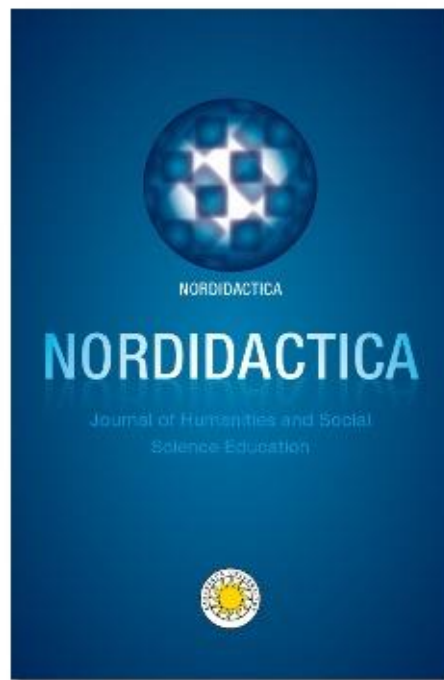


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How did it become possible? Supranational Ecumenical developments and changes in Religious Education during the 1960s and 1970s.

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Abstract: Existing historiographies of Religious Education (RE) are often written from within national boundaries, reflecting the particular relationship between church and state within those bounded spaces; further, they often focus on the question 'what happened?'. During the 1960s significant developments took place in the supranational discourse of Christian ecumenism, including the expansion of dialogue between Christians and those of other worldviews (both religious and non-religious) particularly as a result of the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) and the work of the World Council of Churches (established 1948). These supranational ecumenical discourses transcend national boundaries and thus have potential to influence even the most nationally-orientated educational systems. However, their significance has hitherto been overlooked. Using a method derived from the historical work of Michel Foucault, which focuses on the question 'how did this become possible?', this paper demonstrates the extent to which an awareness of supranational ecumenical discourses enriches understandings of the development of World Religions Teaching in Religious Education. The English context is used as an exemplar, through a single case study, and the potential of the approach is discussed in relation to other national contexts.

KEYWORDS: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, ECUMENISM, SUPRANATIONAL, FOUCAULT

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The Existing Historiography of English Religious Education

Religious Education (RE) holds a unique, and complex, position in the curriculum of English schools. A number of issues combine to make this so. First, between 1944 and the introduction of the National Curriculum following the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), RE was the only compulsory subject in English schools; by law, it still has to be provided for each pupil (except those who are withdrawn by their parents) in every state-maintained school (i.e. those that do not have a specific faith affiliation). Second, RE is the only curriculum area to have locally determined content; since 1944 each Local Education Authority (LEA) has been required to produce or adopt an Agreed Syllabus for RE through an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) - supported by a Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE) - comprising representatives from four groups: the LEA, teachers, the Church of England and other faiths and Christian groups (Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) 2007; Barnes 2008: 77). Since the 1988 ERA, RE has remained separate from the National Curriculum, with the structure of locally determined syllabuses being strengthened by the legal requirement for each LEA to have a SACRE. Third, RE remains the only school subject from which parents are afforded the right to withdraw their child(ren). Finally, RE in fully – state maintained Schools are bound by the rule that 'No religious catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination shall be taught' (1870 Education Act, reinforced in subsequent Acts of parliament pertaining to RE). Consequently, when Christianity is mentioned in relation to English RE, it is not limited to one specific denomination, such as the Anglican Church or the Catholic Church; because of the history of England, Christianity in this context tends to mean a mosaic form of Protestantism.

Against this complicated background the existing historiography of English RE, based on a general consensus amongst scholars in the field, suggests that between the post-war introduction of compulsory RE in 1944 and the mid 1960s, most RE in English publicly-funded schools was delivered through a confessional pedagogy (e.g. Barnes and Wright, 2006; Engebretson, 2006; Jackson and O'Grady, 2007; see also Doney, 2015), whereby children were nurtured in and encouraged to adopt the beliefs and practices characteristic of the Christian faith. Consequently, the period between the mid 1960s and the mid 1970s is highlighted as a moment of great transformation; it is suggested that during this period Christian Confessionalism was swept aside (e.g. Barnes, 2000; Barnes and Wright, 2006; Barnes, 2007) and replaced by a phenomenological, liberal study of World Religions (Parsons, 1994: 173-4; O'Grady, 2005; Barnes and Wright, 2006; Teece, 2011; also Parker and Freathy, 2011; 2012), enabling 'students both to gain an authentic understanding of religion and develop the virtue of tolerance' (SC, 1971), with the publication of the 1975 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus being greeted as a 'major breakthrough' (Hull, 1984: 29) and bringing about 'a totally new orthodoxy' (Priestley, 2006: 1012; see also Barnes, 2008). Overall, this existing historiography records a significant change of direction, not just in terms of *what* was being taught (from Christianity to World Religions), but also *why* (from initiation to information) and *how* (from didactic catechesis to phenomenological

pedagogy) as well as *who* decided what was taught (from a predominance of ordained ministers from the Christian tradition to members of church communities combined with leaders of other faith communities).

The existing histories of English (RE) are, in common with many others, written from within national boundaries, (e.g. Skottene, 1994; Skrunes, 1995; Jackson and O'Grady, 2007; Knauth, 2007; Skeie, 2007; Lied, 2006; 2009; Moschner, 2010; Simojoki, 2010; Müller 2010; Buchardt, 2012). However, by focusing on the national, such histories run the risk of underplaying the operationalization of supranational processes and ideas. Supranational here is used to mean that which transcends national boundaries; it is differentiated from both 'international', which usually has the understanding of a comparison or relationship between two or more nations, and from 'transnational', which is generally associated with the crossing of national boundaries. Oddrun Bråten's doctoral work is an excellent example of this (Bråten 2010, published as Bråten 2013; see also Schiffauer *et al.* 2004). For example, during the 1960s, dialogue between Christians and those of other worldviews (religious and non-religious) expanded significantly through the work of the Christian ecumenical movement, which seeks to achieve greater unity and co-operation between denominationally separated groups within Christianity. The theories and ideas related to this movement, exemplified in the work of The Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962-5) and The World Council of Churches (established 1948) are, by their nature, supranational. By transcending national boundaries these ecumenical theories and ideas have the potential to influence even the most nationally-orientated educational systems; yet they have, hitherto, been overlooked (Doney 2015).

My doctoral research centres on the supposed transition in English Religious Education (e.g. Doney, 2015; in preparation) specifically considering how being attentive to the supranational ideas and practices relating to the world-wide Christian ecumenical movement advances our understandings of the process by which the adoption of this approach to the teaching of 'World Religions' (hereafter, as a convenient shorthand, WRT) became possible. This paper focuses on the relevance of the currently overlooked ecumenical discourse to the development of WRT. In what follows, I will firstly set out my method, which is inspired by the historical work of Michel Foucault; then, through the exploration of a single English case study, which takes Schools Council Working Paper 36 (SC, 1971) as a point of departure from the existing historiography, I will demonstrate how this method reveals the development of dialogue between Christians and those of other worldviews within the supranational ecumenical discourse, highlighting the creation of circumstances in one particular national context (England) in which it became possible to positively reconstruct the religious other, a development which I argue, contributed to the adoption of WRT in English RE in the 1960s and 1970s. Finally, I will discuss the potential for the method to facilitate the exploration of supranational ecumenical developments in other national contexts, briefly discussing Norway and Germany.

Asking a different question – how do certain practices become possible?

Elsewhere I have set out a detailed critique of the existing historiography of English RE, including justification for the inclusion of the ecumenical background (Doney, 2015). There, I have suggested that the current omission results primarily from methodological limitations in the construction of the existing narrative, which tends to foreground *what happened*. My interest primarily focuses on how the change in English RE *became possible*. To address this limitation, and in accordance with my post-structural positioning, I draw on the historical methods utilized by Michel Foucault, especially his exploration of the history of ideas and his tracing of how certain practices became possible (Foucault, 2002; 2009; 2012). Often cited as a principal figure in the development of post-structural historical enquiry, Foucault proposed that phenomena relating to social and institutional processes and power are not pre-existent, but are ‘constructed’ through language, a schema perhaps seen most clearly in *Madness and Civilization* (2001; see also Megill, 1979 and Fitzhugh and Leckie, 2001). As a historian, Foucault’s work shows continuity with and development of previous historical theories; for example, there are clear links to and development of ideas from both the *Annales school* and the *Histoire des Mentalités* (Foucault, 2002). However, in contrast to these earlier historical traditions, Foucault sets out to ask a different type of question. He seeks to reject the question *what happened?* Rather, his enquiries centre on the question *how did a particular practice become possible?*; for example the question at the heart of *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (1978) is ‘How did it become possible for sexuality to become the crucial practice for defining the truth of the modern self?’. Similar questions regarding how particular practices became possible are at the heart of *The History of Madness* (2009) and *Discipline and Punish* (1979). Specifically, Foucault focuses on the change in thinking that is necessary for the ‘new’ practice to become possible; in understanding the changes in the rules we can begin to understand how something that was ‘unthinkable’ becomes ‘thinkable’. Thus, in Foucault’s work the underlying structures that form the context in which things are thought become at least as important as what the thoughts are (see Gutting, 2005). This emphasis on the changing constraints to thinking in order to ascertain how a particular practice became possible suggests that this methodological approach is appropriate when asking ‘how did the change in English RE become possible?’.

Foucault’s work emphasizes the ‘statement’, which, for him is ‘an ultimate, undecomposable element that can be isolated and introduced into a set of relations with other similar elements ...[the statement is] the atom of discourse.’ (Foucault, 2002: 90), and he asks ‘how is it that one particular statement appeared, rather than other’ (Foucault, 2002: 27). Thus, the investigation of statements is at the heart of Foucault’s historical methods. To be faithful to Foucault’s method, it is crucial to focus on the statement, to consider the circumstances of its production, its novelty, and where statements are repeated, to consider their origins, and the rules under which the repetition occurs (Doney, in prep). This concentration on the statement, by

highlighting ‘discontinuities’, enables the search for the ‘relative beginnings’ of particular practices. (Foucault, 2002: 8ff). Within my doctoral work, the deployment of the method in relation to a range of previously unutilized sources facilitates a full engagement with the question of how the curriculum changes outlined above became possible by focusing on the discovery, description and contextualization of the multiple and complex mechanisms by which ecumenical developments could have influenced the emergence of world religions teaching in RE. However, limitations on the length of this article make it necessary to focus on one specific case study.

The adoption of World Religions Teaching in England: The case of Working Paper 36.

Schools Council ‘*Working Paper 36 - Religious Education in Secondary Schools*’ (SC, 1971) has been situated within the existing historiography, especially by Philip Barnes (e.g. 2000; 2002; 2006; 2007; 2009) as a key moment in the transition from Christian Confessionalism to WRT during the 1960s and 1970s. Such a positioning has allowed the document to gain a certain ‘mythical’ status. This is due especially to two issues; firstly, a heavy emphasis has been placed on WP36 as an initiatory document; for example Philip Barnes claims that

[WP36] is commonly regarded as initiating a shift from a confessional model of religious education, which aims to nurture Christian faith, to a non-confessional ‘open’ model which aims to impart knowledge and understanding of religion (Barnes 2002: 62).

Terence Copley also constructs WP36 as initiatory in some respects, highlighting the ways in which it ‘sought to break with the past.’ (Copley 2008: 102). Secondly, WP36 has been constructed as ‘significant’; Barnes for example, claims it to be ‘one of the most important working papers produced by the Council’ (Barnes, 2002: 61). Imbued with this significance, WP36 is often cited, commonly as convenient ‘shorthand’ for the changes that took place in English RE in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Day, 1985; Thompson, 2004; Kay and Smith, 2000; Barnes, 2000; 2002; Freathy and Parker 2013). This repetition, through frequent citation of WP36 and the statements within it, without a critical engagement with the nature, novelty, origin, context and authorship of those statements, leads to the perpetuation of this mythical status. It is thus necessary to consider the historical context of the working paper, before discussing its content; Barnes suggests ‘It is only when a proper and responsible interpretation of *Working Paper 36* is gained that the equally exacting task of evaluation and assessment can begin’ (Barnes, 2002: 62). In order to respond to this challenge, I will firstly set out something of the circumstances of the production of WP36, then problematize its current positioning, before focusing on the distinct contribution made by WP36 in respect of the adoption of WRT.

The Circumstances of production of Working Paper 36; background and authorship

The Religious Education Committee of The Schools Curriculum and Examination Council (established 1964) began to meet regularly from 1965, initially with priority on RE in Primary schools and Sixth form, the carrying 'out of a general survey of the subject', and the effects of the proposed raising of the school leaving age, as well as determining its own constitutional structure (REC, 1965). Having started to research these areas, the committee agreed in 1969 to fund a proposal from Professor Ninian Smart under the heading '*Religious Education in the Secondary School*', aiming

to evolve research and materials relevant to the construction of a satisfying programme of religious education in secondary schools, which would take into account the existence of voluntary schools and the presence of non-Christian populations in this country (SC, 1969)

At their first meeting 'the project team were anxious to write a document which can be published as a Working Paper by the Council' (CC, 1970a). At the following meeting, in June 1970, a more formal discussion took place. 'It was proposed to produce, for general debate, a Working Paper indicating the major concerns of the project and the lines on which it was developing' (CC, 1970b). The existing discussion of WP36 overlooks the question of authorship; within the 'myth of WP36' there appears to be a tacit acceptance of a suggestion that Ninian Smart was the author (e.g. Barnes, 2000; 2002). However, an exploration of the primary sources suggests that this role was shared. An unfinished draft of WP36 was presented to the Consultation Committee in September 1970, together with an apology from Smart 'for the fact that the whole of the Working Paper was not ready for perusal by the Committee' (CC, 1970c). Due to pressure of meeting the various deadlines to gain approval for publication in 1970, a sub-committee was set up, comprising Mrs Beeching, Professor Smart, Miss Clayton, Miss Field, Mr Horder and Mr Halsey (*ex officio*). This group was given authority by the Consultation Committee to make the necessary editorial decisions to enable the paper to be submitted (CC, 1970c). However, once the paper reached the Religious Education Committee, progress remained complicated. There was an extended discussion, particularly over the inclusion of a section headed 'The Christian as R.E. Teacher', which some felt was outside the remit of the project. Mr. Alves clearly felt that the draft was inadequate in a number of respects:

First, the first three chapters in Part I needed much more correlating, and considerable tightening up was necessary. Second, the paragraph on Aims and Objectives was inadequate. The document must make it quite clear what the educational aims were. These should be set out exactly in order that the objectives might be quite clear. Third, on the question of open-ended discussion the Durham Report had expounded a clear statement. The document had stated the objections to Stenhouse but did not say whether these were valid. It seemed clear that if the objection to Stenhouse were valid for teachers than (sic) it ought to be made clear whether they were valid for the school (REC, 1970)

Ultimately, the RE Committee agreed publication, subject to amendments being referred to Mr. Alves for approval (REC, 1970). Consequently, final editorial control of WP36 rested in the hands of one man, not Ninian Smart, but Colin Alves, who had earlier rejected an invitation to chair the consultative committee on the grounds of the conflict of interest arising from his role as a commercial advisor to a firm of publishers.

Problematizing the current positioning of WP36

The current positioning of WP36 in regard to the initiation of WRT is problematic. As discussed above, significant claims have been made, accepted, and repeated, yet they have not hitherto been assessed. A thorough and detailed analysis of statements included in WP36, demonstrates that rather than being initiatory, the document is more appropriately constructed as being part of a wider process. An examination of the ‘nature of the statements’ used by the authors of WP36 to support their argument regarding the adoption of WRT, particularly in terms of their novelty, demonstrates the extent to which the document draws on previously available materials and pre-existing discourses rather than being novel and initiating them. An exhaustive examination, looking not just at the statements themselves, but at their sources, and the rules by which they are repeated, confirms this.

However, it is necessary to highlight that within the existing historiography the discussion of WP36 in terms of *what is taught* (content) and *how it is taught* (method) have not been adequately differentiated, an oversight that leads to an inappropriate conflation of the issues. By separating out content from method it is possible to see that neither are discontinuities. In terms of teaching method, an assessment of the supposed novelty of phenomenology within WP36 suggests a repetition of earlier statements, including lengthy verbatim extracts from a publication by P. H. Phenix (1965), together with the citation of work carried out at Lancaster and Leicester Universities, (compare SC, 1971: 21 with Smart, 1966; 1973). In terms of the ‘explicit religion’ approach foregrounded in WP36, this draws on Smart’s work in *Secular Education and the Logic of Reason* (1968) and the earlier *The Teacher and Christian Belief* (1966). Central to the exposition of the approach in the WP36 is the discussion of Smart’s ‘six dimensions’ of religion (SC, 1971: 47ff). This framework too, is not novel but restates Smart’s earlier work, which is later developed in *The Phenomenon of Religion* (1973: 14ff). Accordingly, many of the statements considered to be novel are shown to be repetitions of earlier statements. However, whilst many of the key ideas had been published prior to the preparation of WP36, it is not clear to what degree they had been taken up elsewhere. Perhaps WP36 enabled a wider constituency access to Smart’s ideas and theories, including the aforementioned ‘six dimensions of religion’ and phenomenological approaches. Even if this was the case, the statements in WP36 do not represent a point at which the phenomenological approach becomes differentiated. Consequently, in terms of phenomenology as a teaching method, it is difficult to support an argument that WP36 represents a moment of discontinuity, and

consequently it is problematic to construct WP36 as the ‘relative beginning of the practice’.

Similarly, an assessment of the supposed novelty of the content of RE proposed within WP36 demonstrates a frequent and detailed references to existing practice, with the writers drawing on examples of WRT across other sections of the document. For example, in Chapter five, ‘*Content and Method*’, illustrations used are drawn from a variety of faith traditions, including Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism (SC, 1971: 46). Two brief examples serve here to support this argument. Firstly, WP36 provides evidence that WRT is already underway, in secondary education at least, by drawing extensively on a survey of ‘*The Comparative Study of Religion in West Riding Schools*’ (Hinnells, 1970a). WP36 positions this survey, together with other papers offered at a 1968 Conference and subsequently published as *Comparative Religion in Schools* (Hinnells, 1970b), as representative of ‘many other parallel developments [which] are taking place throughout the country’ (SC, 1971: 62). The discussion within the pages of Hinnells’ book is predicated on the fact that the teaching of world religions was already happening; the book begins with the statement:

From a number of different quarters the suggestion is being made that the comparative study of religion, or teaching of World Religions, should play a greater part in the educational system than it does at present (Hinnells, 1970b, IX).

This could be seen as a call to expand of such teaching, rather than initiating it; however, it can also be seen as a rhetorical device designed to suggest that the practice has already been adopted. Statements repeated in WP36 focus on the extent to which ‘[t]he subject is widely taught in schools in the West Riding, probably more than is generally realised’ (SC, 1971: 62, citing Hinnells, 1970a, 35), the desire of those involved in its teaching to ‘see the subject incorporated into the examination system’, (SC, 1971: 63, citing Hinnells, 1970a, 48), and the way in which the approach could ‘increase tolerance and understanding, the widening of the pupil’s horizons, as well as deepening his understanding of man (*sic.*) and the world’ (SC, 1971: 63, citing Hinnells, 1970a, 35; 49).

Further, the positioning of WP36 as being novel in calling for the inclusion of WRT in RE is also seen to be erroneous. The document repeats statements, through verbatim extracts, from the earlier published Durham Report, which calls for pupils to study, ‘where appropriate...other religions and belief systems’ (SC, 1971: 9, citing Ramsey, 1970: §216). In addition, extracts are repeated from a document produced by the Birmingham Community Relations Committee, which suggests that ‘in Birmingham, more specifically, Christian children should know something about the Hindu, Islamic, Judaic, and Sikh faiths which are part of our pluralistic scene’ (SC, 1971: 18). In short, WP36 is not novel in calling for the inclusion of WRT.

With content, as with method, it is problematic to position WP36 as being initiatory in the way that is suggested in the existing historiography. Undertaking a critical investigation of the nature, novelty, origin, context and authorship of the document shows that much which has been constructed as novel is shown to be

existing practice, or at the very least a repeat of earlier suggestions that WRT should be practiced. In terms of both method and content then, I submit that WP36 cannot be considered as a discontinuity, and consequently is not the point at which the practice of WRT becomes differentiated; in short, WP36 cannot be considered to the 'relative beginning of the practice'.

WP36 as part of a process of normalization

Consequently, I suggest that WP36 is more appropriately constructed as being part of a longer-term process by which WRT becomes adopted, the relative beginnings of which predate the preparation and publication of the document; being attentive to the wider discourses illuminates our exploration of WP36.

The prior failure to undertake a thorough and detailed analysis of the context and circumstances of production of WP36, arising especially from the unexamined repetition of statements discussed above, results in the wider discourse being overlooked. Exploration of this wider discourse reveals a wealth of material, which supports the argument that WRT was being practiced prior to the Schools Council project. Alongside certain Agreed Syllabus documents (e.g. WREC, 1966; ILEA, 1968, both cited in SC, 1971), there are a number of articles in the professional journal *Learning for Living*, demonstrating that world religions teaching was a day to day reality in many schools (e.g. Hogbin, 1967; Havens, 1968; Stafford-Clark, 1969; May, 1969; Nash, 1969; Butler, 1969). There is also an indication of active support of such teaching; the BBC, for example produced a series of *Radiovision* programmes on world religions, including 'Encounter with Hinduism' and a similar broadcast centring on Buddhism (Butler, 1969).

Reading these developments against the Foucaultian notion of *normalization* is enlightening. By focusing on processes and procedures through which particular practices become accepted as 'normal' and thus become taken-for-granted in everyday life, Foucault's notion of normalization offers a way of interrogating discourses in terms of the means and methods being used to achieve a particular end (e.g. Triantafillou, 2004:9). Whilst being a significant and central strand in Foucault's ongoing project (e.g. Foucault, 1994a; 1994b; 1994c; 1994d) the notion of normalization is most clearly set out in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1979). Here Foucault traces the way in which Western penal systems changed radically during the 18th to 19th centuries from the 'chaos' of torture and public executions to the highly regimented way in which prisoners lived; the key focus of Foucault's interest was *how this change became possible*. He suggests that the change is predicated, in part, on a change of aim. The goal in later penal techniques is not revenge, as in torture and execution, but reform; specifically reform to 'normality', that is a transition in behaviour such that it falls within society's standards, or norms; thus the categorization changes from 'guilty' / 'not guilty', to 'normal' / 'abnormal' with the possibility of restoration of the 'abnormal' to 'normality' (Foucault, 1979).

Foucault suggests that normalization is associated with the rise of modernity, arguing that in this epoch sovereign patterns of power become insufficient for the

increasingly complex society, and so social power, previously limited to religious contexts, become ubiquitous (Taylor, 2009). In order for practices to become ‘normalized’, there is not a direct enforcement, such as the introduction of a new law or policy. Rather, disciplinary power is exercised through the social power structures of ‘reward’ for conformity to the norm and ‘punishment’ for deviation from it. Because the power is exercised by social rather than sovereign means, it is simpler for practices to be willingly replicated. Within *Discipline and Punish*, the emphasis is on external pressures to conform, however in *History of Sexuality part 1*, where Foucault applies the notion to sex rather than crime, he demonstrates that individuals also internalise the norms, freely monitoring themselves in an effort to conform (Foucault, 1978). As Rose suggests,

those who wish to achieve normality will do so by working on themselves, controlling their impulses in everyday conduct and habits, and inculcating norms of conduct into their children, under the guidance of others (1999: 73).

Reading the development of WP36 against this notion demonstrates the extent to which WP36 is *part* of a process of normalization, through which particular practices (in this case WRT) ‘become accepted and thus taken-for-granted in everyday life’. Here, the normalization of WRT is not achieved through the exercise of ‘sovereign power’; that is, there is no new law that enforces it and no policy announcement that insists that the idea is taken up. Rather, there is a complex network of social structures at play that resonate with the notion of normalization. For example, there is an apparent ‘willing replication’ of the practice as shown above; the editors of the professional journals and the producers/commissioning editors of the TV programmes mentioned above are complicit, whether knowingly or unknowingly, in the process of normalising WRT.

WP36’s unique contribution to the process of normalizing WRT

Although WP36 demonstrably does not initiate WRT, it retains an important place in the process of normalizing the practice. By appealing directly to key supranational ecumenical statements, WP36 appears to be unique amongst contemporaneous materials; however, the way in which it has been situated has resulted in this appeal being overlooked in the current historiography. WP36 includes a statement which originates in the supranational ecumenical discourse, repeating a statement from *Nostra Aetate*, (a decree promulgated by the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church in 1965) as an ‘endorsement’ of the approach it promotes. The positioning of this repeated statement is noteworthy; placed at the end of Chapter Seven on *Non-Christian religions and the religious needs of minority groups*, the statement it is presented as the concluding argument for the adoption of WRT. Thus, this repetition of a supranational ecumenical statement is very significant, and yet has been overlooked in the current historiography; an exploration of the provenance of the statement is required.

The supranational ecumenical discourse – *Nostra Aetate*

Standing in contrast to earlier Catholic documents, that had expressly forbidden Catholics from becoming involved in any ecumenical meetings (including the Papal Encyclical *Mortalium Animos* (1928) and the *Monitum* of the Holy Office (*Ecclesia Catholica*, 1949)), the promulgation by the Second Vatican Council of the decree “On Ecumenism” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1964) was a significant discontinuity, widely welcomed by the ecumenical community (e.g. Cullman, 1965:93; Evdokimov, 1965: 101; Bristol, 1965: 107; WCC, 1968a). Prior to this decree, Non-Catholic Christian congregations had been considered as non-churches, giving rise to the view that ecumenical unity could only be achieved through the ‘return’ of those who had separated from the ‘true (Catholic) church’, a view still evident at the draft stage of *Unitatis Redintegratio*’ (see Graham, 1966). However, the discursive change in designation from “communities” to “churches and ecclesial communities” in the final version marked a significant change, and allowed Oscar Cullman to declare, ‘The aim of ecumenism is no longer our ‘return’ (1965:93).

Initially, it had been intended that *Unitatis Redintegratio* would include a statement on Judao-Christian relations, and a draft text along these lines was prepared (see Velati, 2007). However, during protracted discussions, the scope was widened to include other world faith traditions, and the decision was taken separate the text into an additional Decree, *Nostra Aetate*. This expansion was partly, it seems, to avoid political repercussions on Arab Christians in case any statement regarding Jews was seen as supportive of the State of Israel (Graham, 1966: 656ff). Islam is discussed in some detail; starting with a statement of ‘high regard for the Muslim’, the Decree goes on to state

Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all, let them together promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values (Nostra Aetate, III).

Consistent with its development, the discussion of relations between the Catholic Church and Judaism make up a greater part of the *Nostra Aetate*. Amongst other things, the Decree affirms that: ‘Since Christians and Jews have such a common spiritual heritage, this sacred council wishes to encourage further mutual understanding and appreciation.’ (*Nostra Aetate*, IV). The earlier establishment of the *Secretariat for Non-Christians* by Pope Paul VI in 1964 had paved the way for the implementation of the decree, being established with the specific aim:

to create a climate of cordiality between Christians and followers of other religions, to dissipate prejudice and ignorance, especially among Catholics, and to establish fruitful contact with members of other religions concerning questions of common interest (Graham, 1966: 660, emphasis added).

The promulgation of *Nosta Aetate*, created circumstances in which co-operation between the Roman Catholic Church, (through the newly established *Secretariat*), and the World Council of Churches (WCC) became possible. The first official partnership

of WCC and the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians was an inter-denominational consultation on *Dialogue with men of other Faiths* in early 1967, at Kandy, Sri Lanka (WCC, 1968b; Ariarajah, 2002), with further meetings taking place over subsequent years (e.g. Ecumenical Chronicle, 1968: 303; 1969: 271).

In 1969 at Cartigny, for example, a Christian-Muslim conversation was organised, based on the recognition that 'Christian-Muslim dialogue is occurring in many places. This gathering represented an attempt to take up the conversation at an international level' (Ecumenical Chronicle, 1969: 270). A number of facets were described that were foundational to the necessity of dialogue between Christians and Muslims, including their common historical roots, increased global mobility resulting in Christians and Muslims coming into greater contact with the consequent need for the two traditions to live harmoniously where their lives intersect (both of which are specifically mentioned in *Nostra Aetate*), and their joint responsibility to respond 'to the political problems in the Near East' (Ecumenical Chronicle, 1969: 270). Areas of commonality were emphasized, and areas of difference were, to some extent, constructed as areas of similarity formulated differently (Ecumenical Chronicle, 1969: 271). Such dialogue was further justified on the grounds of increasing secularization whereby Christians and Muslims become united against a common enemy.

In setting an agenda for additional discussions, a series of questions were posed, first of which was: 'How are Christianity and Islam being presented today in textbooks and religious instruction?' (Ecumenical Chronicle, 1969: 271). The raising of this question is notable, and the placing of it as first on the list is important; it serves as an example of the inter-relationship between the ecumenical discourse of dialogue with non-Christians and the ecumenical discourse of education. Furthermore, it is suggestive of a view that society's knowledge about each faith tradition is developed from textbooks and religious instruction rather than from the action of either faith community, with a consequent foregrounding of school-based education as a space in which inter-faith understanding can/should be developed.

Further meetings took place at Ajattoun, Lebanon in March 1970 'which brought together scholars and others experienced in dialogue from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim faiths' (Ecumenical Chronicle, 1971: 47); once again, Roman Catholic representatives were present. According to Wesley Ariarajah (2002), this meeting was a 'turning point'; participants from different faith communities, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, gathered, not just to discuss how dialogue might be practised, but also to practise it. A further meeting took place in May the same year, in Zurich, 'to study the theological implications of dialogue between men of living faiths' (Ecumenical Chronicle, 1971: 47). Based on a report produced at this meeting, and the success of the wider series of meetings, the WCC resolved at its Central Committee meeting at Addis Ababa in 1971 to create a sub-unit on *Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* (hereafter DFI, Ecumenical Chronicle, 1971: 47; WCC, 1971; Mulder, 2001).

These ecumenical developments illuminate the use of a statement repeated from *Nostra Aetate* in Working Paper 36. It appears that *Nostra Aetate* was the first such statement to be widely circulated within the ecumenical discourse of dialogue between

Christians and those of other faiths (see Doney, in prep.), with its promulgation in 1965, preceding any such widely-distributed statement from the wider ecumenical discourse. Likewise, the assurance of a wide circulation for *Nostra Aetate* in the years immediately following its promulgation, contrasts with a narrow pattern of circulation for statements of the WCC in the years prior to the establishment of its DFI (Doney, in prep). In short, *Nostra Aetate*, whilst being the first authoritative statement on developing dialogue between Christians and non-Christians, was issued within a context that engendered ecumenical co-operation. Thus, in many ways, the document could be seen to speak for a wider group than Catholics alone; in other words, *Nostra Aetate* can accurately be considered as an ecumenical statement.

The Discursive reconstruction of the religious other in the ecumenical discourse

Whilst *Nostra Aetate* and the establishment of the DFI are clearly important stages in the process of normalizing dialogue between Christians and those of other worldviews, they do not constitute the point at which the practice became differentiated. Rather, they represent the culmination of an earlier process, the consideration of which requires an exploration of the construction of ‘the religious other’ in the ecumenical discourse. Analysis of this discourse across the years between World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910, often situated as the ‘birthplace of the modern ecumenical movement’ (e.g. Cavert, 1968), and the events described above in the later 1960s and early 1970s reveals a significant development in the discursive construction of the ‘non-Christian’. To take one period as an example, there is a significant discursive reconstruction in the period between WMC, 1910 and the 1928 International Missionary Conference (IMC) held in Jerusalem.

A critical reading of reports covering a discussion of ‘*The Missionary Message in relation to Non-Christian Religions*’ at WMC 1910 demonstrates a superior attitude towards Non-Christian religions, which were referred to variously as ‘animalistic’, ‘backward’ and ‘childlike’ whilst adherents were described as ‘primitive or barbarous’ (Morrison, 1910; Latourette, 1954: 358). It was clear that ‘non-Christians’ were considered to be a threat to be tamed; as Norman Goodall later puts it ‘the dominant emphasis was on the darkness, idolatry, and devil-originating character of the non-Christian religions’ (Goodall, 1972: 28).

The publication of J.N. Farquhar’s book *The Crown of Hinduism* in 1913 significantly changed the way in which non-Christian traditions were constructed in the Ecumenical discourse. Central to Farquhar’s ‘fulfilment’ thesis was the view that Christ was the *fulfilment* of non-Christian religions. So, rather than being constructed as the ‘evil opposition’, other faiths began to be considered more sympathetically, as being incomplete, whilst retaining the clear understanding that Christianity remained the one true faith. This change in construction of non-Christian within the Ecumenical discourse continued over the years that followed; at the IMC meeting in 1928 ‘There was manifest ... a greater desire to understand other religions sympathetically and to appreciate the things that high-minded non-Christians live by’ (Cavert, 1928). Here

papers were presented detailing the ‘values in Islam, in Hinduism, in Buddhism and in Confucianism’ leading to a moment of agreement that ‘other religions can be regarded as allies of Christianity quite as truly as rivals’ a position that was clearly set out in the summary statement ‘*Call to the World*’ a statement issued by the Conference which sets out the value to be discerned in other faith traditions (Cavert, 1928; IMC, 1928). However, whilst the construction of ‘non-Christian’ shifted, the over-riding sense of the supremacy of Christianity remained constant:

Indeed it was felt that the more clearly one discerns the value in other faiths, the more certainly will it be seen that Christ is the one over-towering personality in whom all those values, found elsewhere in partial and fragmentary form, come to such complete realization as to make him the Lord and Saviour of all mankind (Cavert, 1928).

Influenced by the work of Farquhar, and others, the discursive reconstruction of the religious other (from enemy to friend), seen most especially between 1910 and 1928, and epitomized in the events of the later 1960s, created circumstances under which it was possible not only to engage positively in dialogue *about* non-Christian faith traditions, but also to dialogue *with* them. Whilst not marking the relative beginning of WRT, this development is certainly a significant step.

This exploration of the discursive background to the repeated supranational statement in WP36 ultimately leads to the exposure of the discursive reconstruction of the religious other. This reconstruction creates circumstances in which it becomes possible for the domain of RE discourse to extend. The earlier negative construction of the religious other had acted as a ‘substantial constraint’, restricting discussion of Christianity’s interaction with other faith traditions. As the religious other becomes positively reconstructed within the ecumenical discourse, such constraints on discussion were lifted, thus creating circumstances in which it became possible for world religions teaching to be discussed within the RE discourse, resulting - in due course - in its wide adoption. Thus, the methodological focus on statements reveals a hitherto ignored background to the development of WRT in the English context, and enriches our knowledge of how WRT *became possible*.

Local Manifestations of the Supranational in other places

As stated earlier, many historical studies of RE are written from within national boundaries, often reflecting a particular relationship between church and state. However, there is a growing emphasis on ‘inter-national comparative’ studies (e.g. Skeie, 2004; Schweitzer, 2010; Moschner, 2010; Simojoki, 2010; Müller, 2010; also Bråten, 2010; 2012; 2013; Buchardt, 2012), and in other areas of educational history, there is a developing engagement with trans- and supra-national approaches (e.g. Haakedal, 2001; Goodman and Grosvenor, 2009; Bråten, 2010; 2013.) Whilst there is much of value in comparing similarities and differences between two or more national settings, I suggest there is as much, if not more, to gain from exploring the different

ways in which supranational ideas and systems of thought are operationalized in various national contexts.

With regard to the development of WRT in RE, the Norwegian and German contexts offer fertile ground in this respect; there are some similarities to the English context, yet the historic development of RE has taken a different course in each locality (e.g. Schweitzer, 2010; Bråten, 2010; 2012). In all three settings, the nature of RE has changed since the 1960s from a confessional model of some sort, being non-denominational in England. In Norway RE has historically been openly confessional in nature; according to Oddrun Bråten the ‘purpose of the first school law in Norway was to ensure the nurture of children into the state religion’ (2012: 5, see also Haakedal, 2001; Skeie, 2007), and until well into the 20th Century, the school leaving exam in Norway was Confirmation into the State (Lutheran) church (e.g. Skeie, 2007). Only in the 1969 Education Act did RE move away from formal baptismal instruction (e.g. Haakedal, 2001), although Norwegian education remained firmly associated with ‘a Christian and moral upbringing’ through the ‘formålsparagrafen’ (Norway, 2000 §1.1) until 2008, when the preamble was changed to state ‘Education shall be founded on fundamental values in Christian and Humanistic heritage and tradition’ (see Bråten 2013: 215-218). In Germany ‘religious education in public schools was taught in close co-operation with established churches’ (Knauth, 2007: 243) which included both Roman Catholic and Lutheran communities. Each context has had to respond to pressure from non/anti-Christian movements including Humanists and Secularist groups. Rob Freathy and Stephen Parker discuss in depth the effect of such groups on English RE (Freathy and Parker, 2013). In Norway for example, *Humanetisk Forbund* (Norwegian Humanist Association) argued during the 1960s for an alternative to the established *Kristendoms-kunnskap* [knowledge of Christianity] (Skeie, 2007: 223), and similar pressures were felt in Germany (Knauth, 2007: 246ff). Likewise each has been affected by, and responded differently, to immigration – including immigration of the religious ‘other’. Immigration in Norway has been of a different scale to England and Germany, and with a later peak (e.g. Brochmann and Kjeldstadli, 2008) but still it has affected the development of RE (e.g. Haakedal, 2001; Afdal, 2006; Skeie, 2007; Lied 2009; Bråten 2012; Iversen, 2012; see also Thorkildsen, 1997; Slagstad, 1998). Initially, in Germany, the response to the issue of ‘guest workers’ was *Ausländerpädagogik* [foreigner teaching], introduced for immigrants in isolation from RE (e.g. Knauth, 2007: 248). Finally, whilst processes have differed, each context has adopted some kind of multi-faith pattern of Religious Education with Norway and Germany developing the teaching of World Religions content in RE more recently than in England. (e.g. Haakedal, 2001; Skeie, 2007; Bråten, 2010; 2013; Norway, 2000; Knauth, 2007; Simojoki, 2010; Müller, 2010).

A number of areas for further research can therefore be suggested; for example, how might the identification of the discursive reconstruction of the religious other in the supranational ecumenical discourse enrich our understandings of the adoption of WRT in other national contexts? To what extent do other supranational discourses enrich understandings of how certain practices are adopted in particular national

contexts? How might the tracing of repeated statements, using the method outlined and exemplified above, enrich curriculum histories of RE and more generally?

Conclusion

In this paper, I have focused on the relevance of the currently overlooked ecumenical discourse to the development of WRT, demonstrating the potential for a supranational discourse to contribute to enriched understandings of the adoption of certain practices in local contexts. Through the explanation of a method inspired by the historical work of Michel Foucault, exemplified in through the exploration of a single English case study, which takes Schools Council Working Paper 36 (SC, 1971) as a point of departure from the existing historiography, I have demonstrated two particular ways in which the method leads to enriched understandings. Firstly, the method reveals that the current positioning of WP36 as initiating WRT in English RE is erroneous, and that situating WP36 as part of a wider process of normalization is more appropriate. Secondly, the method uncovers, through one possible exploration, that of a repeated statement from *Nostra Aetate*, the importance of the discursive reconstruction of the religious other within the supranational ecumenical discourse in relation to the adoption of WRT; as such, circumstances were created in one particular national context (England) by which it became possible for world religions teaching to be discussed within the RE discourse, resulting - in due course - in its wide adoption during the 1960s and 1970s.

Further, I have highlighted the potential for the method to enrich understandings of how WRT developed in other contexts, focusing particularly on Norway and Germany. Deployment of the statement based method in relation to the operationalization of supranational ecumenical developments in these contexts has the potential to significantly develop our understanding of the development of Religious Education. In addition, a broader application of the method to a range of supranational discourse has the potential to augment our understandings of other areas of educational and social history.

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