

The Paradigms of Contemporary Religious Education

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Abstract

The word ‘paradigm’ appears in a number of Cornelia Roux’s published works (Roux 1998; 1998a; 2003; 2008; 2009; 2011). This article re-examines her use of ‘paradigm’ in the light of Thomas Kuhn’s (1996) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Drawing on recently published work on religion and education (Gearon 2013; 2014), I elaborate why researchers and educators alike require a more rigorous theoretical conceptualisation of the underlying paradigms of contemporary religious education. Outlining how a satisfactory understanding of the paradigms in religious education require an understanding of the epistemological grounds of each, the article presents, by way of demonstration, a critical outline of six such paradigms: the scriptural-theological; the phenomenological; the spiritual-experiential; the philosophical-conceptual; the socio-cultural; and the historical-political.

Keywords: religion, education, paradigm, philosophy, epistemology

Introduction

Outside of faith settings, contemporary religious education is invariably defined by a separation of religious education from the religious life. The problem of modern religious education remains: how to ground the subject when it is no longer grounded in the religious life. Here Willaime (2007) has helpfully identified a ‘double constraint’:

... a *sociological* one, in that the religious and philosophical pluralisation of European societies oblige them to include ever more alternative religions and non-religious positions into their curricula, and ... a *legal* one, through the importance of the principle of non-discrimination on religious or philosophical grounds (as well as others such as gender or race) in international law, especially in the European Convention on Human Rights (Willaime 2007: 65).

Such pressure has resulted in a well- recognised tri-partite system. Willaime in Europe for example identifies three models of religious education:

- 1) no religious instruction in schools;
- 2) confessional religious instruction; and
- 3) non-confessional religious education (Willaime 2007: 60).

A similar pattern has been suggested in Europe by Ferrari and Durham (Ferrari 2012: 100-103) in the European context:

- 1) disallowing religious education within the formal curriculum in schools opened by the state (e.g. France ...);
- 2) providing non-denominational teaching about religions; and
- 3) providing denominational teaching of religion for prevailing religion(s) within the country.

Despite national historico-legal and policy differences, Durham suggests ‘these appear to be the major options not only in Europe, but worldwide’ (Durham 2012: 4). This might well be defined as a shift to the political in religious education, by necessity, the emergence as Willaime puts it, of a complex of legal and sociological factors.

Much of Roux’s work falls into this broad category (notably, Roux 1998; 1998a; 2003; 2008; 2009; 2011). So, for example, Roux claims indeed that ‘Teaching religion in the new educational dispensation has to do with new paradigms’ (Roux 1998: 124). This new paradigm she claims, certainly in the context of South Africa, arises in a post-apartheid context which has moved away from a mono-cultural to the prevalence of and the need to cater for a societally integrative multi-religious and multicultural education, in particular as regards religion in education:

The change to a new paradigm in teaching religion does not involve only lecturers or teachers/ educators, but all role-players in education. Educators, parents, school boards and learners have to rethink the purpose of religious education in education (Roux 1998: 124).

She admits that ‘a programme for multi-religion education or in the learning area Life Orientation in South African schools has been a controversial since 1997’, and that ‘many educators and parents have negative perceptions about a programme on different religions and belief and value systems’, fearing confusion amongst learners’ (Roux 2003: 130). Roux has sought common ground to address this post-apartheid multi-religious and multi-cultural context encouraging inter-religious and inter-cultural approaches to the teaching of religion in education. What here is the basis for the commonality of approaches is a paradigm which is drawn from outside of though not incompatible with religious traditions, the political concept of human rights. This is most systematically encapsulated in her edited collection *Safe Spaces: Human Rights Education in Diverse Contexts* (Roux 2012).

The influencing of religion in education by the political can be traced to a wider movement not of counter-secularization (the re-emergence of religion in public and political context) but a new form of secularization, where the political instead of marginalizing religion has come to dictate the terms of religion in political, here human rights terms, in order to contribute social, political and cultural goals (Gearon 2012). Thus, although the leading philosophical and political lights of eighteenth century European Enlightenment often loathed especially institutional religion (and by which they would have understood both Protestant and Catholic form of religion) they were also seemingly loathe often to remove the term religion entirely from the lexicon of political life. Thus we have: Rousseau’s ‘civil religion’, dispersed in different forms across many works (Rousseau 1914; 1997a; 1997b), Kant’s hopes for the ‘founding of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth’, permeating especially the later works of Kant (1991; 1996), and Dewey’s (1991) ‘common faith’. Roux’s advocacy of a new and political dimension, a new ‘paradigm’ in religious education is part of this historical genealogy. What has become the norm (or an attempted norm) in European religious education is moving to becoming a norm worldwide, as we have seen from the above comments from Durham (2012: 4).

I argue, however, that researchers and educators alike require a more rigorous theoretical conceptualisation of the underlying paradigms of contemporary religious education. Outlining how a satisfactory understanding of the paradigms in religious education require an understanding of the epistemological grounds of each, for there is more to religious education than the political.

To begin this analysis we need to return to Thomas Kuhn's (1996) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Drawing on recently published work on religion and education (Gearon 2013; 2014), I elaborate why researchers and educators alike require a more rigorous theoretical conceptualisation of the underlying paradigms of contemporary religious education. Outlining how a satisfactory understanding of the paradigms in religious education requires an understanding of the epistemological grounds of each, the article presents, by way of demonstration, a critical outline of six such paradigms: the scriptural-theological; the phenomenological; the spiritual-experiential; the philosophical-conceptual; the socio-cultural; and the historical-political.

On Method

While acknowledging the necessity of historical inquiry in education in a limited sense, for example Copley (2000; 2004), Freathy and Parker (2010), and Freathy (2008), these and other such studies are ultimately insufficient for an analysis of the epistemological grounds, the paradigms of contemporary religious education. Standard histories of religious education need to be supplemented not simply by a history of religious education policy but a wider history of *ideas*. To demonstrate the appropriation of various frames of knowledge – and thus the epistemological grounds of emergent paradigms in religious education – I traced developments in the subject in two transatlantic journals with an extensive provenance: in the United States (from c. 1903) *Religious Education*, and (from 1934, *Religion in Education*; from 1964-1981 *Learning for Living*) the *British Journal of Religious Education*. These journals represent a century long process of the attempt to develop new paradigms in contemporary religious education.

Others have attempted meta-analyses of these journals, to identify either trends within a particular discipline, especially psychology (Greer (1984; 1984a), or a political framework to undergird religious education (Jackson 2008), or to search for patterns in research preoccupations and or

disciplinary influences (English, D'Souza & Chartrand 2003; English, D'Souza & Chartrand 2005). There is here no doubting the prevalence of multi-disciplinary and international multi-polar political interests, as Jackson notes, with modern religious education establishing footholds across international professional bodies including

the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR), the American Academy of Religion (AAR), the International Network for Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Education (bringing together European and southern African researchers), the Co-ordinating Group for Religious Education in Europe (CoGREE), the European Network for Religious Education through Contextual Approaches (ENRECA), the Australian National Symposium on Religious Education and the Nordic Conference on Religious Education' and across a wide number of political bodies, 'inter-governmental organisations such as the Council of Europe, the European Commission (via funded research projects on religions education such as the Framework 6 Project REDCo), UNESCO and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and to international non-governmental organisations, notably the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief (Jackson 2008: 184).

Given this, Schweitzer, Simojoki, Moschner and Müller (2012) argue powerfully for comparative studies of journals as a method ripe for development in order to identify research trends and disciplinary alliances:

Researching religious education journals could also become a step towards a more extensive discussion on religious education as an academic discipline, in terms of its understanding of research, its methodologies, its academic standards, etc. In this respect, the advantage of using journals as an object of study can be seen in reference to existing work rather than to mere ideas, claims or wishes for the discipline (Schweitzer, Simojoki, Moschner & Müller 2012: 92).

In large measure this is critical because despite a century long history of the modern subject that no disciplinary consensus emerges, evident from Day's (1985) claim of 'a permanent identity crisis' through Buchanan's (2005) discussion of 'pedagogical drift' to Seymour's (2011) identification of a quest for the 'canon of religious education' (see also Weiss & Cutter 1998).

Some paradigms have in this multi-disciplinary context achieved prominence at different stages of the subject's history. Psychology from the 1960s onwards for example had a special place in relating to pupils' needs and worldviews, whereas today such approaches have been in large measure taken over by models of religious education which vouchsafe its place in the curriculum in social, cultural and or political terms. Much of my earlier work, for example on religious education and citizenship, matched the concerns of Jackson (for example Gearon 2002). As noted above, Roux's work, from 1998 onwards, has stressed a similar preoccupation, especially in relating religious education to human rights education, a matter which has found international prominence from inter-governmental agencies such as UNESCO (2011). But to see the subject as being justified – to take these two examples – by for instance, the psychological (concerned with personal development) or political (concerned with social, cultural and or political development) is to have only a partial view of the subject's emergences and its concerns.

Indeed, given Seymour's remarks, it seems pertinent, as I have argued at greater length elsewhere (Gearon 2013; 2014), to examine not simply journals of religious education but deeper sources from a wider intellectual history, sources, that is, from the history of ideas which have epistemologically grounded the subject, and which helped define contemporary religious education. When we examine these grounds, we find them multiple and shifting. Conroy, Lundie and Baumfield (2012), in Britain at least, give this an almost existential ring, noting the contemporary 'failures of meaning in religious education', seeing in religious education a (failed) attempted to provide:

- 1) an insight into the meaning theological claims have for their adherents;
- 2) a coherent ground upon which the individual creates his/ her own meanings rooted in something more substantial than oddly conceived personal preferences; and

3) a transcendent ground for ethical attachment and moral behaviour (Conroy, Lundie & Baumfield (2012: 317),

Conroy *et al.* argue that,

In the end the enterprise of cultivating meaning is likely to fail as long as religious education, both theoretically and as a practice, continues to foreground purposes that perforce offer too many contradictions: e.g. between the intellectual and the affective, the public and the private, the metaphorical and the literal, self-determination and civic cohesion (Conroy, Lundie & Baumfield 2012: 322; cf. Osbeck 2012; Gearon 2014).

So it seems the quest for stable epistemological foundations in the subject becomes problematic. The problem of modern religious education, I argue, remains this: in finding a ground when modern religious education is no longer grounded in the religious life. The solution has lain, or has been sought, then, in the seeking of foundations, the grounds, of contemporary religious education.

Contemporary Religious Education as Paradigm Shift

Thomas Kuhn's (1996) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* remains a useful point of reference for understanding what we, and as Roux, has defined as a 'paradigm shift' or rather a complex and multiple series of paradigm shifts in religious education. Kuhn's famous thesis of paradigm shift emerged from his time working in a multidisciplinary environment crossing the natural and social sciences, and his recognition of how patterns in the emergence of new knowledge could be applied to both (Kuhn 1996: ix-x). Kuhn's analysis is rooted in the concept of 'normal science', or research

firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice (Kuhn 1996: 10).

While they last these paradigms are called so because they are recognised as having been tested and accepted by a scientific community as providing a fair assessment of whatever aspect of the world is under examination. When we look at historical contexts, paradigms, Kuhn argues, have had ‘two essential characteristics’:

Their achievement was sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity. Simultaneously, it was sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve.

These achievements are defined as ‘paradigms’, i.e.

actual scientific practice – examples which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together – provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research.

These are the traditions which the historian describes under such rubrics as ‘Ptolemaic astronomy’ (or ‘Copernican’), ‘Aristotelian dynamics’ (or ‘Newtonian’), ‘corpuscular optics’ (or ‘wave optics’), and so on. The study of paradigms, including many that are far more specialized than those named illustratively above, is what mainly prepares the student for membership in the particular scientific community with which he will later practice (Kuhn, 1996: 10-11).

To achieve paradigmatic status is no easy matter:

a theory must seem better than its competitors, but it need not, and in fact never does, explain all the facts with which it can be confronted (Kuhn 1996: 17-18).

Those ‘who cling to one or another of the older views, and they are simply read out of the profession, which thereafter ignores their work. The new paradigm implies a new and more rigid definition of the field’; those ‘unwilling or unable to accommodate their work to it must proceed in isolation or attach themselves to some other group’ (Kuhn 1996: 18-19).

Paradigms thus ‘gain their status because they are more successful than their competitors in solving a few problems that the group of practitioners has come to recognize as acute’ (Kuhn, 1996: 23). For Kuhn the advancement of scientific knowledge requires agreement on theoretical frameworks, the definition of unresolved problems and the methods for their resolution, and by such parameters is the paradigm, new and old, defined. The paradigm shift is a marked and decisive change in these. The new paradigm emerges from the old and is distinguished from it so that the latter’s marginalisation becomes progressively more affirmed. Can we identify similar attempts to define religious education in paradigmatic terms? I think we can.

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Paradigm is used as a term here to identify changes in the epistemological ground for the subject. Other studies have attempted to examine different pedagogies in the subject in the round (Grimmitt 2000; Stern 2006) but these attempts deal with individual theorists without identifying the intellectual lineage of these approaches. A short article cannot do full justice to these manifold developments, nor their full intellectual history – something I have attempted in an extended consideration of these questions in *On Holy Ground* (Gearon 2014), a systematic examination of the epistemological grounds of religious education. My method, as noted, was to extrapolate from a systematic search of two leading international journals in religious education the appropriations of religious education from a range of intellectual disciplines from the history of ideas from the Enlightenment onward. To begin with I identified Enlightenment responses to religion and from this analysis identified how religious education adopted key ideas and approaches from these disciplines, showing how each of these disciplines in turn has shaped contemporary religious education. By contemporary religious education, I mean those forms of religious education which have become separated from the religious life. So, in this separation, religious education cannot be dependent on the norms of any particular religious tradition, the subject requires alternative epistemological grounds. Aware of the interface of the disciplines, I was able to identify critical forms of knowledge which had a significant (post-Enlightenment) impact on religion: philosophy and theology; the natural sciences; the social sciences; psychology; phenomeno-

logy; politics; and aesthetics. In another, shorter work (Gearon 2013), I identify these grounds and their trajectories in simplified form as a series of six ‘paradigms’. It is this analytical model of the contemporary paradigms of religious education I present here.

The Paradigms of Contemporary Religious Education

The Scriptural-Theological Paradigm

Amongst western countries that included religion as a curriculum subject as the state in the nineteenth century took responsibility for education, schools divided along those Catholic and Protestant denominational lines formed by the Reformation. In England, a dual system of church and community schools provided: (a) religious education along said denominational lines and (b) religious education in state schools which attempted to cater for children across this divide, by a ‘non-denominational’ religious education. In effect however in both (a) and (b) Christian scripture and some theological perspective was in England *the* form of religious education until the 1950s. Today, the scriptural-theological approach is largely limited to schools of a religious character. That is, there has been a marked and progressive decline in scriptural-theological approaches within religious education. A similar paradigm shift has been identified by Roux in South Africa, away from Christian and Bible-centred approaches to a multi-religious and multi-cultural approach. The outline of the pattern in England therefore applies not simply to there but to many other national and international contexts.

In England, though, the 1870 Education Act made elementary education, including religious education, compulsory. A decade earlier featured highly charged debate between advocates of biblical revelation and Darwinian theories of evolution. The nineteenth century aftermath of Enlightenment was an intellectual foment, and it was into this that the religious education was founded, an intellectual milieu sceptical of the biblical text central to its entire pedagogy. The shift away from the scriptural-theological has been well elaborated by many, but a clear and succinct history can be found in Bates (1994; 1996), detailing in part some of the history of how the teaching of world religions impacted on religious education previously dominated by the teaching of one tradition, Christianity.

But the clarity of religious education teaching was not apparent even from its inception, in large part because of the Cowper-Temple clause (section 14 of the Act), that, 'No religious catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination shall be taught in the school'. How a non-denominational pedagogy was to be implemented was never clarified. The Cowper-Temple clause masked in nascent form a problem which modern religious education – implemented by the state not a church – has lived to the present day. At least in that time and for the next half century and more, it was assumed that the religious education was concerned with Christian scripture and, if limited, theological reflection. Thus *The Spens Report on Secondary Education* (1938) in its chapter on religious education focused exclusively on 'Scripture'; that is, indicating plainly that the concern of religious education was scriptural-theological. Confidently describing scriptural knowledge as threefold – 'the religious ideas and experiences of Israel, of which the record is to be found in the Old Testament, the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and the beginning of the Christian church' – this pattern of approach and content had dominated since 1870 and continued to do so for several decades after Spens. The 1944 Education Act only seemed to confirm this, and to such an extent that religious education (or instruction) was presumed to follow the pattern of Spens.

By the 1960s this would radically change; by the 1970s, even the Church of England's Durham Report (Ramsey 1970) began examining 'the fourth R' (religion) in education in the light of the changing religious makeup and cultural outlook of British society, what one sociologist has defined as a period marked by 'the death of Christian Britain' (Brown 2000; also 2006).

The Phenomenological Paradigm

Ninian Smart's 1969 book, *The Religious Education Experience of Mankind*, presented the case for a 'phenomenological' approach to the study of religion, derived from Edmund Husserl. Credited with developing phenomenology as a science, a technical epistemological investigation of how we know the world of phenomena, the best introduction to Husserlian phenomenology remains the philosopher/ phenomenologist's own summary in an encyclopaedia entry (Husserl 1927).

Smart took a complex discussion from philosophy, as it had filtered through ‘phenomenology’, and applied it, again loosely, to the understanding of religion as a *phenomenon*. Smart thus comments that to ‘religionists’ (those who study religion) ‘it means the use of epoché or suspension of belief, together with the use of empathy in entering the experiences and intentions of religious participants’. This implies that ‘in describing the ways people behave, we do not use, as far as we can avoid them, alien categories to evoke the nature of their act and to understand those acts’ (Smart 1996: 2). Though Gerardus van der Leeuw (1933; 1963) is acknowledged as having pioneered the application of phenomenology to religion. Smart synthesised a disparate array of approaches into an accessible and widely known system, promoting the view of religion’s ‘six dimensions’: the doctrinal; the mythological (or narrative); the ethical; the ritual; the experiential; and, the social; later adding a ‘material’ or aesthetic dimension (Smart 1989; 1999). Smart simultaneously took an interest in the wider educational applications of this approach and in the US journal published a seminal article outlining the case (Smart 1969), a turning point for religious education, though he had earlier written on religious education (Smart 1962). Smart stressed the secularity and plurality of his approach to be almost synonymous:

I am deeply committed to the secular principle in state education. That is, I am sceptical as to whether the present pattern of religious education in England, which assumes that for those who do not contract out on grounds of conscience, etc., the content of religious education shall be Christian, is right or viable (Smart 1969: 26).

The Schools’ Council Working Paper No. 36 (1971) subsequently adopted Smart’s phenomenological approach as the model for religious education. A decade later in 1985 the Swann Report – an inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups, chaired by Lord Swann – or *Education for All* – also adopted this approach as the most appropriate model for a harmonious ‘multicultural’ society, concluding ‘decisively in favour of a nondogmatic, nondenominational, phenomenological approach to religious education’ (Barnes 2001: 445). The most critical challenge to this approach has been from Barnes, an all-out direct assault, consistently claiming that this sort of approach simply enters a far neutral notion of the equality of all religious truth claims which as a result fails to take difference

seriously (Barnes 2001; Barnes 2006; Barnes 2008; cf. Sealy 1982; O'Grady 2005).

The phenomenological approach nevertheless undergirded the 1988 Education Reform Act, with major implications for religious education, requiring in law that syllabuses for religious education in state schools for the first time should reflect not only Christianity but the other, principal faith represented in Britain, thereby legally enforcing a shift away from a scriptural-theological approach to the teaching of world religions. This approach was consolidated by subsequent curriculum guidance (SCAA 1994; QCA 2004; QCA 2010). Perhaps unsurprisingly, a quarter of a century after the 1988 Education Reform Act, the education inspectorate found in English schools a marked weakness in the teaching of Christianity (Ofsted 2010). Subsequent developments in religious education are thus to some degrees also responses to Smart, an immensely influential figure on religious education (see Shepherd 2005), but the next under consideration pre-dated the phenomenological approach.

The Psychological-Experiential Paradigm

Piaget's theories of children's development (Piaget 1928; 1952; 1953; 1957) informed developments in religious education as they had in education as a whole. Religious education researchers soon began to apply Piagetian frameworks of children's development particularly to their *moral* development, an approach pioneered by Lawrence Kohlberg (1981; see Munsey 1980; also Oser 1994; Oser & Gmünder 1991). From here, along with Robert Coles' (1986; 1990; 2011) work on the 'moral archaeology of childhood', researchers soon took an interest in what James Fowler (1981; 2001) defined as 'faith development' theory.

Psychological frameworks for understanding children's attitudes to the Bible would also come to dominate. Harold Loukes (1961; 1963), Ronald Goldman (1964; 1969) and Edwin Cox (1967; 1971) were especially influential in their analysis of the role of the Bible in religious education. A collective view prevailed, that, considering the state of children's psychological development, children lacked 'readiness for religion'. Child-centred religious education began increasingly to focus on children's psychological needs and to their preparation for adult life. Religious

education in English schools came increasingly to resemble ‘personal and social education’. Overnight, and this would help pave the way for the phenomenological approach, religious educators were confronted with the notion that it was, essentially, inappropriate to teach the Bible to children, and even to students in the later years of secondary school (Hyde 1990). On the basis of a few influential researchers, Bible teaching declined. Readiness for religion research provided a readymade excuse for educators already ill-equipped to teach the Bible to jettison it from the curriculum (for a more detailed historical account, see Gearon 2013; 2014).

While there is also a continued application of psychological theory and research to religious education (for example, Francis 2005; Francis Robbins & Astley 2005; 2009) – Francis is responsible for a proliferation of psychological attitudinal studies (Francis 2009) – these approaches soon came to be themselves as lacking especially in religious content. But by a strange coincidence these psychologically driven approaches found solace in the lack of religious studies content, in favour of the emphasis on children’s spirituality. These approaches were a direct response to and reaction against Smart’s phenomenology of religion in the form it came to have in schools. What for these critics – writing from a psychological perspective a – was a religious education dominated by Christianity and Bible insufficient to pupils’ developmental needs, had transformed to the teaching of world religions equally insufficient to pupils’ developmental needs.

New journals on spirituality emerged, such as the *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality*; textbooks like *New Methods in Religious Education: An Experiential Approach* (Hammond, Hay, Moxon, Netto, Raban, Straugheir & Williams 1990) showed the influence of both of Smart’s *Religious Experience of Mankind* and James’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Classrooms were coming to be seen by some advocates of an experiential and spiritual approach to be places not simply for study but generation of religious and spiritual experience.

New Methods and other approaches emphasising ‘spiritual’ development (see for example Thatcher’s 1991 critique) can be seen then as part of a wider field of psychological enquiry, including work on the moral and spiritual life of children (again, Coles 1986; 1990; 2011). The ‘spiritual-experiential’ approaches were given seemingly legal sanction by the way in which spiritual development was enshrined in the 1944 and 1988 Education and Education Reform Acts respectively: ‘a balanced and broadly based

curriculum which (a) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society' (HMSO 1988: 1). While this would have been envisaged in broadly Christian terms, and still finds Christian expression (see for example, Enger 1992), the new approaches were secular and psychological and could, as critics of them have argued, really mean anything to anyone.

Thus, while Carr's (2005; 2006) philosophical critique accepts that spirituality has meanings across and beyond religious traditions, this breadth of terminology, definition, reference points is problematic. When spirituality has been adopted by and into secular contexts it has less well defined and less easy to determine and more diffuse senses, even the political (Alexander, 2003; Alexander & Agbaria 2012) have been regarded certainly by philosophers of education as ethical problematic (Alexander 2004; Carr & Haldane 2003; Carr & Alexander 2005), not simply pedagogical unsuccessful but logically nonsensical (Carr & Haldane 2003; Hand 2003). Amongst the most systematic critiques of phenomenological *and* 'spiritual' approaches to religious education emerged not surprisingly then from philosophically informed pedagogies, the philosophical-conceptual paradigm.

The Philosophical-Conceptual Paradigm

Just as psychology became a bedrock for many developments in religious education, philosophy of education has emerged as an important approach to the teaching of religion in schools. But this history, which begins most significantly with John Dewey, and especially his 1916 work, *Democracy and Education*, subtitled *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, is replete with irony. If Dewey had sought for a philosophical replacement of the obscurantism of religion as a foundation for education – there is no room for religious education in Dewey's 'common faith' – its focus would increasingly, like the lineage of Rousseau to which Dewey gives obeisance, integrate a political focus. The title of *Democracy and Education* encapsulates this as much as its implicit scepticism towards religious tradition.

It was Seymour (1995) who identified here a major shift in the theory and practice of religious educators between a nineteenth century, when Christianity ('albeit a strictly Anglo-Protestant variety') still framed the aims

and purposes of education, to the twentieth, where a secularized philosophy of education began to take a central role in supplying justifications for the moral content of education. Although there was a time in the history of education when philosophy and religious education ‘were close allies’, from the late twentieth century allies had become estranged (Seymour 1999: 318). Philosophers were amongst those who charged that religious education was by its nature ‘indoctrinatory’ (Copley 2006; 2008).

Yet religious educators would also re-discover old alliances with philosophy. The Philosophy for Children movement emergent from the 1970s encouraged the use of philosophy in schools, countering much of the thinking of psychologists that children were incapable of such developed analytical and cognitive thought (Lipman & Sharp 1978; Lipman *et al.* 1980; also, Golding 2011; Vansieleghem & Kennedy 2011; 2011a). Drawing on largely ancient Hellenic, specifically pre-Christian, traditions, the movement encouraged the development of philosophical skills to develop autonomy of thought (for example, Oliverio 2012).

Approaches using philosophy in religious education soon emerged in an educational environment where the subject had been philosophically devalued. In the context of a liberal education committed to educational openness it has even been questioned whether religious education is possible at all (Hand 2006). Philosophers of education have thus been and remain amongst the most trenchant opponents of religious education (see, for example, White 2004). Nevertheless, this did not prevent philosophers arguing that the same rigour philosophers applied to other subject areas, especially in the development of critical thinking could also be applied to religious education (Strhan 2010). Chater and Erricker (2012) go so far as to argue that religious education’s future must be one rooted in a tradition of philosophical critique.

Wright and Barnes are the most notable who have formulated a philosophical pedagogy for religious education: ‘critical religious education’. Religious education, they argue, should not be defined by the motivations of social and political harmony, phenomenological neutrality, but a search for ‘truth’ (Wright 2006; 2007). In critical religious education the study of the religious phenomenon should give precedence to the cultivation of critical, philosophical and theological insight, finding some support even from theologians and a wide spectrum of religious educators (Astley 2012; Astley, Francis, Robbins & Selcuk 2012).

Along with criticism of the phenomenology of religious education itself, much of the impetus for this model has grown from the very necessity of plurality of religious truth claims and especially the surfacing in contemporary geopolitical context of extremist religious claims. Carr (2012) points out that these geopolitical and theological circumstances do not mean that the classroom can become the milieu for the resolution of ancient challenges to the epistemological foundations of religious truth claims (Radford 2012). As Hyslop-Margison and Peterson (2012) suggest, however, it is erroneous to suppose that religious education can find new legitimation by being a forum for epistemic examination of truth claims. Three critical reasons for this are that : *first*, it is difficult to see how such claims could be evaluated epistemologically; *second*, there are no philosophical or even theological standards by which such claims could be measured; and *third*, the very basis of discussion may ferment conflict rather than resolve it.

The Socio-Cultural Paradigm

Socio-cultural approaches to religious education are a sympathetic re-working of Smart's phenomenology but placing more emphasis upon the socio-anthropological method deriving from socio-anthropological traditions, notably Durkheim's (2001) classic work on religion, and through this lineage to the anthropological analyses of culture by Clifford Geertz (1995), especially *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1975). The ethnographic method examines manifestations of culture in the minute detail of its own settings. In educational context ethnographic studies in religious education have similarly focused on children in their own communities (for example, Nesbitt & Arweck 2010) or as Arweck and Nesbitt (2010) neatly put it, 'plurality at close quarters'. Ethnographic method thus forms the empirical and methodological basis for later curricula and pedagogical frameworks, establishing a,

close link between the activity of the ethnographic researcher, working on field research, and the activity of the learner in the classroom, attempting to understand religions in the contemporary world (Jackson 2011: 190).

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The interpretive approach, in its use of the ethnographic method, focuses, like anthropologists, on the complexities of religion, and its representations, and especially the lived experience of children of faith in the context of their traditions and in those, especially educational spaces, where these communities meet. The approach places less emphasis on neatly bounded traditions, the study of ‘world religions’, and more on religious diversity of religion, particularly the plurality within religious communities where faith is lived out. Ethnographic insights from children here form the basis for the view that religions are not ossified but lived and living traditions.

Jackson’s (1997) approach has had wide international impact on religious education. Arguably this has been given most prominence in the Religious Education Dialogue or Conflict (REDCo) project. The ‘interpretive approach’ was the method informing research and pedagogical thinking in the REDCo project. The interpretive approach aims to help children and young people to find their own positions within the key debates about religious plurality (Jackson 1997; 2004; Willaime 2007). Although

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

It is advanced as a pedagogical and research tool and a contribution to various debates and has never been intended to be seen as the pedagogical approach to the subject ... it is complementary to various other approaches and lends itself particularly to the study of contemporary religious practice (Jackson 2011: 190; also 2011a).

In and through these socio-cultural emphases, the ethnographic approach has been a key mover in the development of programmes of religion in education internationally, not least because of its political applications, as we see in the historical-political paradigm.

The Historical-Political Paradigm

The historical-political paradigm emphasises understanding present-day uses

of religion in education as a means of achieving broad political goals, and these mainly secular in origin and orientation. Religious education here is seen serving democratic principles and practice, thereby through this serving the needs of cohesion amongst culturally and religiously diverse populations. Religious education here is founded on principles intent on the amelioration of those potential conflicts inherent in religious and cultural pluralism. This cultural and social justification of religious education – the contemporary relevance argument – has long been current, and arguably was part of the reason for the success of phenomenology (see for example, Bates 2005). Increasingly however, pedagogical efforts do simply dimly reflect but directly mirror political agendas; see Grimmitt's (2010) collection on social and community cohesion and religious education. Here political principle underpins pedagogical principle (see Gearon 2008).

Many examples could be cited but perhaps the most influential across Europe and in the United Nations has been the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (the OSCE) document, *The Toledo Guiding Principles* (OSCE 2007). Here the foregrounding of tolerance as a principle of religion or politics is one which mirrors not only the pragmatism of contemporary democratic politics but echoes in language and tone the Enlightenment and the revolutions in democracy which also marked that century. Most famously Rousseau's 'civil religion' has 'tolerance' as the highest virtue in the social contract.

The high profile dissemination of REDCo – for example to the European Parliament and the United Nations Human Rights Council – gives some sense of the political impact of this paradigm of religious education. Key findings from the REDCo study seem also curiously to mirror the same ideals. Students 'wish for peaceful coexistence across differences, and believe this to be possible'; for students 'peaceful coexistence depends on knowledge about each other's religions and worldviews'; students 'who learn about religious diversity in school are more willing to have conversations about religions/ beliefs with students of other backgrounds than those who do not'; and so forth (Weisse 2009; 2011). The rights justification here is doubly confirmed by legal-political emphases on the voice of the child, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child is of paramount importance (Jawoniya 2012).

The growing worldwide political impetus for teaching religion in education is by the nature of its influence *political*, but it is also and of

absolute necessity *historical*. One of the problems in implementation was that we have the politics without the history: the acceptance (and clearly many European students have) of certain liberal democratic values as the core rationale for religious education. Religious education here, as noted, risks limiting religion to its public and political face. The resurgence of religion in public spaces of significant power is not necessarily the mark of a prevalent counter-secularization but rather a new form of secularization, for it is not the resurgence of religious authority in its own right, nor less in religious education, but an answering of religious education to political authority, not more autonomy but less (Gearon 2013). All said, this paradigm is arguably amongst the most powerful and prevalent of all current paradigms, in large measure because of the potential it is seen to have not only for justifying religious education as a curriculum subject but enjoining this with renewed political and societal as much as educational purpose.

Conclusion

The ‘paradigms’ of contemporary religious education, merely sketched here, I have argued, can be identified as: the scriptural-theological; phenomenological; psychological-experiential; philosophical-conceptual; socio-cultural; and historical-political. There are broad correlations between these paradigms of contemporary religious education and the intellectual disciplines from which they emerged, and some justification of the notion ‘paradigm shift’ or ‘paradigm shifts’ in religious education pedagogy (Gearon 2013; 2014). However, are these developments paradigmatic? As noted, paradigms ‘gain their status because they are more successful than their competitors in solving a few problems that the group of practitioners has come to recognize as acute’. A review of research impacts in classrooms that there is rather some epistemological confusion amongst teachers about what the subject should now be achieving (Conroy, Lundie & Baumfield 2012). We might therefore argue that there is little evidence of a universal acceptance of any one of the competing paradigms of contemporary religious education.

In theoretical and pedagogic terms the implications of this are significant. Thus, philosophical models see the object lesson of religious education to make thinkers and proto-philosophers; socio-cultural models see the object lesson of religious education as creating ethnographic, cultural

explorers; psychological models see the learner as a seeker after personal meaning and fulfilment, ‘spiritual with religion’, the child as spiritual seeker; phenomenological models see the object lesson of religious education as creating a detached observer of the stuff of religion who is perpetually distanced from it; ever more prevalent political models, emphasizing the public face of religion, see teaching and learning in religious education as concerned with the creation of citizens and even activists.

Roux has aligned herself and her work with a particular paradigm of religious education. Her approach straddles the socio-cultural and the historical-political: aware of an emergent new post-apartheid South Africa, her work can be seen as part of a wider international move to enhance the social and political relevance, and indeed usefulness, of religious education. But this, her favoured paradigm, is only part of the story of contemporary religious education. The greatest risk inherent in an over identification of religion with the political is that religion is over-conflated with its public manifestations. Religious education yet still awaits a fully integrated and intellectually coherent model which could be termed in any meaningful sense paradigmatic.

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