

History, Remembrance and Religious Education

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Peter Lang

Foreword

The International Seminar on Religious Education and Values (ISREV, www.isrev.org) is the most important international research association of its kind, with a major seminar session taking place in a different country every two years. ISREV has no religious basis or test itself, and has members specialising, for example, in Protestant and Catholic Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and secular traditions. It was founded in 1978 by John M. Hull, the distinguished Australian academic (currently Honorary Professor of Practical Theology at The Queen's Foundation, and Emeritus Professor of Religious Education at the University of Birmingham), and John H. Peatling, then of the Character Research Project in Union College, Schenectady, New York. The first meeting had research papers from thirty-two scholars attending from ten countries; the 18th meeting in 2012, in Turku, Finland, had 118 research papers from more than thirty countries. This volume's chapters represent just about 15 per cent of all the papers presented at that fine event.

Each seminar has a broad theme, and the theme for the Turku meeting was *History, Remembrance and Religious Education*. I remember myself, as a schoolteacher, teaching History as well as Religious Education. Some colleagues treated them as no more than parts of a larger subject called 'Humanities', but this does not seem fair on either subject. The teaching of the Holocaust in both History and Religious Education, as is common in many countries around the world, can sometimes highlight the differences between the subjects and also the need for them to work together and build on their distinct strengths. A number of chapters in this volume tackle that issue directly: the Holocaust is both 'historical' (for Christians as the dominant 'perpetrators' as well as for Jews) and 'religious'. But as well as considering historical-religious 'events', this book provides an historical perspective on Religious Education itself, in all its varied contexts – for example in South Africa, Canada, Germany, the UK, Israel, Finland,

Switzerland and Norway – and the nature and significance of history and memory in understanding religion.

There has been a loss of ‘history of education’ classes in teacher education, in many jurisdictions, and a loss of memory, in much educational policy-making. This makes for weaker policy and poorer teaching. At the level of governments, it can lead to an emphasis on wholly-vapid ‘innovations’ (innovatory only for those with no memory of the previous versions of the same initiatives) or, equally problematically, on recreating an illusory past ‘golden age’. At the level of school teachers, the lack of history and memory can mean teachers merely follow the educational or social fashions of the day, leading to Religious Education having no lasting influence and a built-in obsolescence.

It is a huge achievement, I think, of this book, that History, Remembrance and Religious Education are seriously tackled in all their combinations. The Scottish poet Norman MacCaig writes of sitting with his ‘back to the future’, and of ‘being helplessly/lugged backwards/through the Debatable Lands of history’. With this book to hand, I feel a little less helpless. I am therefore delighted, as General Secretary of ISREV, to commend it to all those interested in Religious Education, around the world.

JULIAN STERN
General Secretary of ISREV