

Chapter 1

Introduction: Changing Perspectives and Themes of the Landscape of Religious Education



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A Landscape

Carl Dennis- 1939-

This painting of a barn and barnyard near sundown

May be enough to suggest we don't have to turn

From the visible world to the invisible

In order to grasp the truth of things

We don't always have to distrust appearances

Not if we're patient. Not if we're willing

To wait for the sun to reach the angle

When whatever it touches, however retiring,

Feels invited to step forward

Into a moment that might seem to us

Familiar if we gave ourselves more often

To the task of witnessing. Now to witness

A barn and barnyard on a day of rest

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Z. Gross (ed.), *Reimagining the Landscape of Religious Education*,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20133-2_1

When the usual veil of dust and smoke
Is lifted a moment and things appear
To resemble closely what in fact they are
<https://poets.org/poem/landscape>.

1.1 Aim and Scope

This book brings together new thinking and research on religious education's complex and evolving role in the multicultural, diverse post-modern era. Religious education occupies a contested space whether in different contexts around the world, at different levels of education, and from different theoretical lenses. The book analyzes data from five continents: Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and America and from three different religious perspectives: Christian, Muslim, and Jewish. The ongoing, changing nature of the world due to increasing secularization, rapid technological change, mass immigration, globalization processes, conflict, and challenging security issues, from inter to intra state levels, and with shifting geopolitical power balances, generates the need to reconceptualize where religious education is positioned (Gross & Rutland, 2014). Claims that religious education on its own can be an agent of moral, social, and spiritual transformation are disputed (Miedema, 2017; Moore, 2007; Saada & Gross, 2017; Waghid, 2011). There is significant controversy about whether special religious education, that is in-faith education, still has a role within the post-modern world (Gross & Rutland, 2015, 2021). This collection will facilitate new understandings from empirical and reflective accounts in a variety of countries and political contexts, as well as provide innovative methodological approaches to the study of education and religion.

Initiatives in religious education, interfaith education, and social cohesion are not only linked to the historical and social contexts, but also to issues of civic and moral education (Gross, 2013). Studying education's role in religious and interfaith encounters is often justified by the need to help secure the future against further exclusions, xenophobia, and violations of human rights, whether based on ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. At a time when many societies are more diverse than ever before, legitimate concerns about religion, nationalism, and xenophobia underscore the importance of an inquiry into whether religious, multicultural sensitivity, and critical interfaith education can function together to develop mutual understanding and shared goals (Barnes, 2014; Selçuk, 2017; Valk, 2010, 2017; Valk et al., 2017).

This volume focuses on the challenges and opportunities that the new global, political, social, and religious milieu, promoted through social media and modern education, poses for religious education through four themes. First, it raises the question of how one can create an inclusive, religious worldview in the face of growing tribalism and xenophobia. This has increased with the minority problems in Europe

and the United States, as well as in Australia and China, the second theme. In the face of these contemporary challenges, it aims to investigate how religious education can develop critical thinking, facilitate social justice, and respond to totalitarian rule with a more liberal approach, which is explored through the third theme. Finally, this book investigates issues relating to spirituality, prayer, and affective learning, which can respond to the need for emotion among young people in the contemporary world.

The object of this book is to delineate the contours of the topography of religious education and the emergent landscape, from the contemporary research perspective of religious education in various geographical and cultural contexts. In so doing, this book provides a multi-layered, inclusive picture of Religious Education which reflects the *Zeitgeist* and the new challenges education, religion, and religious education face today.

1.2 The Need to Provide a Conceptual Mosaic

An in-depth study of the cumulative research in this book shows that in the post-modern world it is impossible to offer a one-dimensional, coherent, closed, and cohesive picture of religious education (Barnes, 2014; Gross, 2013; Jackson, 1997; Selçuk, 2017; Ziebertz, 2011). Instead, in the present challenging era, with its vast range of options and questions, researchers strive to examine questions that push the boundaries, with the aim of presenting the unique qualities of various regions around the world, which create a conceptual mosaic and make it possible to raise both new and old questions (Gross, 2022).

We are living in a post-modern world that advocates cultural, moral, and scientific pluralism and strives for equality in every sphere of life and every discipline, out of the belief that stratification in society and knowledge is an outgrowth of power relations. Thus, as the world becomes more modern and even post-modern, there are competing narratives that challenge the legitimacy of past beliefs, intensify the dimensions of relativity and criticism, undermine traditional hierarchies and authorities, and break down the great narratives into sub-narratives that relate different stories of different communities in different voices. In response to these developments, in 1992, Steve Tesich became aware of a new phenomenon that he called a world of post-truth, which is dominated by post-truth politics and post-factual politics, where a large portion of public discourse is based on emotions and personal opinions that shape public opinion instead of on facts and rational thinking (Schindler, 2020). Joshua Forstenzer (2018) argues that “Oxford Dictionaries proclaimed ‘post-truth’ its 2016 word of the year, noting a 2,000-% increase in its usage over the previous year and defining it as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’” (p. 5).

It is possible that the suppression of objective positivist epistemologies made it possible to give too much legitimacy to the constructivist epistemology that sanctifies the subjective and personal knowledge, and this may have constituted fertile ground for the creation of the consciousness of post-fact and post-truth. These developments

impact the shaping of the consciousness of the individual and society, and this in turn has a decisive effect on the design of education in general and religious education in particular. It seems that it is impossible to talk about one single post-modernism but rather about multiple patterns of post-modernism and multiple patterns of post-truth (Gross, 2012). These radical changes impact the shaping of religious consciousness in different cultural and social contexts.

1.3 The Collapse of Traditional Categories and Definitions

An in-depth perusal of the book's chapters shows that the old categorization of religious and secular is no longer relevant, because in our post-modern world we have different expressions and patterns when it comes to defining religious and secular (Gross, 2011; Gross & Gamal, 2014). Pluralization and differentiation of definitions alter both the perspective and the commonly accepted categories that we customarily addressed in the type of discourse that previously existed in the world. With the demographic changes resulting from mass migration and mobility leading to the blurring of the Christian and Muslim worlds, the definitional dichotomy has intensified and has become unclear in many places (Panjwani, 2012). A more thorough perusal of the book's chapters and various phenomena of religiosity and religious education around the world leads to the conclusion that in the new world we live in, with its political, social, and religious extremism, it is possible that reality should be examined through the prism of both liberal and conservative concepts. Thus, it may be possible to identify liberal religiosity and secular conservative fundamentalism, and this new categorization challenges religious discourse and opens up the possibility of new in-depth questions in religious education in the various geographical regions around the globe.

1.4 Mapping the Religious Ecological Landscape

The attempt to map the religious ecological landscape where the educational act takes place shows that there is religious extremism in some parts of the world, and secular extremism in other parts, along with a constant increase in the number of those who define themselves as non-religious, particularly in the Western world. The major questions that concern many researchers are whether religion is growing weaker or growing stronger in the world we live in (Casanova, 1994; Davie, 2000; Hervieu-Leger, 2000), whether governments around the globe are managing to achieve a balance between secular and religious interests, and the impact of these processes on religious education in state and private schools in different countries.

In the 1960s, a secular thesis developed that argued that the more modern the world, the more secular it would become (Bruce, 2002; Martin, 1987), but the exact opposite happened (Berger, 1999). The events of September 11 in the US, the rise of

radical Islam, and current conflicts such as the war in Yemen between the Saudi-led Sunnis and the Iran-led Shiites in Yemen further emphasize the central role of religion as a major player around the globe and challenged the secular discourse. Many governments around the globe are coping with the question of the role of religion, with the main question of interest to numerous researchers being the balance between the right to equality and freedom of religion. In fact, the most prominent phenomenon in different parts of the globe is that of a religion becoming identified with the political right (O'Brien & Abdelhadi, 2020). In the United States, for example, Christianity was a cornerstone of the American identity and shaped the old American society. Now it has become a bone of contention between the Christian right and the secular left, which are fighting in order to shape the identity of the new America. President Trump understood the electoral power of both religion and Christianity, which constitute an electoral component that was important to his success. He adopted a number of extrinsic Christian customs and enhanced the position of religion in the public sphere. For example, Trump gave Christmas considerable visibility in the public sphere in his public appearances with a Christmas tree, he appointed a conservative judge to the Supreme Court, he fought the abortion law, and he permitted priests to talk about politics in church. He strengthened ties with the Jewish right in the United States and also with Israel, by stressing the religious aspect of the relationship between the countries and consolidating and establishing the status of political theology in America. This transition of religion to the right has not only occurred in the United States but is a global phenomenon. For example, Turkey under Erdogan has become more religious and conservative and since the rise of the Islamic Party, clearly Islamic politics can be identified there.

Thus, in many places in the world religion is associated with right-wing parties that are often also nationalistic, racist, and violent. For example, the ruling party in India is the nationalist religious BJP party. Charismatic, right-wing, Hindu leader Narendra Modi is challenging the secular left and threatening to turn India into a single-party state, while imposing racist laws. In the Buddhist country of Myanmar, ethnic cleansing against the Muslim Rohingya minority is currently underway. The connection between the right and religion is a topic for a complex analysis that extends far beyond the boundaries of this introduction.

1.5 The Challenges of Religion in a Globalized Alienated World

Globalization is blurring boundaries and fostering alienation between human beings who are thrown into an amorphous transnational geographical space and are seeking an anchor, meaning, and roots to hold on to. While religion confers an identity and sense of belonging, the liberal left focuses on the concept of rights and freedom that usually loosen the reins and boundaries. As a result, modern man becomes dissociated and often seeks what Fromm (1994) called an “escape from freedom”,

toward more clearly defined boundaries. Religion confers order, clear content, and meaning and therefore serves as a refuge from the unlimited freedom and liberty that liberalism has to offer. Surprisingly, religion is gaining strength in places where it was forbidden for many years, such as China, Russia, and post-secular countries. In effect, religion strengthens the particularistic, local dimension, mainly because it sanctifies time and place. For this reason, various social institutions and many political institutions find themselves struggling with the dilemma between religious particularism and secular humanist universalism. The conflict and contrast between religiosity and secularism are especially pronounced in Europe. Christianity developed in Europe, and Europe is now the most secular continent. On the one hand, churches in Europe are empty and are being turned into places of entertainment, museums, or even makeshift mosques for the hordes of Muslim immigrants. On the other hand, in Europe today, there is overwhelming religious visibility in the public sphere. This religious visibility threatens to supplant the traditional *laïcité* and turn Europe into another religious continent which, under certain conditions, is liable to become fundamentalist (Ziebertz, 2011). Europe is finding it difficult to handle the waves of religious Muslim immigration. Thus, one can see in Europe two opposing trends. On the one hand, the enactment of anti-religious laws restricting ritual slaughtering, religious attire, circumcision, and the construction of mosques, as well as many Muslims attempting to integrate into the European secular space in order to enjoy the fruits of emancipation and enlightenment, breaking free of the shackles of burdensome and oppressive tradition. On the other hand, some Christians are converting to Islam and churches are being converted into mosques.

The questions currently arising in Europe and other parts of the globe are whether liberalism can contain non-liberal groups (Kymlicka, 1995) and whether, on the other hand, secularism can completely disregard its own religious tradition (Gross, 2010, 2013; Gross & Rutland, 2021). Specifically, with regard to Europe, the question is whether Europe will remain Europe without a significant Christian identity. To some extent, these questions also are matters of concern in countries in other geographical regions. In Australia, the various faith groups wish to retain half an hour of in-faith religious studies for members of the various religions in state schools with many parents choosing classes for their children even if they, themselves, are not religious, because they believe that religion gives students identity, meaning, and content. On the other hand, leftist and liberal groups are fighting a bitter war against these religious frameworks, perceiving them as fanatical frameworks of a fundamentalist nature and background that employ outdated methods of religious indoctrination.

Thus, the relationship between religion and secularization around the globe is multi-layered and complex. Many countries in the Middle East, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, do not perceive themselves as secular countries although they do perceive themselves as modern countries, despite maintaining traditional cultural norms. On the one hand, many countries around the globe approve of same-sex marriage and their public space is becoming more secular. At the same time, the liberal, multicultural approach facilitates the dissemination of religious beliefs and practices providing them with greater external visibility in the public sphere and challenging the secular discourse (Gross, 2010, 2013; Selçuk, 2017). These diverse

approaches to religious beliefs and practices in each geographical context impacts the different pedagogies and methodologies that are employed within the framework of religious education in different parts of the world. Therefore, in view of the dramatic changes taking place around the globe in the religious and secular context, this book's mission of delineating the contemporary landscape of religious education is timely and important.

1.6 Four Major Current Debates in Religious Education Scholarship: The Scope and Structure of the Book

As it is reflected in the current professional literature in the field, the topography of Religious Education moves between tradition and modernity, particularism and universalism, locality and transnationality and includes four major themes which reflect major theoretical challenges in the contemporary field of Religious Education which are discussed in the four parts in this book. They are the concept of worldviews; meeting the needs of refugees and minorities; developing critical thinking especially in relation to social justice and creating enlightened autocracies; and finally issues of spirituality, prayer, and affective learning (Fig. 1.1).

The combination of these four themes helps to reimagine the contemporary landscape of Religious Education as demonstrated in the diagram above. While there are other themes that could be explored, these are the timely and burning issues currently being faced in Religious Education scholarship.

Now I will elaborate each of the sections of the book, which deal with these four themes, outlining the different chapters that are included in each section and demonstrating the issues of debate and challenge in Religious Education relating to each theme.

Part 1: The ongoing debate: enhancement of worldviews and life orientation in religious education

The first part of the book deals with the ongoing debate, particularly in the Western world, as to whether to talk about Religious Education or Worldview education, which seeks to include the concept of secularization as a form of belief. These can coexist but, in many locations, they are contested concepts, with each challenging the other, representing the conflict between religion and secularism. While they may sometimes overlap, the Worldview approach can represent a form of secularization that threatens the existence of religious Education.

Robert Jackson deals with this dilemma in his contribution, entitled "The Study of Religious and Worldview Diversity in Public Schools: Contributions from the Council of Europe". In this chapter, he outlines some issues relating to incorporating the study of religions, together with non-religious worldviews, into the curricula of publicly funded schools in Western democratic states. Attention is given to examples from work on this topic conducted within the Council of Europe since 2002, with a

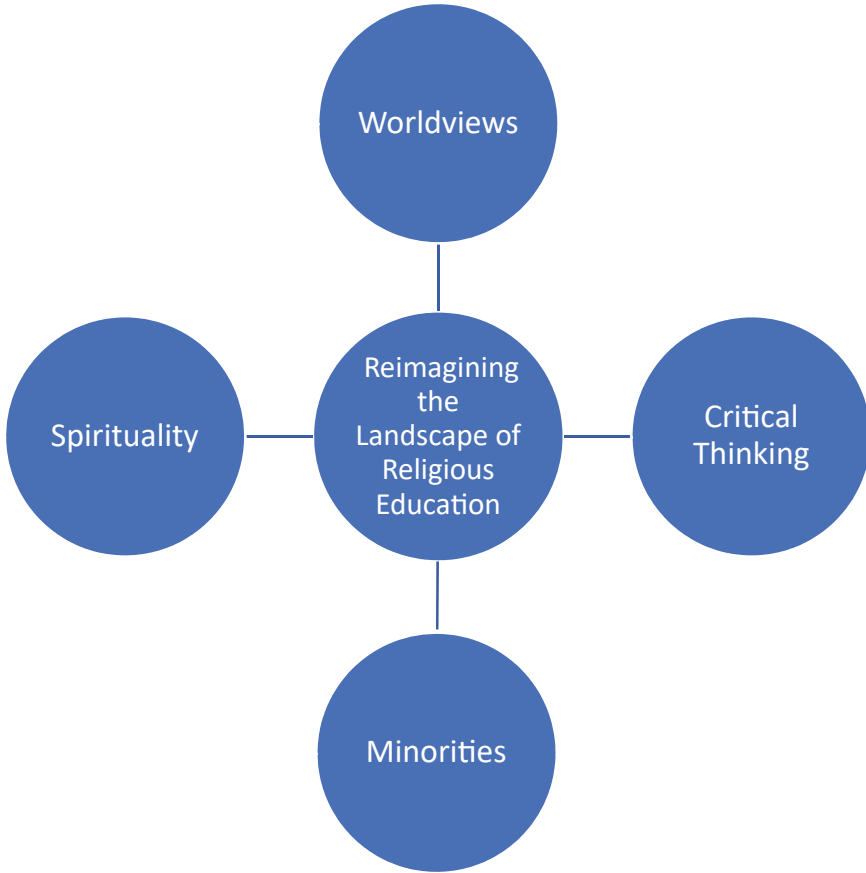


Fig. 1.1 The conceptual structure of the book

particular focus on *Signposts: Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Nonreligious Worldviews in Intercultural Education*, a text published by the Council of Europe in 2014. *Signposts* is designed to assist policymakers and practitioners in interpreting and applying ideas from the 2008 Recommendation from the Committee of Ministers (the Foreign Ministers of the 47 member states) dealing with education about religions and non-religious convictions. Various issues raised by the *Signposts* document are considered. Toward the end of the article, recent UK and Council of Europe policies which emphasizes the study of religions and beliefs as a means to counter extremism, and which have appeared since the publication of *Signposts*, are summarized and discussed critically. Jackson also draws attention to the dangers of certain policies, and also to the plurality of aims which studies of religions and non-religious worldviews need to have in providing a balanced educational program. Finally, the work of the *Signposts* International Research Network is introduced.

Adding another perspective is provided by K. H. (Ina) ter Avest in her contribution entitled “Playful authentic identity development: An exploration of the role of ‘life orientation’ in a plural world”. ter Avest argues that in these days of secularization, and of loosely dropped “alternative facts”, a pivotal quality in the process of the development of an authentic life orientation is critical reading and an attitude of not letting yourself be misled by firmly stated opinions or truth claims. In this contribution, she shows how in different cultural and religious educational contexts teachers in their pedagogical aims and by way of didactical strategies facilitate and stimulate their students’ critical and contextual reading of holy scriptures—of their own as well as of others’ tradition(s). After the presentation of her interpretation of secularization, three examples of “good practice” are presented: from South Korea, from the Netherlands, and from Scotland. Different rationales of teachers show up in the development of their lessons and in their core activities facilitating and stimulating students’ religious identity development. More research is needed on the development of RE teachers’ rationales in the context of the society they prepare their students for, to critically participate in and contribute to society as responsible citizens with an own authentic life orientation.

Following these two broader chapters, Saila Poulterand and Vesa Åhs contribution focuses on Finland and is entitled “Worldview identity discourses in partially integrative Finnish religious and worldview education”. The aim of their study is to analyze worldview discourses that legitimize different hegemonic and disadvantaged positions and identities of individuals and groups in a Finnish school context. A high degree of secularization and diversity among those formally belonging to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church represents the majority’s worldview in Finland today. However, the number of refugees and migrants is growing, and the emergence of new minorities is challenging the traditional understanding of one’s identity in relation to religions and worldviews. The study illustrates how in classrooms containing diverse worldviews, the normativity of the “secular-Lutheran” worldview causes blindness toward its own position and exclusion of those with different norms. Moreover, the concepts employed in education bolster these positions, causing dislocation in the education process. They argue that school knowledge representing an “official” picture of religion with traits that point to the world religion paradigm often excludes lived and practiced forms of religions or relegates them to curiosities, thus constricting what it means to be “religious”. The findings of this study show that it is vital to challenge and problematize discourses which essentialize and categorize worldview identities resulting in different power positions and othering practices in school.

Yune Kim Tran and Amy Lynn Dee are entitled: “Teacher identity in a post-modern world: Who am I and do I think it matters?” They argue that teacher identity is complex, dynamic, ongoing, and worthy of examination in a post-modern era in which subjectivity reigns. This study examined the perceptions of preservice teachers’ personal identity (e.g. gender, race, religious background, etc.) and how they influence preservice teachers’ professional identity as a subject, pedagogical, and professional expert. The participants ($N = 81$) were preservice teachers from two different Christian-based institutions, one in Canada and one in the United

States, who were completing the requirements for initial licensure. Findings from a survey measured the preservice teachers' perceptions based on two scales examining personal and professional identity. The results suggested that preservice teachers did not perceive race as impacting their personal identity as a teacher, nor did they perceive religion as an influence on their professional identity, even though they had chosen Christian institutions. However, preservice teachers did perceive teacher preparation as impacting their understanding of professionalism as they transitioned from learner to teacher in the field.

Finally, in this section, Theodore F. Cockle, Perry L. Glanzer, Elijah G. Jeong, and Britney N. Graber argue in their chapter, entitled: "The Outrageous Idea of Christian Student Affairs: How Christian Chief Student Affairs Officers Envision Their Practice", that despite a growing body of literature depicting specific aspects of a Christian approach to student affairs, a discipline-wide theological vision for Christian student life professionals does not exist. This paper reports on the first stage of a larger research project that attempts to meet this need by investigating how the Christian intellectual tradition animates the practice of student affairs professionals at Christian colleges and universities. They used Benne's (2001) typology to identify 192 "Orthodox" and "Critical Mass" institutions of higher education in the Christian Protestant tradition. They then sent a mixed-methods survey to their chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) and received 69 responses, capturing their initial reflections on what makes their institution's student life practice(s) distinctively Christian. Their findings reveal that some of the participants' responses included language and practices common to non-Christian student affairs, but most referred to words, theological concepts, and practices selectively borrowed from the Christian tradition. The latter distinctively shaped the aims and methods of Christian student affairs.

Thus, the five chapters reflect different aspects of the debate regarding the concepts of Religious Education as compared with Worldview Education. The first two chapters focus on issues relating to Worldview education, with the first taking a Euro-Centric approach and the second more of a comparative approach across continents. The chapter by Saila Poulterand and Vesa Åhs shines a light on Finland, highlighting the tension between the established Finnish population, which supports a Worldview approach, compared with those of the new migrants, who come from a more religious background and oppose some of the secular approaches. The final two chapters focus on teacher education in Christian institutions and how they impact their students' religious identity and pedagogic approaches. Together, these chapters reveal the complex, multi-layered issues relating to Worldview as opposed to Religious Education. Embedded in these tensions is the more religious approach of many of the refugees, particularly those arriving in Europe, and the secular European society.

Part 2: Minorities, Education, and Alienation

Another contested area relates to conflicts between the majority population and minorities in terms of religious practices and education. This is a major global phenomenon that challenges and sometimes changes the landscape of Religious Education. It manifests itself in Europe with the significant demographic changes

occurring in the aftermath of the major influx of Muslim refugees, but also with growing religious nationalism and power struggles which lead to attacks on minority religions and their educational structures. This is seen in Erdogan's move to the religious right, undermining the secular education structures developed from the time of Atatürk in the 1920s and further affected by the huge influx of refugees from Syria and other Middle East conflicts to the Hindu attacks on Islam in India, the Buddhist attacks on the Rohingyas in Myanmar, and Communist China's aim of "re-educating" the Muslim Uyghurs. Some of these specific challenges are analyzed in the chapters in this section.

Aybıçe Tosun focuses on the refugee challenges in Turkey, with her contribution entitled "Multicultural Learning Environments in Turkey: A New Challenge about Refugee Education". Tosun argues that social and cultural aspects of societies have changed dramatically in the last decades because of globalization, migration movements, refugee crises, and global media. These developments, creating new multicultural societies, have a significant effect on daily life, culture, and education by bringing new perspectives about being local and universal. Including refugees in the school system creates a new learning environment for local students. Living together with different cultures reveals different challenges for every part of the society. These societal changes affect the school environment as can be seen in Turkish schools with the diversity in faith, religious beliefs, and worldviews among students. This new situation requires reconsidering the educational contents and curricula. The inclusion of diverse points of view in the curricula will transform students' thoughts and attitudes toward others, especially refugees, and help them to understand the importance of living peacefully together. Apart from all other courses in the Turkish educational system, the compulsory religious education should undertake the role of peace-making in the society with its content and approach. Focusing on cultural similarities and differences in an educational setting could bring a new context that society might use in dealing with conflicts.

An opposing approach, trying to impose unity in education is discussed in Dilmurat Mahmut's contribution entitled "Anti-religious education or preventing religious extremism?—An examination of the re-education camps in China's Uyghur region". Currently, it is estimated that between one to three million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims are held involuntarily in "Education and Transformation Training Centers" or "Counter-extremism Training Schools" in Xinjiang, China (Greitens et al., 2020; Zenz, 2019). With such a background, this study tries to explore the nature of these centers through multiple lenses, such as Orientalism (Said, 1978), Internal Orientalism (Schein, 1997), critical race theory, and post-colonialism—putting the inquiry into both local and global pictures. The data is from the interviews conducted by various reporters and scholars who visited some of these centers, the testimonies given by some former detainees, as well some accessible government documents. The findings suggest that religion and extremism are largely conflated in those educational contexts. Moreover, religion or Islam is depicted as a polar opposite to science as well as communist ideology. Chinese authorities have conveniently and opportunistically benefited from the global rise of Islamophobia and racialization of Muslims to legitimize their anti-religious educational project in the

Uyghur region. Meanwhile, within these camps, mastering Mandarin Chinese is seen as an important sign of progress while the use of the Uyghur mother tongue is strongly discouraged as an indication of backwardness, reflecting but also possibly going beyond the long-existing discourse of Internal Orientalism (Schein, 1997). For the Chinese government, Uyghur Islamic identity can pose threat to the integrity as well as the future prosperity of the Chinese state. Therefore, these infamous re-education camps, as a state-enforced mass pedagogical, assimilative, anti-Islamic project, are deemed necessary in the Chinese government's eyes. This is a form of cultural genocide which reflects the legacy of the shameful and destructive colonial past of humanity.

Terence Lovat's contribution entitled "The Integral Link between Islamic Education and Religious Education: A Bonhoeffer Reflection on the Urgent Task of Countering Jihadist Pedagogy" sheds light on a different issue relating to Islamic education. The chapter begins with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's reflections on the integration between religion and life that he discerned in Islam and then explores this notion in relation to the consequential integral link to be found between Islamic education and religious education. It examines both old and new Islamic scholarship and makes the point that all Islamic education is religious education in the important sense that its ultimate goal is the pupil's holistic wellbeing and intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. The chapter then addresses the urgent task for contemporary Islamic religious education to return to its original charter of holistic wellbeing by countering the ease with which Jihadist pedagogy has been able to draw young people to its counter-wellbeing agenda and so tarnish Islam's reputation.

Ursula McKenna and Leslie J. Francis contribution entitled "Testing the contact hypothesis in interfaith encounters: Personal friendships with Sikhs countering anti-Sikh attitudes?" deals with a different religious minority and examines whether regular contact with Sikhs can reduce intolerance to them. Drawing on data provided by 5,811 students from schools in England, Wales, and London who self-identified as either "no religion" or as Christian, their study explored the effect of the contact hypothesis (having friends who are Sikhs) on scores recorded on the five-item Scale of Anti-Sikh Attitude (SASA), after controlling for type of school (with or without a religious character), location (England, Wales, and London), personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism), and religious factors (self-assigned affiliation as Christian, worship attendance, and belief in God). The data demonstrated the positive effect of having friends who are Sikhs on lowering anti-Sikh attitudes.

Stephanie Lovett takes a broader approach with her contribution entitled "Disgust and the Limits of Reason: Countering the Fear of Contamination and Resistance to Education in a Post-Modern Climate". She argues that in times of rising nationalism and partisan tensions, the natural response of conscientious educators is to want more people to have more information, assuming that more knowledge will counter the ignorance that is considered to be at the root of hate and fear. Yet, we can easily see that information does not create acceptance, and a number of neurological studies have shone a light on this irrational intransigence. In these studies, researchers discovered an overwhelming correlation between subjects' high disgust response and

their political and social conservatism. Examining this subconscious knowledge of the danger of what is “wrong” and “unclean” gives educators valuable perspective on the desperately personal, gut-level knowing, driving students who feel existentially threatened by “unnatural” people, ideas, values, and practices. The post-truth era has widened this gap between intellectual knowing and gut-level knowing into a canyon where all knowledge is equally true and equally suspect. As a result, resistant students have less reason than ever to accept contradictions to their innate worldview and more reason than ever to trust their own worldview, which feels reliable and natural since it does not come from suspect outside sources. This is a very real pedagogical problem for education, with its traditional commitment to the irresistibility of reason and the impartiality of information, and educators must respond with different tactics to create a place of safety and inquiry, so that students naturally prone to policing boundaries can be helped to expand their own sense of what is natural and normal for humanity.

These various chapters, therefore, shed light on the challenges of creating an inclusive form of religious education that can assist minority groups and refugees and create a cohesive society. In some of the case studies, a positive approach is showcased in the face of this challenge, with the case of the Uyghurs demonstrating a totally unacceptable approach of forcing cohesion through re-education camps.

Part 3: Critical Thinking, Social Justice, and Modern Autocracy

Developing critical thinking is another major challenge to religious education because the traditional approach stresses unquestioning acceptance and religious leadership often feels threatened by the concept of critical thinking.

The first contribution in this section by Najwan Saada, entitled “Teaching about the religious and non-religious Other: Three paradigms and an Islamic perspective”, aims to explain the three different paradigms in religious education—exclusivist, inclusivist, and critical—within a theoretical framework. He discusses their possible implications for teaching about the religious Other and non-religious Other in religious education in Islamic schools in western and democratic societies. It is assumed that religions in faith-based schools play a dominant role in interpreting and giving meaning to the world around students as they organize their experiences and guide them to action. Accordingly, teachers of religious education in these schools are responsible for developing students’ religious, civic, and autonomous/personal identities. The application of the exclusivist, inclusivist, and critical paradigms in religious education achieves these goals, respectively, if approached within the framework of a child’s maturation. Saada proposes that the exclusivist paradigm is appropriate for the elementary level, the inclusivist for middle, and critical for high school levels. The religious Others are defined here as believers of different traditions within one’s religion and believers of religions other than one’s own. Also, the Other includes agnostics, atheists, and secular citizens. The application of the exclusivist paradigm in elementary schooling achieves the religious and communitarian purpose of religious education. The inclusivist paradigm at the middle school level achieves the civic purpose of religious education and the critical paradigm at the high school level

achieves the educational and liberal purpose of religious education. In his chapter, he provides examples from an Islamic perspective.

Yusef Waghid provides a different perspective in his contribution entitled “Muslim Education and Claims of Justice in a Global Post-truth World”. He argues that Muslim education has been conceived in at least three ways over the past fifty years: *tarbiyyah* (education as socialization), *ta’lim* (education as initiation), and *ta’dib* (education as goodness). These different understandings of education focus on the cultivation of a Muslim community in the pursuit of moral, social, economic, environmental, and political justice. In this contribution, he extends the underlying underpinnings of education constituted in socialization, initiation, and goodness by focusing on an enlarged concept of education as enunciated in the Quran, namely, *ta’arruf* (associational knowing) and its concomitant link with claims of justice (*‘adl*). An analysis of justice commensurate with human actions such as reasonableness, responsibility, and cosmopolitanism is pursued. Based on such an analysis, it is argued that education as associational knowing devoid of reasonableness, responsibility, and cosmopolitanism does not contribute toward plausible forms of human action. The argument for *ta’arruf* as a living theory of Muslim education is proffered as an approach that endorses pluralism, differences, and otherness.

In Liam Francis Gearon’s contribution, entitled “The Totalitarian Imagination Revisited: State Religious Education at the ‘Worldviews’ Watershed”, he argues that totalitarian “Imagination Revisited” examines the origins and ends of religion in education at the “worldviews” watershed. It does so against a personal academic life journey which has assessed state religious education in the light of modern autocracy, dictatorship, and totalitarianism. Drawing on the specific context of developments in the United Kingdom, the chapter shows this watershed’s epistemological and linguistic shift—from a subject defined by the study of religious traditions to the designation of that of teaching and learning about “worldviews”, a putatively inclusive approach framed in its thinking to incorporate religious and secular outlooks—through an etiology which has its pathogenic roots in a range religiously skeptical, secular epistemologies. This epistemological-philosophical trajectory, with its modern beginnings in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the revolutions of that period, is, it is shown, rooted in an outplaying of a centuries-long, specific historical-political context which has now made itself manifest in the contemporary approach to state religious education.

These three chapters, therefore, provide different perspectives on conflicting approaches to traditional religious education, seeking to argue for the need for developing critical thinking and to foster social justice, both of which are within the framework of post-modern educational theory. However, this produces challenges as discussed by Gearon where the liberal view can end up imposing a modern form of autocracy by being intolerant of more traditional religious education and insisting on imposing a “worldview” approach.

Part 4: Spirituality, Prayer, and Affective Learning

Spirituality is still a major constituent in the field of Religious Education but sometimes it can be a challenging and competing component within the field of Religious

Education because it represents a less religious stance. The chapters in this section explore this conundrum.

In Julian Stern and Eli Kohn's contribution entitled "Prayer in Schools: In Search of a New Paradigm" they argue that prayer and schools have an uncomfortable history together. Prayer is therefore a useful "test" of various aspects of schooling. Empirical research on prayer in schools is used here to develop a new paradigm—a new way of understanding prayer in school, in terms of particular theories of spirituality, and a new way of understanding schooling, in terms of prayer and spirituality. The paradigm that they present reflects the views of young people studied in various recent research projects and also reflects well-established religious and philosophical positions. Their chapter proposes a model of "mundane" spirituality inspired by the work of various Jewish and Christian scholars, notably Kook, Buber, Macmurray, and Hay. This is exemplified by research with young people in Israel and the UK. The implications of this work for schools are described, noting the value of uncertainty and the as-yet unknown, the plural, the open. The chapter does not reject education—or religion—as a search for "truth"; rather it recognizes that truth is still emergent and that there is room for the mysterious, the ineffable.

Gross Zehavit contribution, entitled "The Holocaust as a Source for Religious Education and Reflection among Adolescents in Israel", seeks to examine how students attending a religious Zionist girls' high school in Israel interpret—in religious terms—the Holocaust, an event that constitutes a Jewish national trauma. The study focuses on how an examination of aspects of the Holocaust as a Jewish historical event, which constitutes a reality-changing event, can form a basis of religious education. This study was conducted among 24 eleventh graders at a religious girls' high school in Israel. The data was analyzed according to the constant comparative method (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The study examines the issue through the implementation and use of an innovative six-stage structured pedagogical technique called Reflective Culture of Holocaust Remembrance (RCoHR). First, the author explains the theoretical background of the topic, then she describes the research process and findings, and she concludes with an analysis of the pedagogical implications of this method for religious education and how Holocaust education could constitute a reflective means of enrichment for religious education.

Finally, Richard S. Kitchen in his contribution, entitled "Religious education for the Mexican immigrant community in Albuquerque: The vital role of compassion", argues that in the United States, students of color and low-income students have historically been denied access to high-quality educational opportunities in public schools. As a result, he was moved to initiate and direct Escuela Luz del Mundo (ELM), a progressive Christian middle school that served a high poverty, Mexican immigrant community in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA. ELM had a unique mission: to glorify God by providing a culturally relevant and affirming, college-preparatory education for the children of first-generation Mexican immigrants. In his chapter, the research literature is reviewed that illustrates the historic legacy in the United States of low-income students and students of color being denied access to high-quality educational opportunities. Qualitative research methodologies, both self-study and narrative inquiry, are used to demonstrate some of the distinguishing

features that made ELM a unique school for the first-generation Mexican immigrants that it served. An extended discussion is provided about lessons learned at ELM, such as the vital role that compassion should play in making schools places where every student is valued.

As can be seen in the outline of the aims and scope of this book, it raises basic fundamental questions which perceive the field of religious education as a quest for new and innovative contexts and landscapes which will enable new insights, research replications, and hopefully provide a source of inspiration for educators across the globe. It does this through the themes discussed above, elaborating on them from a diverse multicultural point of view, and from different geographical settings.

Thus, this book presents studies demonstrating how in different political and cultural contexts, diverse educational systems cope with the current challenges to religion and religious education within contemporary society. Coping strategies are influenced by the different economic, social, and political variables, with the various authors discussing creative solutions to these challenges to enable a meaningful religious education in our contemporary era. The various educational situations discussed in the book are complex and require creative thinking and the implementation of innovative pedagogies to meet the new challenges that religion and religious education face in today's societies. The chapters in this book examine this issue within the framework of the four major themes which together provide a holistic picture of new trends and innovative understandings of how Religious Education can move forward into the future.

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