Praktische Theologie
in Geschichte und Gegenwart

Herausgegeben von
Christian Albrecht und Bernd Schröder

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Religion and Nationhood

Insider and outsider perspectives
on Religious Education in England

edited by

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Chapter Eight

The emerging inter-faith context in society and religious education

PAUL WELLER

This chapter explores the emerging inter-faith context in England, including the explicit inter-faith initiatives associated with this context, as both of these have interfaced with the development of school-based Religious Education since 1970.

History does not, of course, begin with the last quarter of the twentieth century. Therefore this period must also be located within a longer historical context, including the place of Religious Education within the context of the school system within which it is embedded. This system emerged out of an historically close nexus between religion (particularly Christianity) and education.[1] In contrast to some other European countries, one aspect of this is not only the presence of teaching on religion within the publically funded education system, but also the public funding of religiously-based schools within which there are varied degrees of autonomy concerning what is taught about religion.

Early in the twentieth century, when educational provision came under Government administration, the Church of England's denominational schools became part of a national framework as a result of an agreement between it and the state embodied in the *Education Act, 1902*. That led to the establishment of Local Education Authorities to govern both primary and secondary school education and the development of what became known as the 'dual system'. Later, towards the end of the Second World War, the *Education Act, 1944* confirmed this 'dual system' with the Church of England (the Church by law established in England), Roman Catholic, and (a much smaller number of) Methodist and Jewish schools, preserving a degree of autonomy as 'voluntary aided' or 'voluntary controlled' schools.

While (especially at primary level) forming a substantial proportion of the publically funded 'sector', schools of this kind have always been controversial.[2] Concerns have come not only (as might be expected) from the 'non-religious'.

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[1] JAMES MURPHY, Church, State and Schools in Britain, 1800–1970. London (1971).
[2] BRIAN GATES (2014) op cit.

Opposition has also been informed by religious perspectives. Among the Christian Churches, following the Baptist Union's 1868 acceptance of the principle of universal education, it called for separate religious and secular instruction. When W. E. Forster's *Elementary Education Bill, 1870*, proposed state financial subsidies to existing voluntary (largely Church of England) schools instead of integrating them fully into the proposed new national system, the Baptist Union protested against what it saw as an extension of denominational education at public expense, and appointed representatives to the National Educational League which campaigned for elementary education for all children, free from religious control.

On 27th May 1870 the Baptist newspaper, *The Freeman*, highlighted that Baptists had been the only Christian denomination, as such, to decide for secular education. When Arthur Balfour's proposals were made for what became the *Education Act, 1902*, the leading Baptist minister John Clifford (who became President of the Baptist World Alliance, 1905–11) launched the National Passive Resistance Committee against the payment of public rates to subsidise Church schools where denominational teaching was taking place. As a result, on several occasions he had his personal belongings confiscated, and a number of Baptist and other Nonconformist Christians were imprisoned for their refusal to pay.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, this kind of debate reignited[3] around the desirability or otherwise of extending these schools to include those rooted in other minority religious traditions,[4] – in particular to the creation of Muslim voluntary aided schools. Within the fee-paying sector a number of Muslim schools had developed and, during the 1980s and 90s, a significant body of Muslim opinion pressed the Government to grant public funding to them. The fact that, for many years, none of these applications were successful led to a concern among some that discrimination may have been involved in the decisions, while others argued that the further extension of such schools could be a significant threat to social cohesion.[5]

Eventually, in 1997 the New Labour Government decided to fund two Muslim primary schools. By the end of that year there were four Muslim and one Sikh school in receipt of public funding, while the terminology of 'faith school' came into use. Following the *Academy Act, 2010,* many 'faith schools' converted to 'Faith Academy' status, receiving public funding direct from the national

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[3] CHRISTIANS AGAINST RACISM AND FASCISM, Church Schools in a Multi-Religious Society. Leicester 1982.

[4] See MARIE PARKER-JENKINS, DMITRA HARTAS & BARRY IRVING, In Good Faith – Schools, Religion and Public Funding. Aldershot (2002).

[5] JOHN FLINT, Faith-based Schools: Institutionalising Parallel Lives?, in ADAM DINHAM, et al. (eds), Faith in the Public Realm – Controversies, Policies and Practices. Bristol (2009) pp. 163–82.

Government's Department of Education, being free of local authority control. As local authority control has generally weakened, debates have again reignited in relation to religiously based (and especially Muslim) schools in the context of security concerns about the radicalisation of young people reflected in the Government's *Counter Terrorism and Security Act, 2015* that included the so-called 'prevent duty',[6] which requires schools to identify even very young children deemed to be at risk of radicalisation.

A. The Changing Religion and Belief Landscape of England

Following the migrations that began in the 1950s, many peoples from the former British colonies 'brought the Empire back home'. This included people of other than Christian religions – especially Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Initially, the diversity created was seen primarily in terms of 'race' and 'ethnicity' and comparatively little account was taken of religious difference. But as migrant groups took on the characteristics of settled communities, it was increasingly recognised that the significance and challenge of increased diversity also included factors of 'cultural' and 'religious' diversity. During the 1980s and into the early 1990s, a number of groups that had originally organised themselves primarily along national or ethnic lines began also to identify themselves in religious terms. Eventually, a pattern of specifically religious organisations emerged, including Muslim mosques, Hindu temples and Sikh gurdwaras, at first in houses and derelict buildings and then in new buildings using traditional religious forms of architecture, to the extent that one could also speak of a literal physical change in the 'religious landscape'[7] as well as metaphorically of a demographic one.

As an analytical image for this development, the present author has characterised the UK as a 'three dimensional society', which has moved from a predominantly 'one dimensional' Christendom inheritance, through a 'two dimensional' and largely Christian-secular development, to one that is now "exhibiting contours that are Christian, secular and religiously plural".[8] Taking only the most recent part of the period under review, in England respondents tto the decennial Census identifying as 'Christian' have, between 2001 and 2011, fallen from 71.7% to 59.4%. At the same time, the proportion of those

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[6] DfE, The Prevent Duty: Departmental Advice for Schools and Childcare Providers. June 2015.

[7] Paul Weller, 'The Changing Patterns of Worship Space Provision in Britain', in IFNET (ed) Places of Worship – The Practicalities and Politics of Sacred Space in Multi-Faith Britain. London (1995) pp. 4–16.

[8] Paul Weller, Time for a Change: Reconfiguring Religion, State and Society. London (2005) p. 73.

identifying with an other than Christian religion has risen from 6.00 % to 8.0 %, and those identifying as being of 'no religion' has risen from 14.6 % to 24.7 %. Of course, the meaning and significance of such data is itself not uncontested.[9] Nevertheless, in headline terms it is clear from the decennial Census that the balance of the components within the 'three dimensional' society can now be described as 'less Christian', 'more secular' (in the sense of non-religious), and 'increasingly religiously plural' as compared with a decade ago While the absolute numbers, and even some of the proportions of the different religious groups in England, may not differ substantially from what is the case in some other European countries, both the degree of religion and belief diversity and of its presence in public life – from the regular contributions to the media through to official public events such as those in connection with the Millennium[10] – means that such diversity is arguably much more visible and 'normalised' in England and the UK than in the majority of other European countries.

B. The Emergence of Inter-Faith Initiatives and a new Inter-Faith 'Imaginary'[11]

Together with the emergence of significant communities of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and their representative bodies and places of worship, there has also been the emergence of specifically inter-faith initiatives, organisations and groups.

For many years, a network of local Councils of Christians and Jews based in those areas of the UK with significant Jewish populations provided a link between local, national and international dialogue among Jews and Christians.[12] However, during the last quarter of the twentieth century as the, third, 'religious plurality' dimension of our contemporary 'three dimensional' society grew in size and significance, other kinds of bi-lateral (especially, but not only, Christian-Muslim) and multi-lateral local inter-faith initiatives and groups gradually emerged.

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[9] PAUL WELLER, 'Identity, Politics and the Future(s) of Religion in the UK – The Case of Religion Question in the 2001 Decennial Census', in Journal of Contemporary Religion, 19:1 (2004) pp. 3–21; and DAVID VOAS & STEVE BRUCE op cit.

[10] For example the 'Shared Act of Reflection and Commitment by the Faith Communities of the United Kingdom' that took place in Parliament during the first weekend of the year 2000. For the text of the Act of Commitment, see the chapter on 'Inter-Faith Activity in the UK', in PAUL WELLER (ed), Religions in the UK – Directory 2001–3. Derby (2001) pp. 89–90.

[11] PAUL WELLER, 'How Participation Changes Things – 'Inter-Faith', 'Multi-Faith' and a New Public Imaginary', in ADAM DINHAM (ed), Faith in the Public Realm (2009) op cit, pp. 63–81.

[12] Initiatives concerned with Christian-Jewish relations were among the earliest forms of organised inter-faith activity in the UK, including the 1927 foundation of the London Society for Jews and Christians, while in 1942 the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) was formed.

Many, although not all of these of these groups, have been affiliated to the Inter Faith Network for the UK[13] (IFNET) (see further below) which has both resourced and encouraged their development, although a number were in existence before the Network was.[14] In 2003, the Network conducted a major survey of local inter-faith activity[15] which demonstrated that local inter-faith groups have a variety of histories, self-understandings and methods of working. This can include such objectives as a better understanding of other religious traditions; the achievement of social harmony; the securing of greater social and religious acceptance for minority religious groups; or an imperative from within one's own religion to work with others. In the early days of local inter-faith groups one of the main needs was for information about one another's beliefs and practices and much early inter-faith activity sought to meet that need.

Some of the early groups grew out of the work of local Community Relations Councils that had been set up in order to facilitate the integration of communities and groups understood primarily in terms of national and ethnic identities. An early example of a local group that focused specifically on the inter-faith aspects of relationships was the Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group, founded in 1974.[16] While the majority of these groups were originally established, and continued to be found, in more urban localities with a high degree of visible ethnic and religious diversity, they can also be found in more rural areas.[17] Many of the early initiatives were quite informal and had an individual basis of membership. Others, from quite early on, had a more 'corporate' and 'official' feel and aspired to have a broadly balanced representation of the religious traditions, communities and organisations in a given area. Thus Birmingham had both a Fellowship of Faiths and an Inter-Faiths Council.

In general, the development of inter-faith initiatives in the period under review has been one in which such initiatives have moved from a more religiously and socially peripheral position to a more 'mainstream' one. The pioneering nature of these and even earlier initiatives attempting to operate from the early part of the twentieth century at a national/international level, such as the World Congress of Faiths,[18] almost inevitably meant that they remained somewhat tangential to the foci, concerns and organisational priorities of the majority

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[13] See: http://www.interfaith.org.uk.

[14] IFNET, The Local Inter Faith Guide – Faith Community Co-Operation in Action. London (1999). It provides advice on the establishment and development of local inter-faith initiatives.

[15] IFNET, Local Inter Faith Activity in the UK – A Survey. London (2003).

[16] WOLVERHAMPTON INTER FAITH GROUP, 30 Years of Dialogue and Community Cohesion: Reflections on the Past, Visions for the Future. Review of the Past and Aspirations for the Next Thirty Years. Wolverhampton (2004).

[17] Such as the Cumbria Interfaith Forum and the Devon Faith and Belief Forum.

[18] See: http://www.worldfaiths.org and MARCUS BRAYBROOKE, A Wider Vision – A History of the World Congress of Faiths. Oxford (1996).

religious groups, communities and organisations. They were also often at least perceived to have been led by, and for, inter-faith 'enthusiasts' having a broadly syncretic if not syncretistic approach to religious diversity; as a home for those individuals who had, for doctrinal or moral reasons, become 'refugees' from the established religious traditions; or as a place of support for those from more socially and religiously marginalised religious traditions.[19]

However, as the population as a whole diversified, the challenge of living together in an increasingly plural society pressed 'mainstream' religious communities and groups to develop pragmatic ways of interacting and co-operating. As this has happened, other initiatives have either sought to address broader community and public life concerns and/or have been "wooed" by secular agencies.[20] Intersecting with this was a broader social trend in which governments of all political complexions have moved away (albeit on differently ideological grounds) from a more 'statist' vision of the provision of services in society to one that has sought to draw on the resources of civil society groups in the voluntary and community sectors, among which religious and inter-faith groups have been identified as having a particular contribution to make.

Beginning with the Tory Government's 1980s project of 'rolling back the state' and continued into the New Labour project of community 'partnerships', it was suggested that community and voluntary sector groups (including religious ones) have both the geographical presence and potential human and physical resources, with assistance from public funding, to provide appropriate local services. As local authorities increasingly sought to engage with, and facilitate, the contribution that religions can make to this, a new pattern of local inter-faith initiatives emerged, the main rationale for which lay in the mutual wish of local authorities and religious groups to work together for a vision of the common good. While some of these initiatives developed on the basis of their own vision and organisational impetus, especially during the period of the New Labour Governments an increasing number (often known as a 'fora of faiths') were, in effect, 'called forth' by local, regional and national governments, especially on the basis of the promise of the possibility of public funding. Local Government Association guidance on the interface between local government and inter-faith initiatives stated that: "The value of more formal structures of this kind in multi-faith cities and towns is becoming increasingly apparent".[21]

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[19] Paul Weller, 'Inter-Faith Roots and Shoots: an outlook for the 1990s', in World Faiths Encounter, 1 (1992) pp. 48–57.

[20] Weller (2009) op cit, p. 71.

[21] LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION, Faith and Community – A Good Practice Guide. London (2002) p. 24.

Utilising research findings and the associated 'communitarian' thinking developed from the work of James Coleman[22] by the American social scientist Robert Putnam,[23] it was argued that while individual religious traditions and groups produce 'bonding social capital', inter-faith initiatives had the potential to create the 'bridging social capital' that can benefit the wider society. In such a context, the role and strategic significance of pre-existing local inter-faith initiatives was enhanced and, where such initiatives did not previously exist, a new impetus was given to their creation.

At regional level, cross-religious bodies such as the West Midlands Faiths Forum; the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum; and the Forum of Faiths for the East Midlands[24] were created to connect with the structures that, during the period of the New Labour governments constituted key structures in English regional governance. The development of these organisations in many ways highlighted critical questions concerning the relationship between the proper autonomy and self-organisation of religious (including inter-faith) groups in their interface with public bodies, given the diverse agendas and financial dependencies that can be involved – in connection with which it should be noted that very few of these regional bodies survived the withdrawal of public funding following the 2008 financial crash and change of government.

At the national level, an independent body[25] that has arguably had the most substantial impact in relation to the inter-faith context of the UK and in a way that is arguably unique in Europe, has been the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom.[26] This was founded in 1987, facilitated by its first Director, Brian Pearce, OBE. As set out on the Network's website, it works "to promote understanding, cooperation and good relations between organisations and persons of different faiths in the UK"[27] and does this through:

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[22] JAMES COLEMAN, 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital', in American Journal of Sociology, 94 (1988) pp. 95–120.

[23] ROBERT PUTNAM, Bowling Alone – The Collapse and Revival of American Social Capital. New York (2000).

[24] Of which the present author was Chair, 2004–7.

[25] The Network is in receipt of public funding, but aims to maintain a diverse funding base being supported also by subscriptions from affiliated organisations, donations from religious groups, and grants from charitable trusts.

[26] PAUL WELLER, 'Inheritors Together – The Interfaith Network for the United Kingdom', in Discernment – A Christian Journal of Inter-Religious Encounter, 3:2 (1988) pp. 30–4; PAUL WELLER, 'Das 'Inter Faith Network for the UK' Eine neue Initiative in den interreligiösen Beziehungen', in JOHANNES LÄHNEMANN (ed), Das Wiederwachen der Religionen als Pädagogische Herausforderung – Interreligiöse Erziehung im Spannungsfeld von Fundamentalismus und Säkularismus. Hamburg (1993); PAUL WELLER, 'The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom', in Anglo-Indian Historical Review – A Journal of History, 20:1 (1994) pp. 20–6; and the majority of the chapter, PAUL WELLER, 'Interreligious Cooperation', in DAVID CHEETHAM, et al. (eds), Understanding Interreligious Relations. Oxford (2013) pp. 365–89.

[27] http://www.interfaith.org.uk.

[…] providing opportunities for linking and sharing of good practice, providing advice and information to help the development of new inter faith initiatives and the strengthening of existing ones. It raises awareness within wider society of the importance of inter faith issues and develops programmes to increase understanding about faith communities, including both their distinctive features and areas of common ground.

In taking forward this agenda the Network today acts as an umbrella body for over 180 affiliated organisations. In the latter part of the period under review, it played a pivotal role at the interface between inter-faith developments both more broadly and in relation to developments in the Religious Education curriculum, both in the actions it has taken in its own right, but also through partnership working with its affiliated bodies and in facilitating creative interactions between them and others. This approach reflects the Network's overall mode of working as a 'network of networks' in which it does not seek to replace its affiliated organisations but to complement and amplify their work, of which there are four categories, namely: national faith bodies; national and regional inter faith bodies; local inter faith bodies; and, significantly for the focus of this chapter, a number of what the Network describes as 'educational and academic bodies'.[28]

In addition to the Network, there have also been a number of what might be called more 'structural' inter-faith initiatives concerned more directly with the interface between government and religious and inter-faith groups. Early among these was the Inner Cities Religious Council (ICRC), established in 1992 within the Department of the Environment, and which played an important role in the development of inter-faith initiatives framed particularly around urban regeneration.[29] The ICRC was set up under the Conservative government as part of a shared response between the CofE and the government to the CofE's critical report[30] on disadvantaged areas and communities which had identified the economic and networking potential of places of worship and religious groups within the wider voluntary sector.

However, the interface between government, religious groups and inter-faith initiatives focused by the ICRC was relatively limited in scope. In co-operation with the IFNET, a 'Working Together' review was established that examined the challenges particularly for other than Christian (and non-established and minority Christian) communities in gaining access to government.[31] The outcome

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[28] See: http://www.interfaith.org.uk/members/educational-academic-bodies.

[29] Chris Beales, 'Partnerships for a Change – The Inner Cities Religious Council', in *World Faiths Encounter*, 8 (1994) pp. 41–6.

[30] ARCHBISHOPS' COMMISSION ON URBAN PRIORITY AREAS, *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation – The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas*. London (1985).

[31] HOME OFFICE FAITH COMMUNITIES UNIT, *Working Together – Co-Operation Between Government and Faith Communities: Recommendations of the Steering Group Reviewing Patterns of Engagement Between Government and Faith Communities in England*. London (2004).

of that review led, in 2006, to the establishment of a new Faith Communities Consultative Council (FCCC), bringing together the streams of work from the ICRC and the Working Together exercise across a range of national policy areas of mutual concern. This was jointly serviced by the Home Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and was later complemented by an 'independent expert' Faith Advisors Group to the SoS, other Ministers and civil servants in the Department of Communities and Local Government, [32] although this was only in place for one year (in 2010) until it and the FCCC were abolished by the incoming Conservative-Liberal Coalition government.

C. Religious Education in a Diverse Religion and Belief England

As developed in detail in chapters 1–3 of the current volume, in England there are both legal requirements and rights (for parents) relating to RE and CW. The *Education Act, 1944* made 'RI' mandatory and required that syllabuses should be "agreed" at a local level. The unwritten assumption of that time was that the content of such curricula would be Christian, so the Act merely specified that the content of the 'instruction' should not be of a 'denominational' character.

Nevertheless, and gaining ground during the first part of the period under review, a gradual shift took place, as reflected initially in a change of the name by which curricula were known from 'RI' to 'RE'. Increasingly, the public task of RE was no longer to be seen as 'instructing' or 'nurturing' pupils within a particular religion, but as educating them *about* religion. The scope of RE also began to be broadened to include religions other than Christianity and 'multi-faith syllabi' began to emerge, designed to help children understand the diversity of religious traditions. By the late 1970s many publically funded schools that employed RE specialists were teaching this kind of RE, although many schools continued to use only Christian content, or failed to provide the subject at all. Concurrently, many 'denominational' schools introduced learning about a variety of religions. However, with the 1988 ERA a new set of parameters were introduced in England, including the requirement that any new RE syllabus must "reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain".

The precise meaning and implications of these legal requirements has been widely debated since the enactment of the 1988 legislation. In 1994 SCAA published 'model syllabi' for RE in England as guidance to local authority ASCs. 'Voluntary aided' schools and Academies do not have to include other religious traditions within their Religious Education syllabi, although in practice they

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[32] And of which the present author was a member.

often to some extent mirror the Local Agreed Syllabus. In early 2000, the then new QCA published non-statutory guidance designed to supplement the QCA's model syllabi and released related schemes of work to exemplify work that can fulfil locally determined requirements. They were later substantially extended in its 2004 nsNFRE which included a commendation for Key Stage 3 of the curriculum to include some attention to "interfaith dialogue: a study of relationships, conflicts and collaboration within and between religions and beliefs". The QCA has also published guidance for schools on requirements for citizenship education and, in its RE document, it noted the role that RE can play in preparing pupils "for life as citizens in a plural society". Significantly for the focus of this chapter, the QCA's guidance suggested that "pupils can understand how believers in different religious traditions may interact with each other, not just historically, but in contemporary ways, nationally and locally", with schemes of work that included units dealing with inter-faith issues.

All Agreed Syllabi have to be reviewed on a five yearly basis. The ASCs that draw these up are composed of four committees which must individually and collectively agree on their content. As described elsewhere these include one each for local authority representatives; for professional teachers; for the (established) CofE; and for representation from all other Christian Churches as well as other religions. Membership of the SACREs[33] is similarly composed. SACREs have a statutory role in monitoring the delivery of RE and CW within the publicly funded sector of education in their area. ASCs are often constituted from the membership of the local SACRE. Evidence from Ofsted inspections in England suggests that RE has, generally grown in health and vigour in recent years including an unexpected rise in the number of students taking the subject for both GCSE and A Level qualifications (see ch. 11).

D. Inter-Faith Context, Inter-Faith Initiatives and Religious Education

Interaction or Parallelism?

In some ways, the development of specifically inter-faith initiatives and of those concerned with RE in schools have proceeded more in parallel than in (at least conscious) interaction. This has been in part because the aims and objectives of most of those engaged primarily in inter-faith developments have been broader than of those focused on RE; while many among those involved in the development of a broader RE curriculum have been concerned to differentiate a wid-

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[33] The history, composition and issues associated with these bodies is explored in more detail in the chapter by Julie Grove on the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education.

ening of educational knowledge and appreciation of religious diversity from any more theologically or ideologically informed kinds of engagement. Nevertheless, in ways that will be drawn out in this concluding part of the chapter there have been a number of specific and quite important ways in which interaction and not only parallelism has occurred – especially as mediated through inter-faith organisations and initiatives.

Schools, Universities and Communities

Compulsory school education impacts upon the lives of nearly all the population, offering a route to individual achievement, personal growth and the expansion of economic opportunity. Because of the place of children within society in general, but also the special transitional and inter-generational role that they can play within migrant populations, schools were in many ways the first public institutions that had to face the existential issues and opportunities arising from a newly 'three dimensional society'. From curriculum content and school rules, through to playground encounters between pupils, and on to parents coming to collect their children, schools have been an arena within which family traditions and identities, including religious ones, come into interaction with the beliefs and values of the wider and more diverse society. Such interaction can result in significant tensions for parents, children, and teachers alike, taking the form of either conflict or negotiation, and because of this, schools can play a significant role in shaping perceptions and approaches to issues of religious diversity and inter-faith dialogue.

   In the UK's second city of Birmingham, the extent and diversity of its early cultural and religious mix provided both the context and the impetus for the LEA to pioneer a new approach with an Agreed Syllabus that was one of the earliest to give other than Christian religions and ideologies a significant place alongside Christianity. Writing from Birmingham in the mid-1980s, Christopher Lamb noted that,

> […] the most obvious changes in school syllabus connected with the growth of a multi-faith and multi-racial society in Britain have been those in religious education … it was the growing presence of young Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in British schools which created an apparently unanswerable argument for the radical move away from a syllabus centred on the Bible to what might be called Religious Studies.[34]

In this early period there was a parallel ferment in the study of religion in higher education institutions involved in the initial training of school teachers. Both the practical issues of the classroom and the spread of the new Agreed Syllabi underlined the need for in-service training and Continuing Professional Development for teachers of RE who, by and large, knew little of other than Christian

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[34] CHRISTOPHER LAMB, Belief in a Mixed Society. Tring (1985) p. 23.

religions, having been trained in a traditional Christian-orientated way. This demand led in turn to changes in the courses offered by Teacher Training Colleges and Colleges of Education. As the scholar of religion Geoffrey Parrinder noted in a 1975 survey of the situation of Religious Studies in Britain,

Colleges of Education have turned increasingly to the wider study of religions for two reasons. The first is that religious education is compulsory in all British schools, the only subject that all must teach, and after general biblical teaching on 'agreed syllabuses' attention is often turned to other religions. The second reason is the immigration of workers in the post-war period, and the most significant for the study of religion has been the arrival of large communities of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, with many fewer Buddhists. Scores of mosques and temples have been opened in recent years, and industrial areas have many coloured children in schools. When a large proportion of a class is non-Christian, the teacher sees the necessity of broadening his concept of religious education and he looks for help in training teachers of religion.[35]

At this time, again partly through the change in population profile and partly through the new experiential issues being faced by RE teachers in schools, the historically almost exclusive approach of departments of Theology (with some optional courses in comparative religion) began to be prised open by non-confessional approaches to the study of religion characterised by the Anglo-Saxon terminology of 'Religious Studies'. As Trevor Ling had previously noted with an eye to the changing social context and the inheritance of the history of religions and Orientalism in British universities:

[…] one does not properly understand the religion of one's Pakistani immigrant neighbour if one attends only to the rise of Islam in the seventh century in Mecca and Medina. The modern Pakistani Muslim is heir also to centuries of tradition which has moulded the Islamic tradition of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent and have provided him with his present cultural and religious heritage.[36]

Approaches to the study of religion such as those advocated Ling gradually became informed by the broadly phenomenological approach historically associated with the pioneering scholar Ninian Smart and his emergent RS Department at what was then the new University of Lancaster (see chapter 9), in which scholars attempted to 'bracket out' their presuppositions in order to encounter and understand individuals, groups and organisations in their own right rather than through a theologically or theoretically interpretive prism. Phenomenological approaches to the study of religion have, in more recent times, been challenged for being too schematic and simplistic.[37] But importantly for the theme of the present chapter, such approaches helped to create an alternative paradigm

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[35] GEOFFREY PARRINDER, 'Religious Studies in Great Britain', in Religion, 5 (August 1975) p. 11 (1–11).

[36] TREVOR LING, 'Comparative Religion Today,' in Baptist Quarterly, 22 July 1967, p. 161.

[37] GAVIN FLOOD, Beyond Phenomenology – Rethinking the Study of Religion. London (1999).

and methodological approach for those working in school-based RE who, for whatever reason, were not satisfied with traditional, often Christian confessional, approaches that were part of the post Second World War inheritance.

Important in this regard has been the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education which was initiated from a conference on the theme of 'Comparative Religion in Education', held in spring 1969 at a hotel in the village of Shap, Cumbria, England. The conference participants (of whom only a few are still living) decided to establish a working party, to campaign for and support the development of, teaching about the World's Religions in schools and other educational settings. Its membership was drawn from experts in various fields, from primary schools through to Universities, coming from a variety of personal religious backgrounds and none. Since its foundation it has "promoted and supported good practice in the teaching of world religions at all levels of education" seeking to achieve this by producing "accurate information and resources for those involved with religious education and religious studies"[38]

The Working Party is composed of around thirty people who contribute to it in their individual capacities. Among its most well-known and influential outputs has been the annual *Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals*, originally published annually (but covering a fifteen month cycle) as a hard copy wall-chart for use in a classroom or office, and accompanied by an explanatory booklet that includes a detailed listing of religious festivals, with both now being available electronically. Between 1978 and 2009, the Working Party also produced an annual journal on *World Religions in Education* which, in each issue, explored a different theme from a variety of faith tradition perspectives (now freely available online)[39] as well as highlighting and reviewing important books and other resources related to the key theme. Together with arranging conferences and courses, the Shap Working Party has offered a free advisory service and published a range of key books, especially in two editions of its *Festivals in the World Religions*.[40]

The emergence of such initiatives needs to be seen in the context also of changes that were, at least in parallel, also underway in the majority Christian traditions and community in relation to traditional theological understandings and which themselves gave 'permission' to majority Christians to think and approach questions of religious diversity, epistemology and soteriology in a different way, and which gradually came to affect the curriculum of University departments of Theology and Christian clergy training Colleges.[41] A radical

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[38] See: http://www.shapworkingparty.org.uk/mission.html.

[39] http://www.shapworkingparty.org.uk/journals.html.

[40] ALAN BROWN (ed) (1986) op cit.

[41] ALL FAITHS FOR ONE RACE, Blind Leaders of the Blind – Theological Training in Today's Plural Society. Birmingham (1981); KENNETH CRACKNELL & CHRISOPHER LAMB, Theology on Full Alert. London (1984).

stimulus to these changes came about through the impact of the work of the philosopher of religion and Christian theologian John Hick.

Hick argued for what he called a 'Copernican Revolution' in theology in which, in contrast to the more traditional Christian-centric view of religion and theology, the new knowledge of other religions brought with it a demand which was analogous to the need which Copernicus felt to construct a scientific theory more adequate to the observed workings of the physical universe. Hick believed that theologians were increasingly recognising the contradictions between their inherited theories and the experienced realities of the modern world but, that in order to deal with this they were trying to stretch traditional approaches to breaking point instead of creating new theories – a process he likened to the theory of 'epicycles' in pre-Copernican science. Hick's argument was given classical expression in his book, *God and the Universe of Faiths*,[42] but his basic ideas had been set out earlier in an article in the *Expository Times* as part of that journal's series on 'Learning From Other Faiths', in which Hick had argued that:

[…] the Copernican revolution in theology must involve an equally radical transfor-
mation of our conception of the universe of faiths and the place of our own religion
within it. It must involve a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the
thought that it is God who is at the centre and that all the religions of mankind, including
our own, revolve around Him.[43]

In this early period, Hick worked in the University of Birmingham's Theology Department and his quest for a new understanding of the universe of faiths in the economy of God was very much related to the circumstances of his theologising.[44] Given the work done by the Birmingham Council of Faiths; the emergence in the city of national organisation All Faiths for One Race; and an LEA that, as has already been noted, developed one of the earliest of the more inclusive RE curricula that reflected the diversity of the city's inhabitants, it is perhaps not surprising that Birmingham was also home to these significant Christian theological developments. Indeed, Hick himself acknowledged that this change in his thinking had occurred through his encounter with religious diversity, thus: "The whole subject of the relation between Christianity and other religions is one which I had, in effect, largely ignored until coming to live in the multi-cultural, multi-coloured, and multi-faith city of Birmingham." [45]

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[42] John Hick, God and the Universe of Faiths. London (1974).

[43] John Hick, 'Learning From Other Faiths: The Christian View of Other Faiths', in Ex-
pository Times, 84 (November, 1972) p. 38.

[44] John Hick, 'Living in a Multi-Cultural Society: Practical Reflections of a Theologian',
in Expository Times, 89 (January, 1978) pp. 100–4.

[45] Hick, God and the Universe of Faiths, pp. xviii–ix.

In due course, theologians in other Christian traditions began the task of serious engagement with other than Christian religious traditions, with the (respectively) Anglican and RC theologians Alan Race[46] and Gavin D'Costa[47] producing what also became very influential books in this debate, particularly since their textbook style and format made them readily usable in the field of theological education. The work of Gavin D'Costa was particularly important in the RC context in the period following the opening to other religious traditions articulated in the Second Vatican Council because, as the former Executive Secretary of the former British Council of Churches Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths, Kenneth Cracknell pointed out, writing in the mid-1980s, "It is something of a paradox that while, ever since Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world has been producing leading thinkers and activists in the field of inter-faith relationships, the English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish hierarchies are very far behind other Churches in the British Isles".[48] At the same time, specifically in relation to the interface between Catholic theology and RE in Catholic schools, Charlotte Klein noted that some excellent and early grassroots was, for example, done on the revision of Catholic textbooks in the light of the new teaching on the Jews, as charted in an unpublished thesis on English religious textbooks written by Sister Ann Moore OLS, and submitted to the Roman Pontifical Institute, Regina Mundi in 1967.[49]

E. The Resourcing of More Inclusive Religious Education Developments

One of the key areas in which early local inter-faith groups engaged with local authorities was in relation to the resourcing of the more inclusive RE curricula which gained pace in the 1970s and 1980s. This is related to efforts to develop what later became known as the challenge of developing 'religious literacy'[50] among public bodies and the general public. Initiatives of this kind were therefore situated at the important interface between broader public education about religion and school-based RE. Indeed, a number of the early organisa-

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[46] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism – Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*. London (1983).

[47] Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: the Challenge of Other Religions*. Oxford (1986).

[48] Kenneth Cracknell, 'Within God's Gracious Purposes: Inter-Faith Dialogue in Britain', in *Ecumenical Review*, 37 (October 1985) p. 459 (455–466).

[49] Charlotte Klein, 'Catholics and Jews – Ten Years After Vatican II', in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 12 (Fall 1975) p. 476 (471–83).

[50] Yorkshire and Humber Regional Assembly, *Religious Literacy – A Practical Guide to the Region's Faith Communities*. Wakefield (2002). Cf the current thrust in Adam Dinham & Matthew Francis, *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice*. London (2015).

tions such as All Faiths For One Race (AFFOR) which came out of the city of Birmingham, that has already been noted as having been a crucible for many related developments in this area, were concerned with both these aspects of education.

A number of the local initiatives that were active in this field were, strictly speaking, not 'inter-faith' organisations, but were rather organisations of 'multi-faith' composition that saw themselves as having an educational role, or were educational initiatives seeking full and active participation from diverse religious groups. Examples of such included Leeds Concord and – from the present author's own city of Derby – the Derby Open Centre, established in 1981. From its inception the Open Centre, as well as hosting the specifically inter-faith initiative, the Derby Multi-Faith Group, acted more broadly as a broker for educational visits to places of worship and as a resource centre for a collection of artefacts used in Religious Education in schools. As stated on the Centre's website, "our main focus has been to support schools and teachers in the delivery of their R. E. and PHSE curriculum" and that it is "passionate" about its "work with schools". [51] The website explanation given for this is that "…in this ever-changing society, our work helps children to understand the many communities that make up Britain today. This is achieved through a fun, visual experience, away from the classroom, that stimulates their imagination and confidence."

The Centre offers visits to places of worship; special events; CRB-vetted speakers on various religions; a hireable mobile exhibition and on-line resources; and workshops on a variety of themes related to religious and cultural diversity, such as Arabic calligraphy, Asian marriage and mehndi patterns, Jewish cookery, Hindu clay divas etc. [52] Examples of unsolicited feedback from Centre users found on its website included one from a trainee teacher at the University of Derby who said: "Really enjoyed the visits, very relevant to trainee teachers". Another from a teacher at a local Church of England junior school stated: "A thoroughly enjoyable and informative day seeing the Hindu Temple. It supported the children's learning perfectly and they loved the marriage workshop! Thank you all". As also explained on the Centre's website: "We have an excellent understanding of the Agreed Syllabus and as members of Derby City & Derby County SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) we are listed as a main resource for local schools." Until recently the Centre received funding from the Local Authority in recognition of its role and services, although this has been recently lost within the cuts to public funding that have occurred in the context of austerity measures. In its present form the Open

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[51] See: http://www.derbyopencentre.org.
[52] http://www.derbyopencentre.org/services.

Centre specifically abjures any religious character, stating that: "As part of our activities we work closely with many different communities, faith organisations and places of worship as well as representatives of secular organisations; however the Open Centre is not a religiously based organisation and has no affiliation to any specific faith based groups."

In this regard, the Open Centre contrasts with the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby[53] which came about as an explicitly inter-religious initiative, although open to non-religious participation. Its focus has been one of a broader 'public education', although it does provide some support to trainee teachers from the University of Derby. Its building hosts acts of religious worship and meditation as well as more inclusive opportunities for reflection and discussion; it promotes 'Conversations Across Faiths' and it also delivers Religious Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Training developed on a European level by Belieforama,[54] of which the Centre is a partner organisation, with the Centre having hosted the training's very first Train the Trainers Workshop in October 2005. In addition, the Centre has developed an adapted version of this originally adult education programme for use in work specifically with schoolchildren in the Derbyshire Local Authority. Another key way in which the Multi-Faith Centre has contributed to the interface with the school curriculum is through its involvement, from 2001 onwards, in the *Religions in the UK* directory project, the four editions of which were edited by the present author,[55] and the sales feedback on which indicates that it has been extensively used in schools, in both RE and more broadly. [56]

F. National Inter-Faith Initiatives and Inclusive Religious Education

The IFNET's 'educational body' category of affiliation now includes the Cambridge University Interfaith Programme; the Community Religions Project, University of Leeds; the Institute of Jainology; the Islamic Foundation; the

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[53] See: http://www.multifaithcentre.org; and PAUL WELLER, 'How Far Can We Go Together? Reflection On and From the Development of the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby', in Internationale Kitchliche Zeitschrift, Bern Interreligious Oecumenical Studies, vol 2 (2015) pp. 95–113.

[54] See: http://www.belieforama.eu.

[55] PAUL WELLER (ed), Religions in the UK – A Multi-Faith Directory. Derby (1993); n. e. (1997); n. e. 2001; 2007–10 n. e. (2007).

[56] In 2001 the present author was honoured, "on behalf of the team at the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby for the *Religions in the* UK Directory 2001–03" by receipt of the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education prize that is awarded each year to "someone, or some organisation, that has made an outstanding contribution to RE".

NASACRE; the REC; the Shap Working Party; the Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter; the Woolf Institute; and the WASACRE.

This category is not intended for any and all academic or educational organizations engaged in the study of religion and religions. Rather, it is for those specifically concerned with, and contributing from an academic perspective to, the relational dimensions of religions, particularly with reference to the UK context. In many ways during the Network's history this category has been the most challenging for it fully to develop in its own right, perhaps because, as with organisations such as the Open Centre in Derby, the bodies that compose this category of affiliation are, by and large, not specifically religious, although they include participant individuals and organisations that are. But it has also been precisely this which has been an important part of the Network's overall balance.

The Network's affiliation structure means that, although there are sometimes those both within and beyond it who want the Network to undertake a number of initiatives which might increase its own visibility, it often holds back from doing so because it sees some of these roles or tasks as more properly belonging to one of its affiliated bodies. Because of this, one of its central functions is as a means of communication between its affiliated bodies and their diverse interests, resources, helping to facilitate their contributions to one another, to government, to public bodies, and to the wider society.

In relation to RE in schools, some important frameworks of co-operation preceded the existence of the Network. In the case of the Christian Churches, a Joint Churches Education Policy Group facilitated this engagement, including consultation with the Department of Education on 'faith schools'. As long ago as 1973, the REC was established to provide a framework for faith communities more generally, including the Churches, to consider together issues around RE and CW, and to engage with Government around these (see ch. 1). From the beginning of the Network, the REC and the Network were in mutual affiliation, this arrangement having come out of an agreement that the Network would not seek to duplicate the RE focused work of the REC, but rather that both would act in mutually complementary ways, being enriched in their respective aims and objectives by both this differentiation and connection.

On the REC's website is the byline "Working together to strengthen the provision of religious education in schools, colleges and universities".[57] Like the Inter Faith Network for the UK, the RE Council is itself an umbrella body composed of independent member organisations that support the Council's aims.[58] These include faith community bodies, inter-faith organisations, and professional bodies or associations concerned with RE and the teaching of

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[57] See: http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk.
[58] See: http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/members/rec-members.

it, such as NATRE,[59] a subject association for RE teachers; AULRE,[60] which links academics across higher education engaged in Initial Teacher Training, Continuing Professional Development and research in relation to all aspects of Religious Education; AREIAC,[61] which supports local authority, diocesan and independent advisers for RE; NASACRE,[62] supporting SACREs in each Local Authority; and Shap WP, already previously discussed above. The various member organisations are described on the REC's website as being "engaged in providing support for RE in complementary ways, some specific to one religion and others to a particular aspect of the subject."[63]

As well as working together with the REC, the Network has also co-operated with the NASACRE: for example in a June 2001 seminar and report on the challenges and opportunities involved in building inter-faith issues into the curriculum[64] and again in 2009 in a jointly sponsored seminar on collaborative working between local inter-faith groups and SACRES.[65] Since 1997, the IFNET has also been centrally involved in the development and organisation in the UK of what is now an annual Inter Faith Week,[66] in which wider public educational initiatives have been undertaken in relation to religions, beliefs and relationships between them, including extensive activities in schools. In such initiatives the Network has not been alone. For example, the Three Faiths Forum has a significant schools programme,[67] which includes school linking; professional development for teachers and educators around identity, faith and belief in the classroom and also controversial issues in the classroom; as well as broader intercultural training.

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[59] See: http://www.natre.org.uk.

[60] See: http://www.aulre.org.uk.

[61] See: http://www.areiac.org.uk.

[62] See: http://www.nasacre.org.uk.

[63] http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/members/rec-members.

[64] IFNET & NASACRE, Examining Issues and Practicalities of Introducing Inter Faith Issues into the Curriculum. London (2001): http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/all-publications/all-publications/99-inter-faith-issues-and-the-re-curriculum/file.

[65] IFNET & NASACRE, Local Inter Faith Organisations and SACREs. Working together for understanding and community cohesion. London 2009: http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/all-publications/all-publications/7-local-inter-faith-organisations-and-sacre-working-together-for-understanding-and-community-cohesion/file.

[66] See: http://www.interfaith.org.uk/take-part/inter-faith-week.

[67] See: http://www.3ff.org.uk/schools.

G. Religion and Belief, the Secular and the Broadening of 'World Religions'

The Inter Faith Network's 1991 *Statement on Inter-Religious Relations in Britain* noted that: "Our religious traditions offer values and insights of great worth to society, and provide a framework of meaning within which individuals can interpret their experience" and that:

> Both within and between our communities there are significant differences in the ways in which we translate these values and ideals into ethical judgements concerning specific personal and social issues. But a recognition of the extent to which we share a range of common values and ideals can contribute to a wider sense of community in our society.

But, of course, a concern for morality and shared values is not the preserve of religious or organisations or inter-faith initiatives. In curriculum terms, matters of values and ethics have often formed a significant part of Religious Education curricula and in the relationship between such curricula and personal and social education. An early national initiative focused on values in education was the National Association for Values in Education and Training, while in 1995 the relatively short-lived Values Education Council of the UK was established, linking a range of religious and secular bodies concerned with the relationship between education and values. Also in that year, SCAA convened a National Forum for Values in Education and the Community, which led to an agreed statement about a framework for moral education in schools. The work of the Forum was reflected in guidance for schools on moral education produced in 2000 by the QCA (the successor body to SCAA).

In relation to RE, from some of the early more inclusive RE curricula (such as that of the Birmingham LEA) onwards, and especially (but not only) because of a concern for the place of the moral and ethical dimensions of RE there has been active debate about the extent to which it should properly also include humanist perspectives. At the same time, questions and issues have opened up concerning the broadly descriptive 'world religions' approach that was found in the early broadening of RE curricula on the basis that it was in danger of presenting an overly schematised and relatively 'surface' understanding of religious traditions, beliefs and communities, as well as one which did not take sufficient account of the complexity of religious diversity beyond the generally recognised 'world religions' and in terms of the often hybrid nature of its lived reality.

In both these ways, therefore, the development of RE curricula has encountered the challenges posed by awareness of disciplinary boundaries and the criteria for them. Similar questions of boundaries and criteria have increasingly pre-occupied inter-faith initiatives – particularly as these became more engaged with public life. Membership of the ICRC was limited to Christian, Hindu, Jew-

ish, Muslim and Sikh involvement, thus excluding the Bahá'í, Buddhist, Jain and Zoroastrian traditions that were part of the IFNET from its beginning. Similar issues were encountered in relation to the Faith Communities' Consultative Council. The IFNET had a focus on specific 'world religious traditions' with substantial communities in the UK, resulting in the participation via national representative organisations of the Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian traditions. The collaborative nature of the original *Religions in the* UK directory project between the University of Derby and the Network meant these traditions were also the primary focus of that project and publication. In popular parlance these became known as 'the nine', as a result of which a critique developed that this legitimated the notion that these were the only 'recognised' religious traditions as compared with others that were more socially and religiously marginalised.

The Network's original boundaries came about because of the concern that many previous inter-faith initiatives had been seen as somewhat marginal to the principal religious communities in the country, and because of a wish to engage this new initiative with that 'mainstream'. Nevertheless, the question of Pagan membership was raised regularly at Network annual general meetings, culminating at the Network's silver jubilee AGM with a formal membership application from the Druid Network. While Pagan individuals have always been active within the Network as individual members of national and local inter-faith initiatives, the question at stake focused on applications from Pagan national religious organizations to affiliate to the Network as national representative bodies.

On one side of this debate were pragmatic arguments that Pagan affiliation was inappropriate, either because some 'mainstream' religious groups that might find such affiliation problematic, and/or because it was thought that such affiliation might affect the standing of the Network with government and other public bodies. By contrast, others pointed out that, on numerical grounds, UK Census results showed there were more Pagans in the UK than there are people of some other religious traditions (for example, Jains and Zoroastrians) which have national representative organizations affiliated to the Network and that Pagan traditions can have a claim to at least some continuity with the original religious traditions of these islands. In local inter-faith initiatives, there has always been a much wider range of practice. From an early period the Lincoln Inter-Faith Forum listed Pagans among its member traditions. Other local bodies, such as the Leicester Council of Faiths took a different position.

In the most recent part of the period under review, the introduction of *European Convention on Human Rights* to British law through the *Human Rights Act, 1988*, resulted in the framing of these issues in a new way. This is equality and human rights law does not specify a list of recognised religions. Therefore,

for a body in receipt of public funding to exclude some religious groups from membership was seen as increasingly problematic, even though the *Equality Act, 2012* does allow religious organizations to provide a rationale for having certain carefully defined exemptions (which include some limited exemptions bearing upon their self-definition of patterns of membership). But increasingly such a stance was seen as being contrary, if not to the letter of the law, then to its broad spirit and intention. In more recent times, during the period of its current Director, Dr Harriet Crabtree, the Network has opened out its membership now to include expressions of religion that are not limited to 'the nine' traditions that were the founding members of the Network. Thus now within the Network's national faith body members are the Druid Network and the Pagan Federation.

Similar arguments relating to public funding in relation to equality and diversity law were also used in relation to the possibility of Humanist organizations affiliating to the Network. As with Pagans, Humanists have been involved in the Network through other categories of affiliation, including especially via the academic and educational bodies affiliated to it. At the same time, while Pagans clearly came within the category of 'religions', most Humanists do not see themselves as 'religious', and most religious people would share that view. However, in the context of equality and human rights law, 'belief' includes 'non-religious' as well as religious belief and lack of such belief. Thus, as confirmed in the case of *Grainger Plc and other v. Nicholson* (2009), 'environmentalism' was deemed to be a philosophical belief, but with the Employment Appeal Tribunal also specifying that for a 'belief' to be recognized under equality and human rights law, it needed to:

[…] be genuinely held; be a belief and not an opinion or viewpoint, based on the present state of information available; be a belief as to a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour; attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance; and be worthy of respect in a democratic society, compatible with human dignity and not conflict with the fundamental rights of others.

Indeed, when the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)[68] was founded, in taking on its remit for 'religion and belief' as one of a number of 'protected characteristics', the EHRC tried to set up (with input from the Inter Faith Network) a Religion and Belief Consultative Group. The purpose of this was to facilitate discussion between faith community representative organisations, the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society on issues arising in this field. However, as the emphasis of this group started to move into the direction of perhaps becoming a formal advisory body on 'religion or belief' for the Commission, the Group fell apart with the withdrawal from it of major Christian representative bodies. In so doing, it gave a sharp reminder of

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[68] http://www.equalityhumanrights.com.

the importance of the 'secular' and the 'non-religious' within our 'three dimensional'society when dealing with issues of religion and belief plurality.

H. Inter-Faith Initiatives and Religious Education in 'Three Dimensional' Interface

The presence and claims of diverse religions and belief in a 'three dimensional' society that is composed of 'Christian', 'secular' and 'religiously plural' dimensions poses profound practical and epistemological challenges for people of all religions, beliefs and values. As has already been noted, schools have been one of the key contexts in which these challenges came together and, within schools, especially in relation to the RE curriculum.

These debates have included such questions as whether the Christian tradition should be main one to be taught in schools, because without a knowledge of this tradition neither the historical inheritance of the country, nor the beliefs and values of a majority of its people can be understood. But if that is the case, what would that mean for the role and place in RE of people and groups of other than Christian religious traditions who, in our increasingly 'three dimensional' society are no longer 'guests' but are now full citizens in British society curricula? But then what might be the role of RE in the context of wider social concerns about shared values and social cohesion, to which people of non-religious traditions, such as Humanism, have things to contribute? In both the religion and belief landscape and in the structures of public life, as also in the RE curriculum and how it has been developed and taught, minority religious traditions have moved from being 'guests' within a framework determined by 'hosts'; and from advocacy and organisation by Christians on behalf of others, through to more 'equal' approaches, all set within a complex overall balance for 'governance' within our increasingly 'three dimensional society.

The nineteenth century constitutionalist Walter Bagheot spoke of both the 'dignified' and the 'efficient' parts of the constitution and aspects of the governance that flows from it. As distinct from 'government' more narrowly understood, 'governance' is more concerned with the action, manner or system of governing, including those diverse policies, structures and mechanisms through which the legislation, policies and practices of national and local governments are translated into the wider context of civil society. As long ago as 1996,[69] the present author suggested that the governance of the England's 'three dimensional complexity was something that, in many ways, Local ASCs and SACREs

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[69] Paul Weller, *The Salman Rushdie Controversy, Religious Plurality and Established Religion in England*, PhD thesis, University of Leeds, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, July 1996, pp. 294–95.

were among the earliest bodies in British society that attempted to provide a structural forum for what could be called 'values outcomes negotiations'. In this, it is not the various underlying educationally, politically and religiously informed values themselves that are under negotiation – which for some may be the non-negotiable presuppositions of the particular and distinctive positions which they bring to the common forum. Rather, it is a process in and through which people of very varied convictions and perspectives who must live together in a very diverse society commit themselves to 'holding the ring' for finding what are the most generally acceptable negotiated outcomes of their values for discerning ways of living together in a plural society.

In the conduct of such processes, ASCs and SACREs can be seen as already, in the extremely sensitive area of the religious education of children and young people, modelling 'parallel worked alternatives' for how the wider society's structures might further develop governance of its "three dimensional" diversity in other spheres. Of course, ASCs are far from being without limitations and weaknesses. Thus the structures of ASCs and SACREs embed the continuing substantial role of Christianity and, in England that the particular role of the CofE as a Church established by law. But within these bodies, space is also made for the participation of other Christian and other religious traditions. The secular Local Authority is also represented, as are teachers who have professional expertise.

In the ASC, despite the fact that the CofE's position as established church remains relatively privileged in terms of having a part to itself, the basic structural and working principle that is of potentially wider importance is, negatively speaking, that there is no privileged power or 'veto' or, positively speaking, that all the parts have to agree, separately and jointly. In the SACREs, these and other voices contribute to pragmatic decision-making on 'determinations' made within the overall framework of the law.

Through their structuring and processes at the interface between religious groups (Christian and other), professional educators and secular Local Authorities, these bodies have demonstrated that it is possible to provide ways forward in our 'three dimensional' society which neither presuppose the dominance of one religious tradition or the exclusion of all, and neither the full incorporation of religions into government, nor their complete detachment from it. In so doing, out of the interface between RE and the increasingly inter-faith context of contemporary society, SACREs and ASCs have made a relatively unrecognized but distinctive, creative and productive contribution to the evolution of an emergent new and broader 'socio-religious contract' in England and the UK.