theme in the media and literature (Gray, 2008) that religion is on the decline in current times, and the void is being filled alternately with science, materialism, and violence. Thus, here, we will first examine the nature of the secularisation thesis, as outlined by sociologists of religion. We will then examine the perennial nature of religious identity, and how this plays out in social differences.

2.1. Secularisation

As described by Voas and Crockett (2005), Davie's (1994) thesis of believing without belonging has become the challenge offered by many European sociologists of religion to the 'idea that modernization brings secularization in its wake' (Voas and Crockett, 2005, p. 12). Davie's thesis argues that while the numbers of regular church attenders may be declining, traditional and nominal religious affiliates retain their religious beliefs. Voas and Crockett (2005) note that while Davie herself has taken care to emphasise that 'the beliefs of those who are not religiously active are unlikely to be orthodox' (p. 12), other proponents of the theory are less cautious. In contrast to this theory, Voas and Crockett (2005) argue that what they term the 'strong' version of the believing without belonging theory ('that with the exception of a handful of atheists, Europeans continue to believe in God and to have religious [or at least 'spiritual'] sensibilities' (p. 12)). It is at least clear from their argument that believing without belonging may at least be a 'transitional phase as a thoroughly secular culture emerges, rather than an important characteristic of late modernity' (p. 13).

In contrast, what is argued here is not that those who do not attend church still maintain religious beliefs, but rather that those who have some religious affiliation retain a distinctive identity, in contrast to those of no religious affiliation. Indeed, data from a variety of studies (see, for example, Fane, 1999) appear to indicate that even those who *self*-affiliate with a religious group remain significantly different in their values profile from those who self-define as of no religious affiliation.

At a European level, the idea that religion remains a strong influence in our society is recognised by European institutions, demonstrated, for example, in the recent adoption by the Council of Europe of religious education as a key strand within their work on intercultural education (Council of Europe, 2004). Indeed, as stated by Haaland Matlary (2004) during one such event, ‘religion is a powder keg when invoked for political rationales, and it is the most effective mobiliser of hatred when instrumentalised’.

Accordingly, Mercer and Roebben (2007) highlight, in contrast to secularisation, a growing recognition in the work they review of the ‘impact of religion as a cultural phenomenon on the social and political agenda and on the daily lives of young European citizens’ (p. 438). They also draw attention to the recent history of the UK, and the role of RE within secularisation, describing that ‘in an era of secularization, the role of denominational RE had to be redefined and re-justified within the boundaries of the modern school in the UK, with its multireligious context and its own didactics’ (p. 447).

Furthermore, Sahin (2005) demonstrates that an ‘exploration of the religious life-world of a selected group of British Muslim young people revealed that Islam on the whole remains an important factor structuring their lives’ (p. 178). Yet, while the great majority of British Muslim young people surveyed showed high positive attitudes towards Islam, the actual degree of religious practice was found to be low, ‘interpreted as an emergence of *an implicit secularization* process among young British Muslims’ (p. 178, emphasis in original).

Cooling (2000) notes the negative attitudes developed by young people in recent years to institutionalised religion (as documented by, for example, Kay and Francis, 1996). He argues that such attitudes are partly a result of the increasing secularisation of society, yet also attributable to the way in which approaches to RE failed to make connections between the study of religion and the experience and concerns of young people.

It is clear, then, that there is a high level of questioning among scholars of the basic thesis of secularisation. A more detailed examination of the literature surrounding religious identity sheds further light on the question.

2.2. Religious identity and practice

A great number of studies have been undertaken variously examining the religious identity, values and practice of young people. Here, a number of recent international studies will be explored to give a flavour of the persistent quest for religious identity among young people internationally.

Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005), as described by Mercer and Roebben (2007) depict various studies about young people's relation to religion across Europe and Israel, reaching the conclusion that religion remains extremely important for contemporary European and Israeli youth. This is in contrast to 'fears that increasing secularization and declining participation by young people in religious institutions implies a lack of religious meaning in the lives of these youth' (p. 442). For example, in Germany, Streib (2005) suggests that declining church membership and church attendance do not give an accurate portrait of the importance of religion among young people, but that young people are instead changing religion for themselves from its former institutionalised forms to ways that provide more individual meaning. While German young people are not present at church services, they do engage in private prayer, describe themselves as religious and intend to raise their children in a religion.

Francis (2001), a study published around the same time as Brennan (2001), examines the values of young people in England and Wales. The values described here are not those of a particular religious group, rather the general reactions to a number of issues of young people from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. These values are useful as a reference point with which to compare the values of young people from specific religious groups. In examining young people's religious beliefs, Francis (2001) primarily focuses on young people's beliefs in Christian creeds. He states that on the overall question of belief in God, young people are divided between theists, agnostics, and atheists. Larger proportions of the young people reported uncertainty about the more specific claims of Christianity. For example, 41 per cent of the young people in the study agreed that they believe in God, in comparison with 33 per cent who expressed uncertainty, and 26 per cent who did not believe in God. Yet, 42 per cent of the young people were uncertain about whether or not Jesus really rose from the dead, and 37 per cent were uncertain about whether or not Christianity is the only true religion.

Concerning issues of church and society, Francis (2001) demonstrates that the young people in the study identified a role for religion in their lives, primarily in providing rites of passage. Yet they did not want religion to encroach too greatly into their daily lives, and did not see attendance at religious services as necessary for religious affiliation. For example, 73 per cent wanted to get married in church, and 54 per cent wanted their children to be baptised or christened in church. However, just 8 per cent of the young people agreed that schools should hold a religious assembly every day, and 51 per cent agreed that they can be a Christian without going to church.

Francis (2001) indicates that the young people were uncertain regarding supernatural beliefs, although they did not reject them outright. For example, 40 per cent expressed belief in ghosts, and a further 29 per cent were uncertain; and 31 per cent expressed the belief that it is possible to contact the spirits of the dead, and a further 33 per cent were uncertain.

Halsall (2005a), a more recent study of the values of young people in England and Wales, indicates that the young people expressed mixed values with relation to themselves and spirituality and religion, although they resisted religious and spiritual labels for themselves and were less positive about the religious values of their family and friends. Thus, only just over a third (35.9%) agreed that religion is irrelevant to their life, and a similar proportion (34.3%) agreed that religion has been replaced by science. However, similar proportions of the young people agreed and were not certain in response to these items. Just over a third (34.4%) were not certain whether or not religion is irrelevant to their lives, and 38 per cent were not certain whether or not religion has been replaced by science. Thus, smaller proportions definitely disagreed with these statements; 29.8 per cent disagreed that religion is irrelevant to their lives, and 27.7 per cent disagreed that religion has been replaced by science.

The young people in this study were more clearly negative regarding religious labels for themselves. The largest proportion were positive regarding the label 'superstitious', with nearly a third (32.9%) agreeing that they are a superstitious person. The next largest proportion were positive regarding the label 'spiritual'; 19.6 per cent agreed that they are a spiritual person. The smallest proportion were positive regarding the label 'religious'; 15.6 per cent agreed that they are a religious person.

A mixed picture also arises when examining young people's certainty in their religious views. A relatively small proportion of the young people (27.8%) agreed that they have not made up their mind about religion yet. However, a similar proportion (29.6%) were not certain whether or not they have made up their mind about religion yet. Over four out of ten (42.6%) disagreed that they have not made up their mind about religion yet, and thus felt they have made up their mind about religion.

While young people's assessment of their own religious views leaves room for uncertainty, their assessment of their families' and friends' religious views was again more clearly negative. Over half (53.3%) agreed that most of their friends think religion is irrelevant to their lives, while just 15.5 per cent disagreed with this item. Moreover, just 16.9 per cent agreed that their family thinks religion is important, while 58 per cent disagreed that their family thinks religion is important.

Internationally, Bibby (2001) explored the values of young people from diverse backgrounds in Canada. Regarding religion and spirituality, Bibby (2001) demonstrates that approximately a fifth of the young people stated that they were very involved in organised religion. However, much larger proportions affiliated themselves with a religious group than stated that they were involved in organised religion. Bibby (2001) indicates that 75 per cent affiliated themselves with a religious group. Furthermore, 45 per cent agreed that they might be open to religious involvement in the future, and 89 per cent agreed that they would like a religious wedding ceremony.

A comparative international study is outlined by Ziebertz and Kay (2005). They describe a study entitled the 'Religion and Life Perspectives Project (RALP)', an empirical study about the religious and life perspectives of young people in Europe, drawing on questionnaires administered to young people aged 17-18, attending high achieving schools, across nine European countries. The study outlines interesting findings in relation to religion, as reported by Mercer and Roebben (2007). In terms of trust in the church, for example, they contrast different groups of young people: young people in Germany, who ranked the church low (third to last place) among the fourteen institutions evaluated; young people in Poland, for whom the Catholic church is the 'most positively perceived non-political institution' (p. 88); and, young people in Finland, where young people place a great degree of trust in the church because of its practical social justice element.

Ziebertz and Kay (2006) report on the religious self-perception of the same respondents. As depicted by Mercer and Roebben (2007), 'the most successful religious socialisation is measured in Turkey and in traditional Catholic countries such as Poland, Croatia and Ireland; the least successful in Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany' (p. 441). They argue that the young people throughout Europe described in this volume accept and tolerate religion as a method of self-expression, as long as it adheres to the:

...no-harm principle: I offer the other the full opportunity to flourish, I am politically correct, as long as he/ she is not standing in 'my way' of individualised self-expression; you can worship your own religion or life style as long as you are not offensive or coercive to mine (Roebben, 2007, p. 3).

Brennan (2001) takes these conclusions one step further in examining change regarding young people's affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland through work with young people who may be described as 'lapsed' members of the Roman Catholic Church. Studies of religious young people often centre on those affiliated with a church (see, for example, Wright, Frost and Wisecarver, 1993; Smith, Lundquist-Denton, Faris and Regnerus, 2002), and as such Brennan's study provides important insight into the continuing effects of religious affiliation. Young people who are 'lapsed' members of a religious group may be described as marginalised, in that their values may not fit well with either those of the religious group, or those from a more secular perspective. Brennan (2001) explores this with reference to socio-economic change in society, and the effect this has on the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of young people. Overall, Brennan (2001) concludes that:

Contemporary Western youth culture, which is characterised by relativism, undifferentiated pluralism, and a deep suspicion of institutions, adversely affects the possibility of the young people's commitment to religious institutions (p. 9)..

Religion is the primary theme in Brennan (2001). His central topic of investigation is the decline in young people's affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church. Overall, Brennan (2001) concludes that although young people are suspicious of religious institutions, they remain open to spirituality. Brennan (2001) notes that the young people interviewed were critical of the Roman Catholic Church, and that within the interviews the Church was largely described negatively, and did not have a positive influence in bringing meaning to the young people's lives. Yet, Brennan (2001) asserts that overall, the

attitude of the young people to the Roman Catholic Church can be characterised not as enmity, but as indifference.

Brennan (2001) makes connections between the way in which young people relate to the Roman Catholic Church, and the concepts of modernity and post-modernity in society. He states that the young people's attitude of indifference to the Church suggests the influence of post-modernity, whereby the young people are at least spiritually open; rather than modernity, whereby the young people would be more hostile to religion. Thus Brennan (2001) maintains that the young people have a 'spiritual hunger' (p. 39), but remain suspicious of religious institutions.

Families were repeatedly emphasised as important by the young people interviewed by Brennan (2001), particularly as an influence on their values. Brennan (2001) argues that the strong language used by the young people when speaking of the influence of their parents and home environment demonstrates how powerful this influence was for the young people. Brennan (2001) sees a clear connection between care and influence, stating that 'the people who care most for the rising generation will have the greatest influence on them' (p. 123).

The young people also reported a high level of concern for the poor, oppressed, and socially deprived, and also environmental concerns. However, while the young people themselves expressed social concern, Brennan (2001) notes that none of the young people demonstrated awareness of the increasing orientation of the Roman Catholic Church towards such issues. Regarding environmental concerns, the young people expressed an appreciation of nature and a desire for the restoration of ecological balance.

Brennan (2001) also identifies their local area as important to the young people. Whether the young people grew up in a rural or urban area is of great importance to them as individuals, and affects their values. For example, one young person stated that: "I think people from rural Ireland have very different values and beliefs from people in big cities; it is like two different cultures" (Brennan, 2001, p. 108). Urbanisation was further identified as being important with regard to the young people's values. This is also emphasised by MacGreil (1996) in discussing the negative effects of urbanisation on religious practice and belief.

Brennan (2001) discusses the young people's core values. He maintains that the young people have a set of primary values which include: happiness; love; friendship; honesty; freedom; life itself; good health; experiences of birth and death; and experiences of pain or hurt. Moreover he states that:

What gives ultimate meaning to the lives of the majority of those who participated in this study is a belief that they have a message to bring or a contribution to make in their world. (p. 126).

Brennan (2001) maintains that, overall, the 'manner in which young people experience reality is culture bound' (p. 128) and thus their ideas, values, and attitudes are primarily determined by the type of culture to which they are exposed. Additionally he argues that young people's motivation when making decisions in their lives comes from personal experiences, and that this overrides any other factor.

As such, from Brennan (2001) we arguably see the ongoing effects of religious socialisation in the home, as well as the notable distinctions in religious identity of a further religious group.

Brennan's findings of the distinct identity of those affiliated with a particular religious group are reflected in other studies. For example, Halsall (2005b) investigates the identity of young people affiliated with the Anglican Church, and forms part of the continuing debate concerning the potential importance of self-assigned religious affiliation as a socially significant indicator. The study demonstrates that, in the case of young Anglicans, self-assigned religious affiliation is a socially significant indicator of values. The identity of young Anglicans is investigated through an exploration of their values, in comparison with the values of young people of no religious affiliation, and analysed with relation to gender orientation theory. The data concerning young Anglicans are taken from a database of 30,564 young people. The study shows that young Anglicans have a distinct values profile and identity when compared with young people of no religious affiliation, and that, overall, affiliation with the Anglican Church tends to be associated with a more 'feminine' values profile.

A previous study of young Anglicans was conducted by Francis and Kay (1995). The data analysed in Francis and Kay (1995) relate to over 13,000 young people between the ages of 13 and 15 in state-maintained schools. The young Anglicans presented in Francis and Kay (1995) are consistently compared with young Roman Catholics, and

young members of the Free Churches. Their study finds that 87 per cent of young Anglicans, in comparison with 88 per cent of young Roman Catholics, and 85 per cent of young Free Church members believe in God. On moral issues, Francis and Kay (1995) find that 24 per cent of young Anglicans, in comparison with 30 per cent of young Roman Catholics, and 27 per cent of young Free Church members agree that divorce is wrong. Furthermore, 38 per cent of Anglicans, 66 per cent of Roman Catholics, and 47 per cent of Free Church members agree that abortion is wrong; and 30 per cent of Anglicans, 35 per cent of Roman Catholics, and 38 per cent of Free Church members agree that homosexuality is wrong.

Overall, therefore, these studies clearly demonstrate that while there are some similarities between members of particular Christian groups, there is also a distinct difference and identity equated with self-assigned religious affiliation, in comparison with those young people of no religious affiliation.

2.3. Religion and social differences

It is clear, therefore, that there are distinct differences between the religious identities of those who affiliate with religious groups in comparison with those of no religious affiliation. However, the question remains as to how these differences play out when other facets of a person's identity are brought into consideration. Some of these factors will therefore be explored in greater detail here.

Sex¹

Halsall (2005a) demonstrates that sex is a significant factor when considering young people's values regarding spirituality and religion. From this study, it is apparent that girls are more positive than boys about spirituality and religion for both themselves and their friends. Thus, fewer of the girls (28.9%) than the boys (43.3%) agree that religion is irrelevant to their life; and fewer of the girls (26.4%) than the boys (42.6%) agree that religion has been replaced by science. Furthermore, a smaller proportion of the girls

¹ 'Sex' rather than 'gender' is used by necessity as the descriptor here, in recognition of the fact that comparisons here are made along the lines of the dichotomy of biological sex, whereas gender describes a much greater variety of individual differences acknowledging that the biological dichotomy is too limited a descriptor of this facet of identity.

(48.2%) than of the boys (58.7%) agree that most of their friends think religion is irrelevant to their lives.

This greater positivity among the girls is also reflected in their values with relation to spiritual and religious labels. Thus, more of the girls (22.9%) than the boys (16.2%) agree that they are a spiritual person; and more of the girls (40.1%) than the boys (25.4%) agree that they are a superstitious person.

This is further exemplified in Halsall (2006) which indicates that Christian affiliated girls as a group have a distinct identity as expressed through their values, in that they are more positive in their outlook on life, yet also more anxious and more conservative in their values than girls of no religious affiliation. This finding supports the concept of religious affiliation as a key part of a person's identity, and has important implications for policy regarding young people, specifically Christian affiliated girls.

Furthermore, Archer (2003) explores the identities of young Muslim boys in the British school system. She demonstrates that 'all the boys in the study primarily identified themselves in terms of their Muslim identities' (p. 48), and that these strong religious identifications 'appear to confound social psychological and social cognition theories of ethnic identity and acculturation, which assume that adherence to minority ethnic cultural beliefs, practices such as language and religion, declines with each new generation' (p. 48). These findings, she emphasises, concur with existing studies such as Shaw (1994) in which second generation Asian/ Muslims have been found to increasingly define themselves in terms of their religion, rather than their nationality or parental country of origin.

Different strands of research have attempted to interpret the values profile of religious people. Interpretations using gender orientation theory (Bem, 1981) and sex differences arising from personality tests (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1985) have been much criticised, more recently in favour of interpretations of religious sex differences in congruence with socio-cultural understandings (Archer, 2003).

Whichever way these differences are interpreted, it is clear that there are pervading differences in religious affiliation according to sex. A comparison of Archer and Halsall may also lead to the observation that a difference exists between majority and minority religious groups in the 'northern' world, that while majority (Christian?) groups are define themselves less in terms of their religious affiliation, religion still resounds

within their values, while for minority groups, identification with their religion is a way of self-identifying, even though they may no longer hold those particular beliefs.

Age

A comparison of young people's religious beliefs by groups of older and younger young people has also been undertaken in Halsall (2005a). From this study, it is clear that age is a factor of limited significance when considering young people's values in relation to spirituality and religion, in that year ten pupils are more negative regarding religion than year nine pupils. Thus, a higher proportion of year ten pupils (37.0%) than year nine pupils (31.8%) agree that religion has been replaced by science. More of the year ten than year nine pupils also perceive that their friends are negative regarding religion. Thus, 56.3 per cent of year ten pupils, in comparison with 50.5 per cent of year nine pupils, agree that most of their friends think religion is irrelevant to their lives. However, these differences are not great, and it is evident that overall there is much consistency in young people's values regarding spirituality and religion across the two age groups.

Social class

Many studies demonstrate the the persistent importance of social class in relation to education (Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003; Ball, 2003; Reay, 2004), not least, as discussed below in relation to school choice, where 'educational choice practices can be seen to reinforce wider social processes of social exclusion' (Reay, 2004, p. 537). However, the relation between religion and social class is a less researched area.

Halsall (2005a) also drew comparisons between young people's religious views according to socio-economic group, with the finding there is a clear relation between socio-economic group and young people's values in this area. Young people from higher socio-economic groups are more negative in their assessment of their friends' religious values, and have a greater level of uncertainty regarding their own spiritual and religious values. Those from intermediate socio-economic groups have the next highest levels of negativity and uncertainty regarding religion, while those from lower socio-economic groups have the lowest levels of negativity and uncertainty regarding religion.

More of the young people with parents in 'managerial' occupations (59%) agree that most of their friends think religion is irrelevant to their lives. This is in comparison

with 51.7 per cent of those with parents in 'administrative' occupations, and 50.2 per cent of those with parents in 'elementary' occupations. Furthermore, 31.1 per cent of young people with parents in 'managerial' occupations agree that they have not made up their mind about religion yet. This is in comparison with 25.2 per cent of those with parents in 'administrative' occupations, and 24 per cent of those with parents in 'elementary' occupations.

Overall, therefore, these studies of varied groups of young people across differing countries show that there are significant differences in the values and attitudes of young people who affiliate themselves with a religious group, and young people who do not. Differences are also apparent in the religious views, and affiliations, of young people from different social groups, with sex differences being particularly notable. Returning to the secularisation thesis, therefore, it seems safe to say that, while observance of institutionalised religion may well be in decline, the significance of self-assigned religious affiliation in relation to individual identity prevails.

PART THREE: RELIGION AND SCHOOL

The relation between religion and schooling is one of varying degree across Europe and internationally. However, the importance of the role of religion in school is increasingly recognised at the European level (Jackson, 2007) and how this should be played out at the school level is hotly debated, from, for example, a wholly secular school system in France, through optional religious catechetical instruction and teaching of world religions in Russia, to mandatory study of a variety of religions in England and Wales. Several attempts have been made to schematise this pan-European situation of RE and its relationship to state and confession (Kuyk c.s. 2007; Schreiner 2005). In our own schema below we come to the following divisions, based on these attempts:

Group 1 – Pluriform or mixed solutions (with weak state intervention)

<i>Mixed system with mostly denominational schools and RE</i>	<i>Mixed system with large number of denominational schools and RE</i>	<i>Secular system with denominational contributions to RE</i>
Ireland, Northern Ireland, Belgium, Netherlands	England, Wales, Scotland	Germany, Finland, Austria, Romania, Poland, Hungary

Group 2 – Uniform solutions (with strong state intervention)

<i>Denominational RE system for all</i>	<i>RE as non-denominational school subject for all</i>	<i>No RE in school</i>
Italy, Spain, Malta, Turkey, Greece	Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark	France, Slovenia, Albania

In this section, therefore, we will review some of the ways in which religion and school intersect, and draw international comparisons between provision in different systems.

3.1. School selection

A recent UK press article demonstrates the importance and seriousness the issue of school selection has become in the UK:

The past few weeks have seen newspaper accounts of a father throwing himself in front of a train, a family being hounded by surveillance tactics usually reserved for terrorists, and a mother handing her child over to the guardianship of a relative in a different area. These are not reports of the latest soap opera, simply the latest examples of the extreme stress that can arise from parental choice colliding with the rationing of school places (Millar, 2008).

The issue of faith schools becomes embroiled in this, not least because Christian faith schools are often among the higher achieving schools in England, and thus desirable to middle-class parents.

For Yesodey Hatorah, an Orthodox Jewish state girls' school in north London, the balance between maintaining their Haredi values while welcoming the state money for the running of the school is complex. As stated by Butt, 'the school's admissions policy reflects these values, and the fear is that entering the state system will force changes to the curriculum and entry criteria. A Jewish education official says the concerns are largely unfounded' (Butt, 2008).

Faith schools are not only popular because of their high academic achievement, but also because they appear to foster other desirable qualities among young people. For example, O'Donnell (2001), as quoted by Darmanin (2007), found that Catholic schools were 'marked by a reputation for academic achievement, matched by a personalised education, as well as personal standards of good behaviour' (p. 428). Further, O'Donnell (2001) considers that the transmission of the 'special character' of, in this case, a Catholic, faith school, is possible through

Catholic practice, such as formal worship, prayer, and retreats; school organisation; special events; symbols; teaching; environment, including the physical and emotional climate; role modelling, both structured and unstructured and relationships of care, concern and affection (Darmanin, 2007, p. 428).

Furthermore, in the UK, studies have found that Muslim parents would at times prefer their child to attend a Christian faith school rather than a school of no religious affiliation, due to the provision of a set of values and moral code in a faith school in comparison with a school of no religious affiliation.

It is clear, therefore, that religion plays an important part in school selection, being often linked in parents' or carers' minds not only with academic achievement, but also with positive socialisation.

3.2. Faith schools: the policy debate

Closely related to the issue of school selection is the debate over faith schools, of which arguably the school selection question is part. The questions are outlined by Mercer and Roebben (2007): 'should diversity be managed in a multi- or inter-faith perspective ... or in a traditional confessional system in which every confession has the right to offer its own point of view to the children belonging to that confession... What is the best solution to foster religious dialogue in the typical context of the school? What should be the role of religious confessions?' (p. 445).

It can be argued that, generally, in Europe, there is a growing de-confessionalisation of the educational system, contrasting with the more Anglo-Saxon model of recent increased investment in faith schools. For example, Butt (2008) describes the Yesodey Hatorah, an Orthodox Jewish state girls' school in north London, which is noteworthy in that it has been judged as the most outstandingly effective secondary

school in England, its premises are immaculate and contemporary, and it is the only state-funded strictly Orthodox secondary school in its area. Within the Jewish Orthodox community in the UK, children are educated in independent community schools to address specific faith and cultural requirements.

There remains a question over this among, for example, the British public; the heated debate over faith schools in the UK is clearly evident from recent exchanges in national newspapers. Bunglawala (2008) outlines the criticisms made of some British Muslims who wish to establish faith schools. In contrast, Bunglawala (2008) argues that as the government subsidises thousands of Anglican and Roman Catholic faith schools as well as approving funding for Sikh and Hindu faith schools, with over 50 per cent of Jewish children attending Jewish faith schools, it would be unjust for there to be complaints 'about some British Muslim parents seeking equal treatment under the law'. This is again further exemplified by Mercer and Roebben (2007), who describe the ongoing debate on multifaith learning, which is particularly encapsulated in the UK, and forms the basis for much discussion in Bates, Durka and Schweitzer (2006). They outline the

... interesting tensions between multiculturalism and intercultural learning, between learning about and learning from religion, between pedagogy and theology, context and tradition, initiation and critical thinking, universal human rights and particular religious convictions (Mercer and Roebben, 2007, p. 446).

In the Dutch context, de Jong (2007), in describing religious education in the Netherlands, argues that one of the greatest challenges for religious education in this context is the 'coming of so many Muslims in our country' (p. 367) leading to questions of integration and segregation, particularly in relation to 'the possible segregative effects of faith-based schools' (p. 367).

Moreover, Bakker (2001) in the Dutch context addresses the question of how Muslims and other specific groups can best participate in education and the education system, posing the question, much asked throughout other western countries of many differing faith groups:

Should a specifically *Muslim school* be founded which aims at creating a homogeneous Muslim educational setting, or should Muslim children attend a normal, pluralistic 'Dutch' school which can be found in every town and village, in the belief that this will create better opportunities for integrating into a pluralistic Dutch society (p. 32).

In highlighting various arguments for and against specific Muslim schools, Bakker raises arguments that reverberate frequently around the faith schools debate. For example, Van de Wetering (1998) compiled a list of problematic experiences for Muslim children in Dutch schools, which includes issues such as differences in power and authority relations, interactions between women and men, religious feast days and corresponding days off, and the need to pray at certain points in the day. Bakker argues that ‘these differences and underlying tensions could easily lead to conflict’ (p. 35).

It is clear, therefore, that the debate over faith schools remains powerful and ongoing, as part of broader questions raised over the place of religion in modern society. While there may be increased deconfessionalisation of the educational system in some parts of Europe, in others diverse communities have found a confessional home within the national school system, as exemplified by the Muslim communities in both Austria (Willaime, 2007) and the UK.

3.3. Religious education provision

In the context of this heated debate over the place of faith schools within education systems as a whole, questions arise over the place of religious education within state educational provision. It is clear from the research literature that there is varying provision for religious education across different countries, as well as differing opinions on what its role should be. In this section we will first explore differences in existing provision, before moving on to examine opinions.

Mercer and Roebben (2007) explore various studies which depict and examine religious education provision across Europe. In Ziebertz and Kay (2006), Mercer and Roebben (2007) find that, the concept, much applauded by education professionals of inter-religious learning (or perhaps multifaith learning in the Anglo-Saxon world) is seen to lead to a ‘non-committed multi-religious learning perspective’ among young people (Mercer and Roebben 2007, p. 441). Young people consider that RE should take an objective view on world religions, and, ranging from most to least important, should also ‘help in solving societal problems, help in the personal search for meaning and introduction to a particular faith or church’ (Mercer and Roebben, 2007, p. 442).

It is notable that the European perspective comes from a situation where ‘religious education in state-supported schools is normative’ (Mercer and Roebben, 2007, p. 443).

This is in comparison to the situation in the US, or the wider north-American setting, as described, for example, by Smith and Lundquist Denton (2005).

Jackson, Miedema, Weisse, and Willaime (2007) report on the findings of the REDCo-project (Religion in Education. A contribution to dialogue or a factor of conflict in transforming societies of European countries, an FP6-Programme), comparing the conceptual, historical and legislative aspects of the role of religion in schools in nine European countries. These authors offer a variety of perspectives on this issue, from different national points of view. For example, Willaime (2007) describes how in France the traditional concept of abstinence from every religion at school (*laïcité*) is being strengthened by the idea that ‘this neutrality could be helpful as a regulating principle for the pluralism of non-religious and religious convictions at school’ (Mercer and Roebben, 2007, p. 445). In contrast, in Spain, a predominantly Catholic country, Dietz (2007) describes the movement of religious education out of religiously-affiliated schools, as part of the modern reconsideration of traditional church-state relations. Furthermore, Kozyrev and Fedorov (2007) describe how in the Russian Federation, ‘the issues of RE have strong political connotations and divide society’ (p. 155). Thus, while the role of RE in schools in Russia is increasing, it also has increasing potential to become either a factor in conflict or a positive contribution to dialogue. Nevertheless, there appears to be increasing conviction, even among opponents, that there is a role for RE in schools, fuelled not least by ‘the present insufficient level of religious literacy, tolerance and skills for intercultural communication’ (p. 155). The situation of RE in Russia, therefore, remains open for debate:

Russian schools... would be a good place to see how the society, sticking formerly to the state religious and quasi-religious ideologies, but exposed now to globalization and to the demands of an international community for a certain level of democracy and pluralism, faces up to these new challenges and how different confessional and educational backgrounds help or hinder managing with them (p. 156).

Valk (2007), describes how in the secularised context of Estonia, while there is considerable high-level agreement about the importance of RE, it is still taught in only a few schools. This agreement about the importance of RE is compounded by the observation that in society generally there is little religious literacy to facilitate engagement in the contemporary and multi-religious world, due to the residue of the

‘totalitarian Soviet system and atheistic ideology’ (p. 178). RE at present is an optional, marginal subject in Estonian schools, and one of the challenges obstructing its further adoption is ‘the insufficiency of legal documents and the possibility of interpreting them in different ways’ (p. 179).

Jackson and O’Grady (2007) describe how ‘the approach to religious education in state community schools in England and Wales is open and liberal, intending neither to promote or to erode faith’ (p. 198) and is potentially becoming an arena for discussion between pupils from different faith and cultural groups. They emphasise the importance of this religious education in promoting a forum for ‘reasoned and informed discussion’ (p. 198) to counteract some of the sensationalist tabloid media representation of Muslim groups and in playing an informed role in the government-initiated debate around multiculturalism and Islam.

In the Netherlands (ter Avest, Bakker, Bertram-Troost and Miedema, 2007), similarly to England and Wales, ‘ignorance of the content and meaning of others’ religious traditions... shows up in the media as well as in personal encounters’ (p. 218). In this context, teachers need support to understand their own identity as well as their normative teaching competences (see below). There are similar issues to be addressed in Norway (Skeie, 2007).

However, in Germany (Knauth, 2007) the situation is slightly different, in that ‘the traditional organizational divide between Roman-Catholic and Protestant confessional RE in public schools raises again the question of the role and outlook of a (post)modern confessional RE’ (Mercer and Roebben, p. 445-446).

These differing national approaches are brought together in comparison by Miedema (2007). As described by Mercer and Roebben (2007), Miedema argues that across these different authors there can generally be found a common approval for the learning *about* religion approach in Europe, and this is seen as necessary, although not sufficient, for the development of a more integrated and tolerant society. For this to develop more comprehensively, Miedema (2007) asserts that RE must develop into a more reflexive subject, in which students have the opportunity for ‘personal reflection and response that do not direct students to reach particular conclusions’ (p. 281).

De Jong relates the debate about faith schools to questions of the appropriate content for multicultural classes in particular faith-based schools. He asks: ‘how is

interreligious learning unifiable with the Catholic identity of Catholic schools?’ (p. 367). In response he argues that religious education should move away from the traditional western adversarial way of communicating, where we aim to ‘get the better of an adversary’ to a method used more traditionally in the east, where the aim is ‘explaining something to one who asks’ (p. 383). In this way, de Jong argues, religious education in Catholic schools can really contribute to the “integration” of both Muslims and Catholic’ (p. 383). Further, de Jong argues, perhaps the language of integration and segregation is not at all appropriate in this context:

For the main orientation does not have to be integration in our culture and faith nor the self-oriented identity of all the religious groups as such, but the free participation of all the people in the history of our society, also in the religious dimension of it (p. 384).

Halsall and Roebben (2006) further emphasise the challenges raised around the language of religious education, particularly in an international setting, arising from pre- and misconceptions associated with the language. As an example, they describe their experience in the Russian Federation, where the term ‘religious education’, commonly understood in western Europe as referring to a more secularised concept of learning about religions, was assumed by all to indicate a catechetical approach to teaching religion. These preconceptions in language need to be addressed as we expand into developing a more international approach to religious education in schools.

Having examined some of the varying religious education provision throughout Europe, we now move on to explore these approaches in greater detail.

Grimmitt (2000), while noting that a change in emphasis in government-related guidelines on RE in England in recent decades, from a process-oriented view of RE to a content-oriented view, argues that:

While these trends could serve to undermine the broader educational concerns of RE by encouraging the subject to concentrate on instructing pupils in religious knowledge, it cannot be denied that any view of RE... must necessarily involve pupils *learning about religion and religions* (p. 207, emphasis in original).

Grimmitt (2000) instead advocates a constructivist theory of learning as providing ‘a more acceptable basis for the development of pedagogical procedures and principles appropriate to the concerns of RE’ (p. 207), as this emphasises the importance of encouraging pupils to explore ideas for themselves.

A further interpretation is provided by Cunnane (2005), who argues that religious education is emerging as one of the most important issues facing today's world. As cited by Beza (2008), Cunnane states that 'the religious education learned in school frequently clashes with the lived experience of the young person outside of the school setting' (p. 19). One of Cunnane's main themes is that religious education should not be limited to one setting. Indeed, it is clear from the content of the book that religious education in its widest understanding is not actually limited to one setting. Cunnane (2005) aims to provide a new lens through which religious education can be perceived, and argues that:

Religious education should be international, that is, it must account for the array of national meanings of the term. Religious education must be inter-religious in that it affirms the importance of each religion in relation to other religions. It must also be intergenerational, providing a continuum of religious education for people of all ages. Finally, religious education must be inter-institutional, engaging the major institutions of society (Beza, 2008, p. 404).

Cunnane (2005) argues that, from this, there results a paradigm shift from an ecclesiastical to an educational framework for religious education.

Mercer and Roebben (2007) refer back to the 'subjects' of religious education; the young people in whom so much hope is vested for a tolerant future society. They suggest that:

Vast differences exist between ideals and reality in RE. The research shows that young people opt for a 'learning about' approach to religion, and not for an inter-religious learning ('learning from') approach. This situation suggests that young people, like their elders in generations before them, are anxious about confrontations or conflicts along religious lines. Perhaps education on religious conflict in difference needs to be the next frontier of RE in Europe (p. 449).

Mercer and Roebben (2007) thus argue that 'RE at school should support the personal quest for meaning of young people in their actual lived encounters with people from other religious denominations and groups' (p. 447). They further argue, that for John Hull, one of the central figures in the modern development of RE in the UK, RE is about humanity, and this is the central criterion by which to assess the goals, contents and methods of RE. RE should challenge the 'structures of injustice in a modern technocratic and money-driven world' (p. 447) and serve the goals of expanding the human rights of children and young people. Whatever the existing provision or interpretation given to religious education, this would be a unifying goal around which religious education could gather.

3.4. Teachers: their education and profile

In examining the training of teachers of religious education, it is important to consider the context and perspective with which this is approached. While this in itself is a highly contentious and emotive issue, there are perhaps some grounding perspectives with which those who recognise the place of RE within a school system may arguably agree.

It is clear that in a plural society the RE course can no longer be considered from a catechetical viewpoint. However, young people are entitled to expect from the RE course that they be educated in religious competence. So, the fundamental openness to the changes in society and human development is related and connected in the course of RE to the religious answers that many differing groups of people give to these challenges. The answers of traditional religious institutions are examined, challenged and evaluated against the background of new developments. Questions that arise in and through these developments (in communication with fellow students) form the particular content of RE (Roebben, 2007).

In this educational context, Grimmitt (2000) outlines the implications of adopting a social constructivist pedagogy of RE for the training of RE teachers. He states that while constructivism highlights the necessary involvement of the learner in the construction of knowledge, it would be unfortunate if RE teachers' theological assumptions were the major determinant of their response to the constructivist challenge of RE teaching. Rather, in this model the effective learning of RE by pupils is 'dependent upon relating the process of teaching to how pupils, coming from a wide range of social, cultural, and religious backgrounds, learn' (p. 226). Thus, the pedagogical principles supported by a constructivist approach to RE 'are a direct challenge to any process of teaching which over-relies upon the use of a simple transmission model of knowledge' (p. 226).

Grimmitt further argues that it is necessary in this model for teachers to develop reflexivity: they should be constantly checking and adapting their own knowledge to ensure that it meets the needs of the learners. Thus, 'as RE teachers they need to subject their own religious knowledge to the same processes of deconstruction and reconstruction that constructivism advocates as a basis for pupils' learning' (p. 226). Ter Avest, Bakker, Bertram-Troost and Miedema (2007) state of teachers in the Netherlands, that 'in former

days the church's role of conserver and intermediary of the Christian tradition was emphasized, handing over to the teacher the content of the tradition and how to teach their pupils in and about this tradition. However, it is obvious that teachers need support in exploring their own questions concerning faith and religion in its relation to pedagogical themes as a contribution to their normative professionalism of teaching about and from religions' (p. 218).

What does this education for social flexibility in the field of norms, values, life perspectives and religious convictions imply concretely for the training of teachers in RE? Four elements can be discerned:

- Training in classroom management: learning to perceive the (social, cultural, moral and religious) complexity and diversity of the local class groups (e.g. family and church background);
- Training in particular (moral and religious) contents: acquiring knowledge and heuristic strategies (to find knowledge) on religion preferably focused on those religions which are actually present in the classroom and/or can be introduced through local representatives (learning *about* religion);
- Training in hermeneutical and communicative strategies for classroom discussion: adapting and interpreting the RE materials to particular life issues such as love, death, suffering, etc. and the training of oneself and students in perspective change (learning *from* religion);
- Training in the appropriation of moral and religious convictions in one's own biography as an RE teacher: coming to terms with a personal spiritual synthesis and narrative identity (learning *in* religion).

The achievement of these key competences is a central aim in the training of RE teachers, as well as in their ongoing reflexive professionalism. Children and young people have the right to deal with diversity 'safely'. Teachers should gain the necessary hermeneutic, communicative and existential competences to deal constructively with this safe educational space (Roebben, 2008a and 2008b). Pre-modern Europe was the age of religious wars, modern Europe was the age of ideological conflicts, the post-modern Europe should be "the age of the free meeting of minds, prepared to contribute to a

common historical project, on the basis of a cosmopolitan ethos” (Ernesto Balducci, quoted by Pajer, 2001, p. 193).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, it is clear that the role and place of religion in modern society, and consequently within education, is shifting as society changes, and as we therefore accord religion a new place. This shift raises many questions, particularly around the continuing importance of religion within the modern world, and the way in which we should educate the next generation in their understanding of religion. The current study will take its place alongside other important research in adding its voice to these questions and responses.

This review of existing literature shows that there are no easy answers to the questions around the place of religion in society and education, as in fact it is not easy to ask the questions. As such, it may be concluded that, at a baseline level, religious education is about humanity; about fully understanding ourselves, however we individually chose to frame that in terms of god, gods or solely humanity, and in understanding ourselves in turn then understanding how we relate to others in the development of the modern world.

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