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Foreword

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This important book recognises that issues of religion and education in Europe need to be addressed in an interdisciplinary way. Not only do research methods from the social sciences and humanities need to be applied, but insights from a range of disciplines are also necessary for a broad understanding of the issues, especially those resulting from the pluralisation of societies in consequence of migration, globalisation and issues concerned with human rights. The inclusion of law as an academic field is vital, and the conference on which this book is based was a landmark in bringing together legal specialists with others from education, the social sciences and the humanities.

Much of the book deals with themes which recur in different societies in Western Europe. Each nation has its unique history of religion and state, and these have resulted in some very different attitudes and policies towards the study of religion in schools. They range from the policy of *laïcité*, as in France (Massignon 2011; Willaime 2007), where traditionally religion has been confined to the private sphere, to suspicion of any treatment of religion in schools in some post-Soviet countries, such as Estonia (Schihalejev 2010), to aiming to teach about religious diversity impartially in public education, as in Norway (Skeie 2007) or England and Wales (Jackson and O'Grady 2007; Dinham and Jackson forthcoming), to the public funding of schools teaching the beliefs and values of different specific religions and philosophies, as in the Netherlands (ter Avest et al. 2007), to the favouring of a particular religion or religious denomination in public education, as in Spain (Dietz 2007; Álvarez Veinguer et al. 2011).

In addition to teaching religions or teaching *about* religions, there are recurrent issues relating to religious dress and symbols, worship in schools, separate religious schooling, and the rights of children, parents and teachers in various contexts. This book explores all of these through themes such as identity (whether personal, group or national identity), and the role of the state through policies intended to lead to integration or perhaps to assimilation. Often the borderline between public and private space is difficult to locate and there are ongoing debates as each state looks to its own history as well as to the various global or supranational forces operating on it. This is why it is important to look at developments at the European level, as well as national policies and debates. Some national issues have been taken to the European Court of Human Rights, as in the cases of Norway and Turkey (Lied 2009; Relaño 2010). However, it is in institutions such as the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe that we find attempts at policy discussion relevant to European states in general. Such discussions are relatively recent and need to be seen in interplay with accounts of national situations.

Within the documentation of key European institutions concerned with human rights and education, education about religions and beliefs (as distinct from intercultural education and antiracist education) rarely got a mention in the decades leading up to the millennium. Despite significant differences within individual states, the predominant view in European institutions was that religion

was a private matter and that religious education was an issue for parents, religious communities and private schools. The emergence of discussions about religion and education was gradual, but the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States of America and their ongoing global consequences served as a catalyst for the entry of discussions of religion and education within the public sphere (Jackson 2010).

Thus, in 2002, the Council of Europe began its first project on religion and education. Much work had been done earlier on education for democratic citizenship and intercultural education, with the latter seen as a subset of the former. I was at a meeting at the Council of Europe late in 2002 when the issue of how to formulate a rationale for education about religions in publicly funded schools was discussed. Great care was taken to avoid the idea that support was being given for the propagation of a particular religious view or of religious views in general. The argument for learning about religions in schools which finally emerged was a cultural one, although there was no intention whatsoever to suggest that religion could simply be *reduced* to culture. The argument was that, since people practise religion in society, all should be able to agree that, at the least, religion is a part of human culture. Thus, some knowledge and understanding of the religious diversity of Europe should be part of the intercultural education of all European young people.

Specialists in religions and education and in intercultural education from different European states were brought together to participate in the Council of Europe's first project on 'The New Challenge of Intercultural Education: Religious Diversity and Dialogue in Europe'. There were various positive outcomes from the project, including the publication of a reference book for use as a resource in schools across Europe (Keast 2007), but the most important output was a Recommendation from the Committee of Ministers – the Foreign Ministers of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe – on teaching about religions and non-religious convictions in European public schools (Council of Europe 2008). This Recommendation is of great importance and deserves to be studied and discussed by educators, politicians, policy makers, parents and young people across Europe. It is possible here to do no more than indicate the general 'flavour' of the document. For example, its underlying principles include the view that intercultural dialogue, including its dimension of religious and non-religious convictions, is a precondition for the development of tolerance and the recognition of different identities on the basis of human rights. Its objectives include: developing a tolerant attitude and respect for the right to hold a particular belief; nurturing a sensitivity to the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions as an element contributing to the richness of Europe; ensuring that teaching about the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions is consistent with the aims of education for democratic citizenship, human rights and respect for equal dignity of all individuals; and promoting dialogue between people from different cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds. Its educational preconditions include: sensitivity to the equal dignity of every individual; the capacity to put oneself in the place of others in order to establish an environment where mutual trust and understanding is fostered; inclusive and co-operative learning; and provision of safe learning space to encourage expression without fear of being judged or held to ridicule. Many other issues are addressed directly in the Recommendation, including the Foreign Ministers' views on the development of resources for teaching and learning and on teacher training.

During the period of this project there was discussion within the Council of Europe about the establishment of European centres to promote education about religions and beliefs and education for democratic citizenship. Following a feasibility study, the decision was made in principle to

develop a single European Centre dealing with a broadly understood education for democratic citizenship, incorporating human rights education and intercultural education and including education about religions and beliefs. The Norwegian authorities came forward to offer financial and organisational support and, in May 2008, the European Wergeland Centre was established in Oslo (named after the 19th-century Norwegian poet Henrik Wergeland) with a brief to disseminate the results of European projects, to create networks of scholars and teachers and to provide web-based resources in the fields covered by the Centre (www.theewc.org). Among its many activities, the European Wergeland Centre is collaborating currently with the Council of Europe in promoting the dissemination of the Ministerial Recommendation on teaching about religions and beliefs.

Independently from the Council of Europe, another major European institution concerned with human rights also considered the place of the study of religions and beliefs in public education. This is the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE was founded in the 1970s, and includes as participant states most European countries, plus the USA and Canada. The security brief of the OSCE includes the human dimension as well as the military/political and economic dimensions; hence it has an Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). As with the Council of Europe, the ODIHR conducted a project to identify principles on which participant states could develop policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious beliefs in schools across its huge geographical region. The result was the publication of a standard setting document, the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, named after the city in which the drafting team first worked on the text, and in recognition of Toledo's historical role in communication between those of different religions (OSCE, 2007). An important feature of this document is that the drafting team included leading international legal specialists in religion, human rights and education, including Silvio Ferrari, Malcolm Evans, Cole Durham and Jeremy Gunn among others, as well as educators and other social scientists. Again, this important document should be studied and used as a tool by educators, policy makers and politicians across Europe and North America and beyond.

However, the development of policy requires much more than the discussion of generic recommendations. Policy makers need detailed knowledge of what is actually happening 'on the ground', so to speak. In this respect, it is important to understand particular societies – their history, social composition, public attitudes, current educational practices and the views of students and teachers. One large scale inter-European research project involving eight countries, the REDCo (Religion, Education, Dialogue, Conflict) Project, has provided large amounts of relevant data at the national level to complement and inform European policy recommendations (Jackson 2011). The empirical findings of the REDCo project are complemented by the wealth of material made available for the first time in the wide-ranging contributions to the present volume.

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