

# Christianity, Citizenship, Education

## Presentation by Liam Gearon

University of Oxford

In his lecture Dr Gearon explored four critical contexts, three political theologies two views on secularisation and posed the question on a putative link between one European civil religion – one European civil religious education?

### **Critical Context 1: Religion and politics**

If the role of religion in public and political life has been historically underplayed since the European Enlightenment, there is now increasing evidence of the importance of religion in post-Cold War public and political life. Often, though not exclusively, this centres on issues of citizenship, democracy and human rights, including freedom of religion or belief.

### **Critical Context 2: Religion and Contemporary Global Governance**

The UN system incorporated and defined freedom of religion or belief since the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But the early history of the UN tended to downplay religious and ideological diversity. After a long neglect (or low level treatment) of religion explicitly, the UN system from the late 1970s and with the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981) began to recognise the international significance of religion for a stable world order.

### **Critical Context 3: Religion in citizenship education**

The role of religion in citizenship education (and related curricula areas such as civics and human rights education) has been underplayed. Reflecting broader global trends there is now increasing recognition of the importance of religion in citizenship and human rights education, although the recognition of the importance of teaching about religion remains arguably less strong in civic or citizenship education than in religious education.

### **Critical Context 4: Citizenship in religious education**

The political has been underplayed in religious education, and contentious historical contexts sidestepped, including notions of citizenship. Yet the exponential growth of civic or citizenship education around the world has forced religious education to consider the political and historical, a matter itself forced upon education by manifold changes in the world in which we live.

### **References**

Gearon, L. (Guest Editor) (2008) *Citizenship, Human Rights and Religion, British Journal of Religious Education*, 30: 2.

Arthur, A. (UK), Gearon, L. (UK), and Sears, A. (Canada) (2010) *Education, Politics and Religion: Reconciling the Civil and the Sacred in Education*. London and New York: Routledge.

### **Three Political Theologies**

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) has funded research in political theologies, which, on the basis of interviews with religious leaders in the UK, has identified **three political theologies**. As the research is still ongoing it is not yet possible to draw firm conclusions but certain elements have become clear.

The relationship between religious authority and political authority is problematic.

The Church of England can be described as a coalition between three parties: catholic, evangelical and liberal.

The Roman Catholic Church in England has been entering more into public affairs during recent years. A series of encyclicals forms the basis for the Church to speak about social justice.

The RC Church accepts that a democratic State must be *secular*; but it should not espouse a *secularist* ideology.

### **Two Views on secularisation**

There are two views of secularisation. The first view argues that the resurgence of interest and influence of religion and as a consequence religion in education is evidence of *counter*-secularization. This view can be studied under four critical contexts

The references for aspects of these are as follows;

*Sociological* source see:

- Davie, G., Berger, P. and Fokas, E. (2008) *Religious America, Secular Europe*. Aldershot, Ashgate.

*Theological/educational* sources see:

- Peter Schreiner *Council of Europe: White paper on intercultural dialogue*
- Elza Kuyk, Roger Jensen, David Lankshear, Elisabeth Löh Manna, Peter Schreiner (eds.) *Religious Education in Europe Situation and current trend in schools*. Oslo : IKO.

*Educational* sources for view one:

- Jackson, R. (2011) 'Religion, education, dialogue and conflict: editorial introduction', *British Journal of Religious Education*. 33, 105-110.
- Jackson, R. Miedema, S., Weisse, W. and Willaime, J-P. (eds.) (2007) *Religion and Education in Europe: Developments, Contexts, Debates*. New York: Waxmann.

In most European countries, we have assumed for a long time that increasing secularisation would lead to a gradual retreat of religion from public space. *This tendency has reversed itself*

*in the course of the past decade as religion has returned to public attention* (Weisse, 2011: 112, )

The second view says that secularization is not confirmed – this *seems* to be an increasingly weak position. but it is one held by the speaker

Bruce, S. (ed.) (1992) *Religion and Modernization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Berger, P. (1967) *The Sacred Canopy*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Bruce, S (2002) *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*. Oxford: Blackwell.

### **One European civil religion – one European civil religious education?**

Within two generations Europe has transformed two millennia of Christian identity to a plural, multi-faith orientation within its education systems. What the evidence of the REDCo findings in regard to religion in education is an increasingly marginalisation of Christianity as a school subject in religious education. The pattern is not as one would expect homogenous.

- France (Willaime, 2007: 87-102);
- Spain (Dietz 2007: 103-132);
- Russia Kozyrev and Federov, 2007: 133-158);
- Estonia (Valk, 2007: 159-180);
- England (Jackson and O'Grady, 2007: 181- 202);
- The Netherlands (Avest, Bakker, Betram-Troost and Miedema, 2007: 203-220);
- Norway (Skeie, 2007: 221-242);
- Germany (Knouth, 2007: 243-265).

Take the latter summary by Knouth in the context of Germany: Up to the 1960s, religious education in public schools was taught in close cooperation with established churches. It was based on dogmatic and systematic theology and familiarized students with the Bible, the hymnbook, and central parts of church history. Its stated aim was to introduce the Gospel to the (mainly baptized) pupils as the liberating Word of God.

Today, nearly 50 years later, religious education has opened itself to religious and cultural plurality It defines its purpose from its standing as a school subject, and therefore in pedagogical as well as theological terms. Every religious community which carries a share of responsibility for religious education in schools thus faces the challenge of interpreting its own religious tradition in a context of religious diversity and cultural heterogeneity (Knouth, 2007: 24).

Willaime (2007) makes four general observations:

(1) 'School instruction about religious faith is a strong indicator of the way church-state and school-religion relations are constructed inside a given national framework' (examples cited are Greece, Italy, the UK, Germany, Ireland);

(2) 'However great the diversity of state-church and school-religion relations to the various European countries may be, and however many national approaches to the treatment of religion in education they may have, they are all confronted with similar challenges', including 'secularization', the 'lack of religious acculturation amongst school students and their loss of contact with religious life' and 'an overall religious pluralisation';

(3) 'There is also the need to strengthen the role of religious knowledge in public school education' mirroring 'in spite of a high degree of difference which shows no sign of disappearing, there is a broad consensus in Europe of the need for instruction on religion in public schools';

(4) With the exception of France, 'in practically all those countries, including those which joined the EU in 2004, there exist courses dedicated to the study of a religion or religious matters in general' (Willaime, 2007: 57-59).

Willaime identifies three models of religious education in Europe:

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

There are three developments identified which are shared with the REDCO project as a whole:

- (1) 'A growing integration of religious education, be it confessional or not, with the <sup>2</sup> overall educational goals of the school'

'an increased openness, in different degrees, to the religious and philosophical plurality of European societies';

- (3) that the latter developments 'raise tensions and engender conflicts'.

Willaime and the REDCO Project rightly identify a convergence in thinking on confessional models brought about by changed socio-political circumstances, particularly sociological and legal conditions, the 'double constraint' which is

. 'a *sociological* one, in that the religious and philosophical pluralisation of European societies obliges 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, emphasis in original).

It is concluded that this gradual development towards a non-confessional curriculum may just as well be coming about through the convergence of the contents of confessional and non-confessional religious education. Yet one essential question remains that of the relationship

between academic and religious authorities. Do the former teach religious education independently, or do the latter in some fashion or other exert control over it? *This question is an important indicator of the degree of secularisation in religious education* (Willaime, 2007: 66, emphasis added).

Stark and Finke (2000) argue that the contemporary prominence of religion in the public sphere does not indicate the decline of religion as such but that the traditional (that is pre-Enlightenment) models of religious authority means that the latter is subject to vastly more political organizational structures.

Weisse (2011) is correct then, in asserting that ‘religion has returned to public attention’. But this does not equate to the reversal, as he states it, of secularization itself. It would be my argument that the REDCo project, in such close collaboration with powerful European political authorities, is strongly contributory to enhanced secularization not a symptom of secularization’s decline, through increasing uniformity of a civil religion, and an emergent civil religious education.

Compare the REDCo (2011) terms on religious education for tolerance with the penultimate chapter of Rousseau’s (1762) *The Social Contract*.

Thus, the culmination of the social contract is a ‘civil religion’: compare this with Jackson and O’Grady (2007) ‘Religions and education in England: social plurality, civil religion and religious education pedagogy’

