Religion, Conflict and Education

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The aim of this special edition is to explore and discuss the complex relation between religion and education. This relation can, at times, be fraught and be the focus for conflict. This special edition will highlight some of the conflicts that have arisen in different national contexts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and identify some of the attempts to address the causes and effects of conflict. Religion continues to be an influence on the life and lifestyle of a significant number of people throughout the world. The Pew Research Center (2012) has produced an estimate of the contemporary global religious landscape. The Center estimates that 2.2 billion of the world's population are Christian (31.5%), 1.6 billion are Muslim (23.2%), 1 billion are Hindus (15%) and there are 500 million Buddhists (7.1%). There are 400 million Folk religionists (includes, for example, African religions and Chinese folk religions) (5.8%), 58 million following other religions, including, for example, Bahai, Jains and Sikhs (0.8%) and 14 million Jews (0.2%). There are 1.1 billion people (around one in six in the population of the world) who have no affiliation to religion (16.3%). According to the Pew Research Center, then, around 83.7% of the population has some form of adherence to religion.

Although this special edition is focused on religion, conflict and education we prefix our discussion with an acknowledgement of the positive influence of religion for individuals, communities and countries in the contemporary world. Religion provides many people with purpose, hope and a sense of belonging in life and can be integral in the construction and development of their identities. Religion can motivate and inspire people to act for the good and well-being of others. Religions can have a very powerful influence in society acting as pressure groups that challenge leaders and governments over issues of social justice and equity: fighting for the rights of the vulnerable, the voiceless and the dispossessed. In the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries this has been focused on issues such as: the just treatment of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; the alleviation of pov-

erty and deprivation; the promotion of fair welfare benefits for the unemployed, the sick and the elderly and the inclusion of the disabled. There are many examples that can be collated from around the world. In February 2014, forty-three Christian leaders in Great Britain (including twenty-seven Anglican bishops) signed a widely published letter that was highly critical of the government's welfare reforms. The letter highlighted the number of people who are now forced to access food banks in the UK (Beattie, 2014). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has a strong lobbying presence in America seeking to promote justice for migrants and the victims of human trafficking (The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2014). The Dalai Lama has a long-standing public commitment to Tibet and the preservation of Tibetan Culture (Dalai Lama Trust, 2014).

Religions have well established national and international aid agencies (or aid agencies that are affiliated to religions). Muslim Aid in the UK, for example, provides support for health and education in developing countries and also emergency relief for refugees in countries or areas facing crises. These include: Somalia; Pakistan; Sudan; Jordan and Cambodia. Muslim Aid has also established programmes to support the homeless and elderly in the UK (Muslim Aid, 2014). The United Sikhs organization seeks to provide humanitarian relief and support human development (United Sikhs, 2014). They founded GHANAIA (Giving Humanitarian Aid Necessities and Assistance Impartially to All) in 2003 and have provided relief for survivors of disasters such as the Asian Tsunami and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in America. There are many other examples that could be discussed including Christian Aid, Cafod and World Jewish Relief.

Having acknowledged the positive influence of religion, we now address the issue of religious conflict and how this can be manifested in education. Religious conflict can be closely related to ethnic, national, political and cultural disputes and can have a seriously detrimental impact on many aspects of interaction and engagement in society (structural, inter-group, inter-personal). This can have serious consequences for aspirations, plans and operational activities for societal harmony and cohesion.

Religious conflict can be classified as being *between* or *within* religions or it can be *with* or *about* religion. Religious conflict *between* or *within* religions can be described as inter or intra religious. In terms of inter-religious conflict, there have been many significant examples in the last fifty years in locations such as: Cyprus (the physical segregation of the Greek Christian Cypriots and Turkish Muslim Cypriots); India (Hindus and Muslims); Bangladesh (minority Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims) and Egypt (Muslims and Coptic Christians) (Reychler, 1997; Papadakis, 2005; Ethirajan, 2013; Solovieva, 2013). Similarly, there have been many examples of intra-religious conflict (sometimes referred to as inter denomi-

national or sectarian conflict) throughout the world. One notable example is the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland (Cochrane, 2013; Wolffe, 2014). Another example is the fractious historical divide between the Sunni (85% of the overall Muslim population in the world) and the Shia (15%) Muslims. This has caused tension and friction in the Middle East in countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia (Pew Research Center, 2011; Council on Foreign Relations, 2014). Our final example is the antagonism between Orthodox Jews and 'non-Orthodox' Jews (e.g. Reform Jews and Conservative) in America (Spero, 2013).

Religious conflict can also be focused on conflict that bodies or groups (e.g. government; secular organizations) have *with* or *about* religion. Religious perspectives, rights and morals can conflict or clash with government policies, legal systems and moral outlooks in some societies. The bitter opposition to the Zionist and secular state of Israel by the Haredi Jews provides an example of a religious group that vociferously and actively dissents from the ruling power in a country (Petras, 2013). There is continuing debate in countries such as Egypt and Turkey, which have a Muslim majority, about the nature and future of the secular state (Rahim, 2013). Religious groups can lobby against laws or embryonic laws that contravene their moral code (e.g. abortion, euthanasia). In an important demonstration of solidarity, the leaders of Britain's faith communities (including Christians of different denominations, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindu and Buddhist) all oppose the legalization of euthanasia in the UK (Caldwell, 2014). The conflict *with* religion can be conflated with issues of race and racial discrimination (Race & Lander, 2014). Perhaps a useful example is the increase in Islamophobia which has evolved in the post 9/11 and post 7/7 world. Islamophobia has served to develop the 'othering' of Muslims. This is related to a perceived religious difference that is deemed to be threatening but is also related to xenophobic fear and hostility towards migrants (Abbas, 2011).

Religious conflict can often extend to education and particularly school education. The conflict can be realized, partially realized, or, in a subtle form, perceived to be realized, in the structures, systems, curricula and relationships in schools. This can apply equally to faith schools (whether state-funded, partially state-funded or privately funded) and non-faith schools, and in national contexts where both types of school co-exist. The existence of state funded or partially funded faith schools can be particularly contentious. Some supporters of faith schooling argue that this form of schooling is the recognition of their right to choose the most appropriate form of education for their children 'in conformity with' their religious convictions (United Nations, 1948; Council of Europe, 2010). There may be limits, however, to how far governments are able to practically accommodate a diver-

sity of claims for faith schooling (Morris, 2008). Faith schools are perceived by those who oppose their existence to be exclusive, religiously divisive and potentially a means of inculcating and indoctrinating young minds into a particular religious worldview (McKinney, 2011). There are also claims that there is a clash of rights. When parents choose faith schooling for their children, this choice privileges the rights of the parents over the rights of the child (Marples, 2006). Others argue that these faith schools are anachronistic and can be understood to privilege the historical rights of some religions. These rights were established in an era when the state and organized religion engaged in some form of negotiation, often when national state systems of free compulsory school education were established (McKinney, 2013).

Ultimately, there are a number of fundamental arguments that underpin the opposition to faith schools (and also to confessional or faith formational religious education and observance). First, the opposition can be driven by a rejection of faith schools because they are not coherent with the secular aspiration of the separation of the state and organized religion (McKinney & Conroy, 2015). Second, the opposition can also be driven by the ambition to establish, consolidate or retain the principles of liberal education in state schools and ensure that young people have the opportunity to attain rational autonomy (Feinberg, 2006; Conroy & McKinney, 2010).

Non-faith state schooling is also a site for debates about the role of religion, religious education and religious observance in school education. Non-faith state schooling can be used as an opportunity to teach a broad religious education to promote knowledge and understanding of the diversity of religion and expression of religious belief. It is assumed that this will lead to a greater degree of tolerance and dialogue. There is a wide variety of ways in which religious education is incorporated into state school education. There are also conscience or opt-out clauses, supported by international human rights law, that grant parents the legal right to withdraw their children from religious education in schools. (Newcombe, 2013; Mawhinney et. al., 2010).

Religious education can be compulsory and retain a (contested) focus on one main religion such as Christianity (Scotland) or alternatively religious education can be compulsory but pupils focus on the content of their own religious tradition (Finland) (Kotiranta, 2013). A few countries have adopted the policy to exclude all religious education and religious observance from state schools. This is the situation in France, though religion can be addressed in curricular areas such as history, geography, literature, arts and philosophy but only in a non-confessional way (Dericquebourg, 2013; Ferrari, 2014). There is, however on-going debate in France about introducing religion as a curricular subject into state school education and

serious questions around the practical implications of this proposal for schools and the curriculum. Some countries insist that there should be no confessional or faith formational dimension to religious education in non-faith state schools to avoid any preferential treatment for particular religions or denominations. This is the situation in the United States where courses *on* or *about* religion are in fact permitted though these courses are not very common in practice (Clark, 2013). Similarly, religious education is a voluntary subject in school education in Estonia but is non-confessional (Kiviorg, 2013). Other countries such as the Czech Republic and Hungary provide the scope for Christian church representatives to deliver optional religious education in schools (Szabo, 2007; Fiala & Hanuš, 2007). This optional religious education is taught in a confessional way.

The marginalization or exclusion of religion, religious education and even religious observance from the world of school education, whether for secular or educational ideals, must be treated with some caution. Arguably, this marginalization or exclusion has the potential to limit the scope of school education and exclude important aspects of the lived experience of 83.7% of the population of the world.

In this special edition, key issues in conflicts in religion that are manifested in education emerge from across the world: Scotland; Israel; Italy; Northern Ireland; Republic of Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The special edition also highlights some of the suggested solutions that could be used to address these conflicts: many of the articles discuss ideas and potential processes that could be used to resolve conflict. The articles by Scuderi and Castelli are worth highlighting at this point, as these two articles are specifically focused on the importance of creating opportunities for authentic or genuine dialogue for school age children.

McKinney introduces the idea of a social problem and examines sectarianism as a social problem in contemporary Scotland. This helps to frame some of the key themes that will emerge in his article. He discusses Catholic faith schools as fully state funded and integrated into the school system yet their position is contested. He probes the history of the position of migrant Irish Catholics in Scottish society (and their descendants) and the historical opposition to Catholics and Catholic schools in Scotland grounded in anti-Catholicism (religious bigotry) or anti-Irishness (racism) and sometimes a combination of both. This has translated into a widely publicized contemporary discourse that is more rooted in secular opposition to faith schooling that proposes a relation between Catholic schools and the social problem of sectarianism. McKinney challenges the foundations of this contemporary discourse through close analytical scrutiny of the evidence and concludes that this discourse cannot be substantiated. This article highlights a manifestation of religious conflict that was rooted in conflict *within* religious denomina-

tions but has evolved into a manifestation of religious conflict as conflict *about* religion.

Hughes et al. present important findings from an initial stage of a major longitudinal research project in contemporary Northern Ireland. They explain that Northern Ireland has endured many years of ethno-religious divide and conflict. This well documented divide is territorial and also characterizes schooling. The majority of schools are maintained schools (predominantly Catholic) or state controlled or voluntary (predominantly Protestant). There are a small number of integrated schools. The authors seek to understand the impact of contact (adopting well attested contact theory) on pupils in the post–primary stages within schools in Northern Ireland. They argue that social deprivation is an important factor that has a negative influence and conclude that pupils from a more deprived background are less likely to be successful in intergroup interaction. The authors suggest ways in which contact programmes can be used more effectively in Northern Ireland: for example, by careful preparation of school pupils who initially articulate negative experience of the other group.

Renehan and Williams raise highly pertinent issues about contemporary challenges to the historical position and social influence of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland. These challenges are reflected in the current review of the aims, purpose and nature of schooling and, in particular, the religious affiliation, ethos and religious education in the primary schools throughout the country. The article raises some of the key issues that dominate many of the debates around state funded or partially state funded denominational schooling: the balance between inclusivity and exclusivity; the recognition of diversity but retention of denominational identity (including, in their context, the 'sacramental imagination'); the nature of the relationship of the denominational school to the religious body and an authentic knowledge and understanding of the rationale for denominational school education and the practical operation of the denominational school. They demonstrate that these issues are complex and conclude the article with some very insightful and nuanced comments about open and closed 'confessional' schools.

The article by Tolomelli is very thought-provoking as he explains the extraordinary divisive arrangements for school education in some parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the initiative described as 'Two schools under one roof'. The Bosnian and Croat children are physically separated and are taught using different curricula. He also discusses the close connections between religion and political parties and the political-religious implications of the reintroduction of religious education into schools – a reintroduction that has been motivated by ideology. In the very fraught and tense atmosphere of post-war life in Bosnia and Herzegovina,

schools and aspects of school education appear to be used to consolidate and exacerbate hardened and polarized positions of this divided society. This has serious implications for the identities of these children and young people and for the possibility of future societal cohesion (Majstorovic & Turjacanin, 2013).

Hager and Saba discuss a serious manifestation of the deep-rooted conflict between some Arab and Jewish students in higher education in Israel. The authors analyse two texts that were circulated in the Tel Hai College. The first text, a booklet called *Nakba Harta,* was produced by a Jewish Zionist organization called *Im Tirtzu* and ridicules the Palestinian narrative of the 1948 war. The title translates as *Nakaba bullshit* and is clearly designed to provoke and incite the Palestinian students. The second text, an email, was produced by the Iqra organization, an organisation which promotes the interests of Muslim Palestinian Arabs. This email calls upon Arab students to boycott the Student Day, denouncing it as corrupt and vice-ridden. Hager and Saba uncover the dangerous and invidious stereotypes that are employed by the authors of the two texts, including a demonization and denunciation of 'liberal' Jewish academics who hold a different, more critical, view on the Jewish/Palestinian divide. Hager and Saba are very effective in their conceptualization of racism as ultimately essentialist dehumanization in their close analysis of the two texts.

Zannoni presents the findings of some important qualitative research conducted with a small sample of boys and girls whose families are migrants. The author presents a fascinating and complex variety of responses to the socio-cultural and religious context of contemporary Italy. Some found that their common Christian faith is a shared bond, while others are highly critical of the lax practice they have encountered in Christianity in Italy. Some Muslim boys feel alienated by racist taunts and align themselves with the ideals of more radical expressions of Islam, while others are more secularized yet retain elements of religious belief and practice. This is symptomatic of the challenges faced by many Muslims in Italy as they strive to integrate into Italian society and the challenges faced by the young people from a Muslim background. Some of the boys and girls demonstrate an increasing move towards a more private religion while others reject the concept of God and organized religion. Zannoni calls for encounter and dialogue to promote a greater understanding of religious plurality and of plurality of expression within religious groups.

Castelli presents a fascinating account of a small-scale research project that aimed to assess the success of introducing dialogue skills to school pupils in religious education. He uses his pre-constructed dialogic pedagogy comprised of five skills: imagination; articulation; seriousness; humility and hesitation. Castelli provides an illuminating evaluation of the success of the project. He also provides a

sophisticated analysis of the project using Bakhtinian ideas of *unfinalisability, self-awareness outside of self* and *polyphony*. This paper provides some interesting (and evolving) ideas that can be used to help school pupils understand and experience the value of an authentic dialogue that can enable people to live with the challenge of difference.

Scuderi continues the theme of dialogue and the inclusion of different religions in schools education and society in Italy. She provides a very helpful list of characteristics of genuine dialogue. While this differs from Castelli's five skills, the two authors share a fundamental belief: that genuine or authentic dialogue can be transforming. She discusses three possible reactions to a new encounter: indifference, curiosity and closure. She argues that curiosity is the only reaction that can lead to genuine dialogue. She points out that the Italian Constitution safeguards the principle of religious diversity but this may not be exercised in practice in local contexts, including schools. Scuderi is inspired by the LINFA project for intercultural and interdenominational dialogue and proposes that the methods be applied to schools. She provides a detailed description of how this could be achieved and discusses some of the conditions for genuine dialogue.

The strength of the special edition lies in the impressive diversity and originality of the contributions and the different national contexts of the topics. The papers draw on a number of academic fields and research methodologies. McKinney provides a blend of historical (drawing on primary documents and sources) and sociological research, including sociological reconceptualization of sectarianism. Similarly, Tolomelli provides an historical and sociological analysis of the role of school education in political-religious conflict. Hughes et al. focus on the results of the first stage of a highly relevant, large-scale longitudinal quantitative study. These initial findings, and future results, will be of great importance in the debates about the future of society in Northern Ireland. By contrast, Zannoni presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with a small sample of males and females aged between 14 and 22. These interviews report on a markedly wide range of experiences and responses to these experiences, as young people attempt to negotiate Italian religion, culture and society (Khan, 2011). Scuderi explores the characteristics of genuine dialogue and proposes a knowledge transfer (or process transfer): a particular project focused on how dialogue can be transferred to schools. Castelli undertook an 'intuitive proactive' form of action research and, like Scuderi, closely engaged with academic literature on dialogue. Hagar and Saba engage in close textual analysis using the heuristic tool of racism as dehumanization. Renehan and Williams analyze in fine detail the implications of ongoing political and educational debates surrounding the position of faith schools and religious education, exploring the emerging possibilities.

The articles engage with the complexity of the conflicts that can occur in the interface between religion and education and explore the themes with careful and critical academic acumen, eschewing any form of superficial discussion and analysis. There are many important issues that emerge from the articles and some of the articles present research and research findings that are best described as challenging or even disturbing (e. g. Tolomelli, Hager & Saba). We are confident that the articles in this special edition will make a valuable contribution to raising international academic awareness of the topics and will be esteemed for their academic rigour and scholarship.

We would like to conclude with some heartfelt thanks. We would are grateful to the authors for their great willingness to contribute to this special edition. We thank them for their commitment to the quality of their work – in terms of the conceptualization and critical engagement with the topics researched. The authors were very open to editorial advice and were prompt to respond to this advice. We would also like to acknowledge and thank the many reviewers who were willing to spend time reviewing the papers. They were an invaluable part of the process of producing this special edition. We thank them most sincerely for their efforts and their expertise and their very helpful guidance to the authors and to the editors.

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