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**Religion, Culture & Society:
The Key to Understanding Diversity**

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Religion, Culture & Society: The Key to Understanding Diversity

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Abstract

Britain can certainly claim to be a pluralistic, democratic society hosting a population as diverse in 'race' and ethnicity as it is in faith, belief systems and cultural traditions. Therefore, it is crucial that different communities within pluralistic Britain not only understand each other's belief systems, practices and cultural traditions, but also accept and support difference. In accomplishing this aim, it is equally vital that the youth are educated about the diversified and multi-faceted nature of the society they live in and global humanity around them. A central tenant of Religious Education (RE) is engaging in critical and evaluative analysis of different faith systems and cultural heritages. Through studying RE, we can begin to appreciate and understand not only traditional heritage, values and cultural practices, but also the nature of religion and belief systems in direct relation to humanity and human development. This phenomenon applies historically to the development of social and cultural settings worldwide but also underpins the acquisition of knowledge and the meaning of law, sociology, politics, economics, education, philosophy, art, literature etc. Basically, Religious Education provides excellent preparation for real life engagement living and working in a pluralistic society and an ever growing global community. Further, RE informs past, present and future understandings of difference and developments globally and gives us an insight to current events that affect the global community; for example, the 2018 insurgencies in Thailand, the Syrian refugee crises and asylum seekers escaping the near genocide in Sudan. Accordingly, RE is part of the National Curriculum in England and Wales and therefore compulsory for students in primary and secondary state funded schools. However, RE is not compulsory at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) Level like other Humanities subjects such as History or Geography. This is a direct consequence of Government reforms including the introduction of the English Baccalaureate¹ (EBacc), which push students towards Science, Technology, Economics, Math (STEM) subjects. The Baccalaureate is a rather deplorable mechanism to measure education in league tables. The exclusion of RE from the EBacc is having extreme and damaging effects. Not only does this foster a real lack of awareness of valuing difference, but also lack of

¹The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is a performance measure for students in secondary schools who achieve a Grade C or higher in core STEM subjects.

awareness of how to support diversity and why community cohesion is important. RE engages with inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue, without it the youth are prevented from truly understanding and appreciating multicultural societies or global events. I would argue the short-sighted reform brought about by the previous coalition government and supported by the current government undermines policies such as community cohesion, social inclusion, multicultural value of difference etc. and instead fuels ignorance, mistrust, division, intolerance, fear and social unrest. Religious Education ensures students learn about different ways of life locally, nationally and internationally, generating genuine understanding of Other – and we need it in our schools!

Keywords: *religious education, culture and identity, diversity, secularization, globalization*

Religions are primarily made up of rituals, practices, value systems and ideas; the majority being held in stories and myths within sacred text. Spiritual truth and cultural heritage are also included within historical narrative, shaping memory, belief and identity over generations. These are collated and developed over centuries and are embedded within culture. Undeniably, religion and culture cannot be understood in isolation from each other. Basically, religions are embedded within culture and “culture is inclusive of political and economic influences” (Moore, 2016: 31). Indeed, religion is embedded within all aspects of human experience, agency and phenomenon. Religion, belief and culture are also essential elements of personal and collective identity and enrich a sense of belonging. Religion is one of the most powerful forces that bind a community together, it is the heart of community, and therefore impacts directly on how a community interacts within society.

During World War Two community groups supported each other regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender. They organised social movements in Britain that shared provisions, resources and services. Communities also supported an evacuation scheme planned by the government that assisted British citizens and displaced people arriving from Europe (The History Press, nd²). Communities interacting together in such constructive and beneficial ways can only be regarded positively.

After World War Two mass migration took place on a large scale, people from underdeveloped countries took up the opportunity to work and live in Europe. Britain accepted immigrants mainly from commonwealth countries who could claim citizenship, the British Raj from India for example. Immigrants brought their own religious, cultural and social traditions with them. Multiculturalism spread across Europe, including Britain – Britain was fast becoming a diverse pluralistic country interested in new ideologies and beliefs, and it thrived (King, 2012a).

William Temple, Archbishop of York (1929-42) and then Archbishop of Canterbury (1942-44) set out a ‘manifesto for welfare’, which he believed would help to support the country in re-building itself physically, economically, socially and also spiritually. Temple argued for equality and justice for all people and believed that health, education and a right to work was essential requirements necessary to ensure the common good³ for British citizens. Temple’s ideology of welfare was born out of a Christian understanding of spirituality and theological framework (Temple, 1928). The people of Britain embraced this new idea openly and supported Temple completely. Within the welfare system that Temple envisioned was a free medical service, education and employment for everyone, a national system enabling workers to contribute towards a pension scheme and a social service provision that supported families living in poverty with financial aid (Temple, 1941). An old friend of Temple’s from Oxford University, William Beveridge, was also working towards a similar plan. Beverage was a British economist and a Liberal politician who had worked under Winston Churchill on the Board of Trade. In this position Beverage implemented a new national support

²Nd: no date.

³See Thomas Aquinas; Summa Theologica.

system for working people in the hope of averting poverty. This system was the National Insurance scheme. Following this, Beveridge wrote a government report which outlined further social reforms to address ‘*Want Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness*’ in post war Britain (Beveridge, 1942). Many of Beveridge’s reforms had been products of discussions held with Temple during their days together at Oxford. The Report was published in 1942 and undoubtedly influenced the founding of the National Health Service (NHS) and minimum wage legislation.

Following on from this, Clement Attlee – the Labour Party Leader and British Prime Minister (1945-51) – introduced the Welfare State as outlined in Beveridge’s Report. This included social, political, economic and educational reform. This was the first time in history where government took responsibility for welfare. Prior to 1948 “welfare was almost entirely the province of the churches, and huge amounts of social work, community work and charity were done by parishes and congregations up and down the land” (Dinham, 2016: 104). The Welfare State was a shared vision of church and state, which was implemented by both church leaders and politicians. Indeed, it was the “embodiment of the Christian Church” (ibid) embraced by the state and the people. However, as the state took more and more control of welfare the connection of individuals to family, family to congregation and congregation to parish began to weaken; eventually communities themselves began to dissolve. To neglect religion in society is to neglect community and therefore endanger everything that sustains and upholds community living, including the future!

The shift of welfare from church to state also impacted on people’s ability to engage in religious dialogue – we lost the ability to speak religiously. By leaving religious language out of public talk, Dinham and Francis (2016) argue that discussion centered on religion began to degenerate into misunderstandings, assumptions, ignorance and very little real conversation. Rather, general exchange focused on “anxieties about extremism or sex ... wearing of the veil or forced marriage” (ibid: 4). In fact, these are good examples of “public treatment of religion that have produced more heat than light” (ibid). The problem is not that people don’t want to talk about religion, the problem is that they actually don’t know how. Woodhead and Catto (2012: 2) argue that the post war assumption that religion was “purely a private matter with no public or political significance” is not only incorrect, it is damaging. In truth, religion is integral to both the public and political sphere and in fact to the law, economics, international relations, creative and cultural industries and most certainly education (King, 2014).

Indeed, state education policy represents a form of government religious illiteracy simply because it closes down spaces for open debate. Arguably, the ‘domestic war on terror’ and introduction of policies such as the United Kingdom’s Prevent and Counter-radicalisation Policies have major human rights implications (Stanford & Ahmed 2016). The introduction of policy such as PREVENT focuses on religion, and Islam in particular has been singled out as ‘extreme’. This impacts directly upon the identity of Muslims and how they are perceived by the general public. *Show Racism the Red Card* conducted a survey of 6,000 schoolchildren in 2015, the results found that “one-third of those surveyed

believed Muslims are taking over England and over a quarter believing that Islam encourages terrorism” (Taylor, 2016 np). The PREVENT strategy has been counter-productive and has actually intensified negative stereo-typing of Muslims in Britain and increased “alienation and isolation [of Muslims] in which radicalisation thrives, potentially undermining the goal of keeping Britain safe and secure” (The Muslim Council of Britain, 2016: 5). The government are responsible for religious illiteracy and the consequences are ongoing.

Dinham (2016) argues that the loss of religious language within the public sphere was a tragic inadvertent consequence that has repercussions to the present day. Some of these repercussions are easily identified; community crises for example. Irrefutably, there has been extreme cases of hate-crime across communities and neighborhoods; the majority motivated by hostility or prejudice. Perpetrators acting aggressively or violently against another person or group simply because they are different. The increase in religious hate crime across England and Wales increased by 40% during 2017-18. More than half of these attacks were directed at Muslims, with Jewish people being the second most commonly attacked faith group (Home Office, 2020). Indeed, Lizzie Dearden, Home Office Correspondent for the Independent, reported that “Police recorded a total of 94,098 hate crime offences – more than double the total five years ago” (Dearden, 2018 np). Prejudice in its extremist form results in genocide; the Holocaust, 1941; Bosnia, 1992; Rwanda, 1994, to name a few. Regrettably, hate-crime in Britain is on the rise (Home Office, 2020). Again, this is directly related to lack of religious literacy within education and within government policies.

Although there has not been a concentrated effort by government steer to address issues of religious intolerance, there has been an attempt to address community breakdown through a number of mechanisms and policies. These include; *Community Cohesion* (2011⁴), *Building Cohesive Communities* (2016⁵), *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper* (2018⁶); but sadly none seem to be fully workable (King, 2013). As community bonds weakened, social cohesion suffered, as a result communities began to divide. Unfortunately, this also led to emerging friction, intolerance and eventually segregation. There is still heavy reliance on faith-based organizations to outreach – religion reaching communities where the state seemingly cannot (Beaumont & Cloke, 2012). Indeed, Sherwood (2018: np) argues that “there are millions of people of faith across the world engaging in social action projects to help the poor and marginalised. Look at the involvement of churches, mosques and synagogues in food banks and projects to support refugees, the sanctuary church movement in the US, the extraordinary sums raised by Islamic charities for relief work in some of the world’s most desperate places”. Faith-based care organisations continue to work in the most impoverished sections of society, reaching out to the homeless people, rehabilitating offenders, offering support and counselling to drug addicts and sex

⁴GOV.UK: www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-cohesion.

⁵Local Government Association: https://local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/10.31%20Community%20cohesion%20guidance_04.2.pdf.

⁶GOV.UK: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69699integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf.

workers etc. These are problems of extreme exclusion that belong to the public sphere, yet they are “swept away as matters of private concern ... religious communities respond to forms of social hardship and foster forms of civic inclusion” (ibid, 2012:45). Although religion has been relegated to the private sphere, ironically it continues to be faith communities that respond to societal suffering that is undeniably a public responsibility.

A further unintended consequence of the Welfare State and the gradual separation of church and state was the emergence of secular society. Casanova (1994) distinguishes three categories of secularisation;

- Decline of religious belief (the most widely accepted definition)
- Privatisation of religion (public v. private)
- Differentiation of the secular spheres (state, economic, science)

Casanova challenges the secularisation theory⁷ completely and believes religion has always been and always will be a significant aspect of humanity; culturally, sociologically, economically and politically.

Although religion and belief is embedded within every culture worldwide and has historically played a major role in shaping law, politics, economics, social structures, education and policy of every society without exception; the current secular societies of Europe continue to deny the major role religion plays in world events. Berger, Davie and Fokas (2008: 11) argue that “countries are pulled into secularity to the degree by which they are integrated into Europe”. Ironically, secularity, according to Moore (2016), has been shaped by different interpretations and assumptions of Christianity.

Regrettably, religion remains “one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted dimensions of human expression, yet it has a tremendous impact on human behavior and self-understanding. Much of this misunderstanding stems from Enlightenment definitions of secularism that spread wildly through colonialism and remain deeply embedded in cultures throughout the globe” (Moore, 2016: 37). Religious illiteracy⁸ is a direct consequence of this combined with lack of genuine and specialised education in Religious Studies. RE is the only subject that evaluates and critically engages with the individual and collective conscience and unconscious cultural identity that is specifically related to humanity in structural and social settings. RE addresses religious world views of fundamentalism, devotional expression and diverse belief systems together with the continued evolvement of religious and theological doctrine and thought.

Political scientists (Milbank & Pabst, 2016), sociologists (Casanova, 1994, 2012; Davie, 2004) and religious scholars (Dinham 2016; Woodhead, 2013) are amongst many academics who have acknowledged that perhaps religion should not have been removed from the public sphere or political influence across

⁷Secularisation theory: basically meaning religion is fading in contemporary society.

⁸Religious illiteracy: the lack of understanding about the basic tenets of the world's religious traditions, belief systems, rituals, expressions of diverse cultural heritages. The lack of knowledge relating to the evolvement of religious ideologies historically and contemporary. Lack of awareness of the major role that religion plays within humanity and on a global scale.

Europe. There is a growing consensus that the decline of religious influence on politics and ongoing lack of religious literacy, particularly following complex and continuing religious influences on a global scale, has led to inaccurate representations, understandings and knowledge of the role religion plays on a human level. This is clearly evident in the aftermath of major global events that shook the world; terrorist attacks carried out by the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Ulster Defense Association (UDA), religious extremists, right-wing activists, also terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS). Indeed, Moore (2016: 30) argues that after these global events “political theorists in the West began to acknowledge the highly problematic ways that religion and religious influences have been marginalised and too simplistically rendered”. She goes on to argue that “economic or political dimensions of human experience cannot be accurately understood without understanding the religious and other ideological influences that shape the cultural context out of which particular political or economic actions and motivations arise” (ibid: 31). The media incited public ignorance further by ill-informed reporting, which ultimately distorted perceptions of religion, belief and practices of faith communities even further.

For example; by late 1980 the Muslim population in Britain had reached around 1,000,000; the Islamic community becoming a visible minority and the acceptance of Muslims being recognised. However, a controversy arose in 1988 when Salman Rushdie published ‘*The Satanic Verses*’. Muslim communities worldwide expressed outrage, declaring the book blasphemous. Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa on Rushdie and many affronted British Muslims supported the death threat, claiming that the publication was a direct attack on the Islamic faith (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010). Rushdie received many death threats which sparked debate about the freedom of expression and freedom of speech afforded all people in the United Kingdom. Rushdie did try to apologise to the Muslim communities’ world-wide and secured restitution to British Muslims who had been subject to victimisation because of protest that had occurred throughout the country. Rushdie was sincere in his attempt to build bridges, and through ongoing discussions with Islamic scholars he eventually reverted to Islam. The reaction and “rage of the secular liberals ... could hardly be contained, revealing an alarming illogicality at the heart of the campaign. Muslims should be tolerant of offensive books, but liberals could not be tolerant of the writer who became a Muslim. Tolerance, it is clear, was a social construct, to be applied in some cases, but not in others” (Davie, cited in Dinham & Francis, 2016: viii-ix). The British public were equally unfathomable in their response; openly portraying secular views and non-religious affinity yet simultaneously raging about a religious community’s response to their understanding of blasphemy. It seems that faith communities moving to Britain should comply with secular norms. Arguably, this opinion supports *Assimilation* policy rather than *Value of Difference*, which is supposedly the model for managing multiculturalism in Britain (King, 2013).

Davie (cited in Dinham & Francis, 2016: x) describes the public response to the Rushdie Affair and other world changing events such as the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the fall of communism in 1989 and the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001 as the rise of “self-conscious secularity”. She argues that despite elements of

religion being central to all of these events, people were (and still are) generally ill-informed of the complexity of each situation. Although these events were shocking and unexpected, a general lack of religious knowledge made it “more difficult to predict, recognise, or address them when they happened” (Dinham & Francis, 2016: 15). Indeed, in the aftermath of these events scholars and educators have become increasingly aware of the danger of religious illiteracy. There is a growing concern and realisation that lack of religious knowledge is causing intolerance and social un-rest within society. An example of ignorance fueled by fear is the attacks on Sikh communities after 9/11. The perpetrators could not distinguish the difference between Sikh and Muslim and assumed the turban was part of the Muslim dress code. Once again the media played a huge role in communicating incorrect information. Indeed, Francis, Eck, and Twist (2016: 113) argue that the media “have often focused on ways in which religion has been a threat to society, often at the expense of the positive constructive contributions of faith-based communities”.

Despite the varied religious communities that live in Britain, there is a growing ignorance of different religions traditions and lack of knowledge and understanding of cultural practices of faith communities. The fact that religion continues to be a major part of society in the global community seems to be lost on Europe. Where different faiths are acknowledged and expanding globally, the knowledge to understand and engage in dialogue with them is becoming more limited in Europe each passing year. Further, lack of education supporting religious knowledge and understanding has resulted in European countries achieving religious illiteracy – whether intended or not. France is a great example, the ridged, non-negotiable *laïcité* (secularism) system in place is being “peacefully but fundamentally challenged by a group claiming the right to be loyal French citizens while asserting that they (and millions of others) also have rights as members of a religious community” (MacGregor, 2018: np).

In 2013 the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) warned that RE was not being taught in many British schools; they claim that schools were under such pressure to teach STEM that RE was being squeezed out of time tables. Ed Pawson, NATRE Chairman, argues that the introduction of the English Baccalaureate is responsible for edging RE out of the curriculum (cited in Paton, 2011). Many schools are cutting RE because of the GCSE reforms introduced by the government. Paton (2011) suggests that a quarter of comprehensive schools are breaking the law and not offering RE to students. Instead, they are “steering pupils away from taking qualifications in the subject” (Paton, 2013 np). This, it is claimed, is because students are awarded the EBacc for good grades in STEM subjects. High scores in EBacc student attainment are measured against Schools achievement scores – the higher the EBacc, the higher the Schools reward. As a consequence, RE is not prioritised so that schools can concentrate on other subjects – subjects that contribute to EBacc average point scores.

Fiona Moss of NATRE (cited by Strangways-Booth, 2017: np) argues that “too many schools were breaking the law” and that students missing religious education are “not religiously literate”. She further argues that Religious Education

is not about teaching people to be religious, it's about educating students about religion and belief systems that exist in Britain and around the world.

Those Schools that are not breaking the law and are actually teaching RE fall into two categories; those who engage qualified RE teachers with specialised knowledge and those who engage any teacher to deliver RE, the Geography tutor for example. Back in 2007 the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) reported continued inconsistency across England and Wales in teaching practice, quality of provision, assessment practice and compliance with national standards because RE was being taught by none RE specialist. This same issue has been ongoing, constant and raised continually by Ofsted (2007; 2010; 2013; 2019). Inspectors have found none-specialist and unqualified RE teachers "assessment strategies to be weak" with lack of specialist knowledge "affecting the teachers' ability to identify students' strengths and abilities, and to prioritise areas requiring improvement" (King, 2012b: 9). Many teachers are simply lacking in training and knowledge. By cutting RE out of the curriculum or cutting the number of RE specialist teachers and allowing classes to be delivered by unqualified, untrained members of staff with little or no support, schools are actually culpable for neglecting a vital part of students' education.

The lack of RE teachers has been a growing concern for the last ten years or more and has now reached a crises point (REC, 2020). There is a desperate and real need to re-introduce RE as a compulsory subject to GCSE students. It is essential to engage student interest and enthusiasm with a subject that is vital in promoting critical thinking, independent and analytical evaluation and encourages students to search for truths other than their own (King, 2014). When RE is taught well, it offers students a balanced and accurate interpretation of world views.

Rudolf Lockhart, Chief Executive of The Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) warns that lack of specialist RE teachers can foster stereotyping, discrimination, ignorance and prejudice in young people. He further argues that qualified RE teachers are "equipped to challenge and correct" assumptions and falsehoods that may surface in the classroom (2018: np). Young people are very much at risk of going through life with a skewed knowledge and understanding of faith, belief systems and cultural traditions within Britain. Therefore, they are predisposed to perpetuating misinformation and inaccurate ethical, moral and spiritual teachings of any given religion or belief system. Stephen Lloyd, Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group for RE believes that "when RE is diluted, young people leave school ill-prepared to make sense of religion and belief and unable to respond to different views and beliefs in an informed, rational and insightful way" (cited in Paton, 2011: np).

Gilbert (2010): i) further argues that RE makes a "unique contribution to understanding British heritage, plurality, values and futures. Providing excellent opportunities for young people to engage with contemporary contentious issues, developing social, cultural, philosophical and historical awareness". Without this essential knowledge and understanding of people and the world, how will young people develop a genuine understanding of the different perspectives, beliefs, cultures and traditions that are active around them? "Religious education is important, and all young people need some understanding of religion and belief –

if only to reflect the diversity of faiths in the world we live in” (King, 2012a: 172).

Sadly, without RE, most young people know religion through social media, and that information is anything but reliable. Basically, the majority of people in contemporary British society are religiously illiterate, and that is damaging and dangerous. Young people especially need to be taught how to distinguish between reliable and reputable sources and those that are religiously discriminatory, bias or hateful.

Religious literacy begins by acknowledging and truly understanding that religion and belief is real for the majority of people, it is an important part of everyday life and integral to identity. Religion and belief is normal practice for billions of people world-wide. All religions and beliefs are relevant, no matter what faith system or stance an individual prefers; theist, atheist etc. From this starting point intelligent, thoughtful, sensitive and informed conversations can take place. Religious literacy necessitates the ability to discern, analyze and explore religion within cultural, social, political and economic constructs through history and investigate the ever changing nature of these connections. Discussing religion is not a taboo, nor should it be. The subject itself is fascinating, deeply interesting, hugely important, nuanced and relevant for all time. Religion and belief is everywhere; “real religion – which is to say everyday, lived religion – is thriving and evolving” (Woodhead, 2013 np). Indeed, Dinham and Francis (2016: 16) argue that “religious literacy is a civic endeavor, over and above a theological or religious one, aimed at enabling people of all faiths and none to engage with the increasing plurality of religion and belief encountered by everyone as a result of migration and globalization”.

Currently, different belief systems, practices, rituals and cultural traditions have emerged globally. This rich diversity is not only celebrated but nurtured across the globe, but not necessarily across Europe. Indeed, most of European countries are moving towards a secular society. The rest of the world, however, are not. Certainly, there is a Global phenomenon of religious movements emerging worldwide. Pentecostalism is rapidly expanding across America; religion throughout Africa is the most important part of individual and community life; Asia-Pacific is now the most religious region in the world and the most populated; and “the Russia that has emerged from the wreckage of the USSR, state atheism is decidedly a thing of the past. The country now defines itself loudly and proudly as Orthodox” (MacGregor, 2018 np). Arguably, the secularisation of Europe is the exception rather than the rule. Davie (cited in Dinham & Francis, 2016: ix) proposes that “this is not the moment to deny the significance of religion in the modern world”. Truly, there has never been a more urgent need for religious literacy; it is a worldwide priority. Sadly, Europe, and certainly Britain, lacks people with this vital skill set (REC, 2020).

If Britain and Europe want to prepare young people to become serious actors on the global stage, the essential equipment they need is religious literacy supported by STEM. To be religiously illiterate in the emerging global arena is shocking and worrying. Religion rivals trade as a major influential transnational force globally. Cross-cultural enrichment and engagement with international religious communities will be necessary going forward. Basically, “belief is back.

Around the world, religion is once again politically center-stage. It is a development that seems to surprise and bewilder, indeed often to anger, the agnostic, prosperous west. Yet if we do not understand why religion can mobilize communities in this way, we have little chance of successfully managing the consequences” (MacGregor, 2018: np).

Faith communities are accepting of diversity within society and generally embrace all religious traditions, being comfortable with alternative practices and cultures. Religious belief is inescapably a human experience. Barnes and Smith (2016: 77) argue that “diversity itself is necessary for social harmony, and people flourish when difference is acknowledged rather than suppressed”. They further believe that “the process of acquiring cross-cultural and cross-religious philosophical wisdom demands a specific set of attributes to be effective” (ibid: 82).

Religious beliefs are dynamic, varied, steeped in cultural tradition, and gaining religious literacy is not only a challenge, but also a journey that is inescapably intrinsic to human identity.

The general assumption of European contemporary secular society is that religion has no relevance in this scientific, technological age. There is a belief that diminishing congregations in formal institutions of worship supports assumptions that religion and belief are no longer significant aspects of human life. This is not true. In Britain, for example, there are new forms of religious life and spiritual movements continually emerging that are engaging and active. Further, PEW Research (2012) concluded that 85% of Global society remain religious, despite assumptions of secularity that religion would fade as time passed. Indeed, “the world was never simply religious nor simply secular, but has always been complexly both” (Dinham & Francis, 2016: 3). Secular Europe does not seem to be aware of this!

I conclude that religion and belief taught correctly in schools and by qualified teachers who specialise in this discipline is essential in understanding human affairs. Without RE how will the young people of Britain ever have genuine knowledge and understanding of the complexities of the local, national and international influence of religion in contemporary society? How will they be able to distinguish between devotional perspectives of religious tradition against actual study of religion? Without the latter there will always be fundamental misunderstandings, ignorance and assumptions relating to religious traditions and practices different to their own and thus continuing fractions of conflict and peace. There will never be fully engaged community cohesion, social inclusion, valuing of diversity, genuine interfaith and intercultural dialogue without accepting that religion and belief are a significant and important part of human nature.

Promoting religious literacy is a government responsibility and a civic practice. There is a real need to deepen the public understanding of religion. At a time when religion, culture and faith in society are expanding globally, and faith communities are becoming more diverse, there has never been a more important time to be religiously literate. Britain clearly needs to develop a deeper understanding of different faiths and belief systems in order to build and support cohesive communities locally and nationally and also equip young people with the

abilities and skills required to participate and fully engage in the global arena.

We need to accept the reality that lack of religious education is damaging our young peoples' knowledge and understanding of multiculturalism and future potential to engage in global affairs. Understanding religion, culture and society is key to understanding diversity. Simply; we need compulsory GCSE study of RE taught by specialist teachers in schools!

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