Understanding Citizenship and Conflict

Why Alberta's New Social Studies Curriculum Can't Forget About Religion

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Introduction

Alberta's current curriculum renewal process is expansive and, as with all educational projects, it has generated considerable public interest and some controversy. When then minister of education David Eggen released the first draft curriculum in the spring of 2017, in the form of K–12 scope and sequences for all the subjects under construction, the proposed social studies curriculum elicited particularly strong responses. One media commentator charged the proposed curriculum with pushing activism and social change at the expense of teaching history (Staples 2017), while Jason Kenney, at the time running for the leadership of the United Conservative Party (UCP), expressed concerns about the lack of military history and presence of social engineering (Graney 2017). Two university professors involved in the curriculum revision process at the time called many of the charges against the curriculum "unfounded rumours" and "egregious myths" (Peck and Gibson 2017).

After Kenney became leader of the UCP, a curriculum war of words ensued between him and Eggen. With Kenney now premier, it remains to be seen how he will carry through on his campaign promises to seek a "more balanced approach to social studies" (Butler 2019). However, no public conversation to date about the proposed curriculum has addressed the need for some form of education about religion, despite calls by an increasing number of education stakeholders for such education. For instance, a recent poll revealed that 68 per cent of Canadians believe high school students should learn at least some basic knowledge about the world's major religions (Angus Reid 2018). Educational theorists agree, highlighting the links between religious literacy and citizenship (Feinberg and Layton 2014; Moore 2007; Noddings 1993, 2008; Prothero 2008; Seligman 2014).

Religion is particularly important to the subject of social studies, because it is inescapable in both world and Canadian history. Most early settlers to the land that became known as Canada were Catholic or Protestant, and their legacies include Christian "accents" on the Canadian judicial, educational, immigration and political systems (Biles and Ibrahim 2005; Gunn 2018). They also embarked on a project of Christianization that included residential schools, which were sites of significant trauma and social dislocation for Indigenous peoples. But Christians were not the only religious settlers. Jewish newcomers arrived as early as 1760 (CIJA 2015), and Muslims from Lebanon and Syria landed in central Canada in the late nineteenth century before heading west onto

the Canadian prairies (Hamdani 2015). Sikhs arrived shortly thereafter, settling mostly in British Columbia. As these immigrants established communities, they created institutions and movements that reflected their religious world views and practices.

Beyond history, religion informs current events, such as the 2017 dispute over Muslim prayer rooms for students in the Peel school district, just outside of Toronto. The conflict comes into sharper focus when one understands the broader religious contexts. Protesting parents interpreted the prayer rooms as a special accommodation for one religious group and therefore a violation of the secular nature of public schools. Many parents were South Asian and had the lived experience of violent Hindu–Muslim clashes in India within the larger context of British India's 1947 partition into largely Hindu India and mostly Muslim Pakistan (Bascaramurty and Alphonso 2017). The resulting antipathies came to a head over a Canadian educational policy.

Such personally significant religion is not limited to newcomers: half of all Canadians continue to tell pollsters that their religious beliefs are important to them (Giguère 2017). There is no doubt that religion is changing as many houses of worship experience declining attendance. At the same time, the number of Canadians identifying as spiritual rather than religious is on the rise.

This paper takes religion seriously and argues that revisions to the social studies curriculum must do the same. The argument is developed through an examination of how education about religion supports citizenship education, a central aspect of social studies. Although the term *religion* will reference the world's large religious traditions, applying the term to some Asian traditions and practices is problematic and laden with colonial history and mentalities.[1] Religions are internally diverse and dynamic (Bramadat and Seljak 2005, 2008), and today most are transnational because social media and the Internet enable leaders, teachers and preachers to reach their diaspora and students around the world. Despite the vast marketplace of religious options, however, a growing minority in western countries do not connect with institutional religion. In Canada for instance, nearly one-quarter of Canadians self-identify as religious "nones" (Pew Research Center 2013). Given all of these complexities, this paper aims for focus and some brevity by limiting the discussion to the larger religious traditions present in Canada, of which the largest is Christianity. Examples drawn from countries outside Canada will be confined mostly to western countries, because they are more familiar to many readers.

One might respond to the call for more education about religion in the curriculum by suggesting that teachers are free to add such education to their teaching if they wish to do so. For example, in the new K–4 curriculum, which is to be piloted in the 2019/20 school year, teachers could teach about religion under the essential understanding of "Analyzing diverse worldviews and experiences fosters our ability and willingness to live well together." This essential understanding occurs in several subject areas, including social studies, for which the conceptual knowledge involves the contributions of such communities as First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Francophone, newcomers, diverse settlers, individuals and groups (Alberta Education 2018). A teacher could indeed include religious communities, but could just as easily ignore them.

As will be argued below, understanding religion is too important to citizenship education to be left to the sole discretion of individual teachers. If students, and indeed all citizens, are to understand their neighbours, develop public policy that serves the common good, understand conflicts at home and abroad, and work toward peacebuilding, they need to know the issues involved in defining religion, what is meant by education about religion and how religion can inform people's public actions. Thus, the first section of the paper discusses key terms and concepts. The second section relates religion to citizenship education, and the final section advances three arguments about how the study of religion enhances social studies.

Terms and Concepts

Religion as a definable category emerged in the early modern period. Prior to that time, peoples and cultures did not typically conceptualize religion as something separate from the rest of life. So-called *religion*, whether in the classical Greek, Japanese, and Chinese societies, Arabic concept of *din*, Sanskrit *Dharma*, or Hebrew Bible, all referenced a comprehensive way of life (Armstrong 2014). The separation of religion from the secular state, economy and politics was achieved over time and received significant impetus from the Protestant Reformation, the Treaty of Westphalia and the Enlightenment. Increasingly, religion came to be seen as something interior, propositional, distinct from embodied rites and virtues, nonrational and inherently conflictive, if not violent

(Armstrong 2014, 5; Asad 1993; Cavanaugh 2009). These processes of creation and the ensuing privatization of religion led Cavanaugh (2009) to argue that "the category of religion does not simply describe a new social reality but helps to bring it into being and to enforce it. Religion is a normative concept" (p 85). Thus, the separation of religion from public life and politics is historically and culturally contingent, a western and liberal principle of social organization that not all societies adopt.

In Canada, secularization processes involving the privatization of religion and desacralization of public life became especially pronounced after World War Two and remained the dominant lens for public life until the events of September 11, 2001, which announced the return of religion to the public sphere, if indeed it had ever left. Yet six years later, participants at roundtables held across the country to discuss multiculturalism concluded that "Religious literacy (or the lack thereof) appears to require more attention," as public and decision-makers alike remained uncomfortable with religion, religious diversity and religious accommodations (Kunz and Sykes 2007, 5). In 2017, Beaman, Beyer and Cusak (2017) were still describing the dearth of education about religion in many Canadian provinces.[2] The resulting religious illiteracy means that citizens do not understand how religion can both animate and impede civic engagement and why some religious practices might require legal protection (Bramadat 2009; Peck, Sears and Donaldson 2008).

The lack of education about religion in Canadian public schools is atypical among western countries, many of which offer religious education (RE) courses in their curriculum (Byrne 2014; Jackson et al 2007). Where religious instruction is confessional, it is described as education *into* religion. Public schools tend to prefer RE that is education *about* religion, often from a religious studies approach in which students study a variety of religious and nonreligious world views. In the United States, teaching about religion is embedded in various subject curriculum standards. Guidelines for teachers as developed by the American Academy of Religion (AAR 2010) are premised on the internal diversity within religions, their dynamic nature and their embeddedness in culture.

Religious education and teaching about religion are not without their critics, who point to the implicit teaching of some religious beliefs and marginalization of others and the exclusion of lived religion, which in turn ignores the educational development of students' moral and perhaps even spiritual values (Ghosh and Chan 2017). Thus, some countries add teaching *from* religion, in which students learn how to make sense of the world by attending to religious beliefs, practices and symbols. This form of RE aims to foster respect and understanding of differing world views (Ghosh and Chan 2017).

While various countries offer standalone religion courses, this article argues for the inclusion of some education about religion to occur within social studies. Studying religion within its historical, political and cultural contexts will help students better understand religion as a factor of public life. When religion is conceptualized as having public import, it is relevant to students regardless of the degree to which they are personally engaged in a religious tradition or practice(s).

Essentially, what is being advocated here is the concept of *religious literacy*, a contentious term dependent upon context. Stephen Prothero (2008, 11) popularized the term, defining it as the ability to know and use religious terms, narratives, symbols, practices, scriptures and themes as well as "the ability to participate in our ongoing conversation about the private and public powers of religion" (p 14). Thus, religious literacy has a civic purpose, and various interpretive lenses are available. Those within the liberal philosophical tradition have an uneasy relationship with religion, ranging from a desire to limit public religious discourse to those who wish to introduce students to diverse world views so that they both choose wisely about what they themselves believe and also understand those who believe something different.

A "culturalist" understanding roots religion in culture. If one is to understand and engage with others, claims a culturalist, one must understand their systems of practices, systems, rituals and so on, all of which may be grounded in religion. For yet another lens, those belonging to a religious tradition may view religious literacy as the ability to read their holy texts, being properly understood by those outside the tradition or the way those outside the faith interact with the practices of their tradition (Dinham and Jones 2010). Dinham and Jones argue that religious literacy is "having the knowledge and skills to recognise religious faith as a legitimate and important area for public attention, a degree of general knowledge about at least some religious traditions, and an awareness of and ability to find out about others." It has the civic goals of correcting misrepresentations, developing relationships across differences, and creating inclusive relationships (Dinham and Jones 2010, 6). Some

Canadian scholars suggest that religious literacy within the context of Canada should pay attention to how individuals define terms and apply the terms to themselves; recognize the dynamic nature of religious, non-religious, spiritual, moral and other world views; understand each world view as distinct and heterogeneous; and include Indigenous spirituality (Chan et al 2019). A common theme among these definitions is the manner in which religious literacy supports citizenship.

Citizenship, Multiculturalism, and Religion in Social Studies

Alberta's vision of citizenship education (Alberta Education 2005a, 2005b) is similar to that of other Canadian jurisdictions that promote "student-centred, skills-based pedagogies, examining social history from multiple perspectives, addressing questions of diversity and equity, [and] critical media literacy in the one-touch information age" (Bickmore 2014, 268). Beyond these aspects, Gates (2006) claims that citizenship education must include some study of belief, whether it is shaped by religious or nonreligious faiths. For Gates, beliefs animate citizens' responses to law, health and welfare, employment, family obligations, and issues of justice. Beliefs concern "the nature of human being and of social and political belonging" (p 573) and motivate for active participation. But Gates does not give religion a free pass, arguing that beliefs can have both positive and negative political implications. Because religion can inspire national critique on the one hand and endorse nationalism and the status quo on the other hand, it too must be critiqued.

Valk (2007) also highlights the importance of belief systems for citizenship, insisting that the study of both religious and secular world views helps students become active citizens and better able to understand themselves, others and controversial issues. Rather than privatize religion, Valk and others reimagine public spaces, including public schools, as plural spaces where all world views and epistemologies are studied, evaluated and critiqued (Jackson 2003, 76–77; Valk 2007; Van Arragon 2017). Education about religion may also support student identity. As Tupper and Cappello (2008, 576–77) argue, albeit in a different context, "Students need stories both to make sense of their world and to enable them to contribute to their world; they need to both *understand* and have places from which to *stand*" (emphasis in original). For some students, religion is their place to stand and it may be the motivating factor of their civic engagement.

As students develop their (religious) identity and encounter others who do the same, they will inevitably meet with difference and conflict. Kathy Bickmore's (1993) concept of "difficult citizenship" prepares students to engage with such conflict. For Bickmore, conflict is not necessarily negative or violent, in part because it originates in the democratic protection of dissent (Bickmore 1993, 2011, 2014). A goal of "difficult citizenship," then, is to develop within citizens of various societal groups the capacity "to build paths toward understanding and democratic decision making—embracing and handling conflict, rather than erasing differences" (Bickmore 2006, 360). In this view, citizenship education prepares students to engage with opposing needs and contradictory views through nonviolent means (Bickmore 1993, 341). While Bickmore does not apply the concept of "difficult citizenship" to religion, the vision of embracing conflict rather than erasing differences certainly pertains to religion. There are differences and conflicts within and among religious traditions, and between those who are religious and those who are not. Furthermore, democratic dissent may arise from religious convictions or practices.

"Difficult citizenship" is important in Canada's increasingly diverse religious landscape. Although a majority of Canadians still self-identify as Christian, overall Catholic and Protestant numbers are declining while minority religious communities are growing (Pew Research Center 2013). Globally, Christianity is the largest religion, but pollsters predict that by 2060 Islam will have approximately the same number of adherents as Christianity (Pew Research Center 2017). Such international changes will affect Canada's religious landscape due to migration and birth rates. The increased cultural and religious pluralism will inevitably lead to disagreements. "Difficult citizenship" equips young citizens with the tools to work toward mutual understanding and democratic decision making across these differences, rather than dismissing the other as "social engineers," "un-Canadian" or "barbaric." Some basic knowledge of several major religious and secular world views can help students understand why they and others might participate in public life as they do. By gaining religious literacy, students recognize that all people respond from some position of faith or world view (Valk 2007, 2017).

Yet citizenship education in Canada and elsewhere tends to ignore or marginalize religion (Arthur,

Gearon and Sears 2010; Calhoun 2011; Sears and Herriot 2016). Curricular silence is never value neutral and, as Keller, Camardese and Abbas (2017) discovered, children as young as 10 are attuned to educational silences regarding religion. The silencing of both religious identity and learning about religion teaches students "that only their non-religious self is welcomed in school, and their religious or spiritual self must remain at home or in the community. Or, children feel ashamed and isolated when their religious beliefs, or differing understandings of spirituality or atheism are in the minority" (Keller, Camardese and Abbas 2017, 26). Silence conveys to students a hidden curriculum: some aspects of their identity are inappropriate in the public sphere.

But citizenship is not the only social studies concept in which religion is diminished. As the concept of citizenship expanded beyond voting and legal rights to encompass identity/ies, diversity and skill development (Alberta Education 2005b), multiculturalism became a concept integral to citizenship. Yet multicultural policy and education also tend to be silent about religion (Beaman, Beyer and Cusack 2017; White 2009), despite Kymlicka's (2015) designation of religion as the third dimension of multiculturalism. Beaman, Beyer and Cusack (2017, 257) wonder if the "broader sensibility related to diversity" of multiculturalism offsets the lack of religious knowledge held by most Canadian youth. One can respond, however, by asking whether it is possible to extend the broader sensibilities of respect and appreciation that undergird multiculturalism to something about which one knows very little or nothing. In the absence of knowledge, multiculturalism easily becomes a passive form of mere toleration.[3]

The concept of *toleration* has been challenged for promoting exclusionary approaches by naturalizing difference and essentializing culture (Brown 2006). Simplistic calls for toleration do not prompt an examination of the power dynamics behind the proposition of "us" tolerating "them" (Abu El-Haj 2010; Brown 2006). Tolerance is related to religion in that "Religion appears in liberal theory first and foremost as an occasion for tolerance and neutrality," resulting in the privatization of religion, the public/private binary, and the conceptualization of citizenship as secular (Calhoun 2011, 77). Cavanaugh's critique (2009) is that monotheistic religions are often presented as inevitably intolerant while the intolerance of many atheist or polytheistic societies is downplayed. Developing some religious literacy and learning about the issues facing religious minorities could help students recognize the exclusions within the concept of toleration and move them towards intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

In summary, the concept of *difficult citizenship* alerts us to the fact that conflict is not necessarily bad or something to be avoided. Religious identity and pluralism are present in most western societies and contribute to differences and conflicts. Yet, both citizenship education and multicultural education tend to ignore or diminish religion, despite the historical and contemporary public roles of religion in countries around the world.

How Education About Religion Supports Citizenship and Serves a Public Good

If silence about religion is not neutral and can affect student identity, and if religion can be a source of conflict in a democratic and religiously plural public, then developing religious literacy can be a public good. This section develops three arguments that, taken together, support citizenship education and the ways in which diverse citizens might live together well.

Strengthening Our Collective Ability to Understand Religion

Commenting on the British context, Adam Dinham (2015, 19) notes how publics no longer have the ability to talk well about religion after a century of secular assumptions, just at a time when there is "a pressing need for a better quality of conversation in order to avoid knee-jerk reactions which focus only on bad religion" (p 29). The situation is similar in Canada, where misinformation, disinterest and incorrect stereotypes about religion easily slide into discrimination. For example, after the 2015 Paris bombings for which the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, claimed responsibility, Muslims in Canada experienced various acts of violence and discrimination (Goodyear 2015). If "difficult citizenship," or the equipping of students to handle conflict rather than erase differences, is to occur and citizens are to learn how to live together well, some religious literacy is necessary. But this is a multifaceted task, as Dinham suggests, and involves the media.

In 2017, 51 per cent of Canadians said they believed that religion does more harm in the world than good, up from 44 per cent in 2011 (Joseph 2017). Pollster

Ipsos Affairs attributed some of the results to the negative impacts of ISIL, social media and the 24-hour news cycle. The issue goes deeper, however, as reporting too often portrays religions beyond liberal Protestantism and Catholicism as extremist, violent, intolerant, and perhaps foreign, racist or misogynist (MediaSmarts, nd). A study examining the construction of individual, religious and national identities within Canadian multiculturalism, as reported in two newspapers over the 10-year period of 2003–13, found that "problematic" religion extends to those who place too much importance on their religious identity. A strong religious identity is seen as challenging the dominant Christian secularism of Canada that privatizes religion (Bonnis 2015, 109). At the same time, religious groups and movements effectively use media, either to make their religion more visible (for example, posting You Tube videos about forgiveness) or for more sinister purposes (such as ISIL's use of social media to spread propaganda and attract recruits).

In addition to focusing on "bad" religion, media often misinterpret religious stories or simply miss the story due to their lack of knowledge about religion (Marshall, Gilbert and Ahmanson 2009). This requires teachers to think carefully about how they use current events, particularly if the event refers to religion. Media also shapes the construction of social boundaries between the public and private and determines what is appropriate and inappropriate (Lefebvre and Beaman 2014; Mann 2015). To avoid simplistic media interpretations of religion, students might study the ways in which all states manage religion. For example, the definition of religion has always been a tool to manage religion; one group receives benefits because it is deemed a religion, while another group does not quality for such benefits because it does not fit the official definition of a religion. Today the dominant view in western countries posits religion as private belief, which "can marginalize other forms of religion that foreground bodily practice and ritual or those epistemologies with a more comprehensive view of religion and in which the distinction between the religious and the secular does not fit" (Van Arragon 2017, 309). Citizens who understand that religion can be both public, communal and enacted, as it is in Islam, as well as private, individual and believed, as it is in most forms of Protestantism (Asad 1993), have stronger religious literacy and are better positioned to engage with public religion and their religious neighbours. As previously stated, the privatization of religion is a contingent process that privileges certain types of religion while disempowering others. Once students are able to interrogate the assumption of privatization as the sole option for religion in democratic life, they can engage more fully in conversations regarding freedoms, democratic debate and the limitations of tolerance.

Conversations can, however, be fraught with danger for students belonging to minority religions. As Bickmore points out, "When conflict surfaces, it is often the lowest-status or most marginalized participants who are exposed to the most risk of discomfort and harm, because it is their ways of being and thinking that are most likely to be unfamiliar or unpopular" (Bickmore 2011, 8). Students belonging to minority religions incur the greatest risk when engaging in class discussions, and silence may offer the best protection. Religious illiteracy in the classroom adds to the risk these students face when most of their classmates, and perhaps even their teachers, know little to nothing about their religious tradition and thus cannot recognize misinformation and misrecognition when it arises. The inability of teachers to correct misinformation or educate students about respectful behaviour towards religious individuals further isolates minority religious students (Guo 2011).

This argument for religious literacy starts with the necessity of citizens to civilly engage with each other across their differences. When students belonging to religious minorities feel it is safer to remain quiet in the classroom, or when opportunities for education about differences are passed by due to teacher and student lack of recognition, differences are erased and all students lose the opportunity to learn how to engage difference, and even conflict, in a civil manner. Perhaps if students and teachers had more religious literacy and could better evaluate media sources about religion, conversations involving religious differences would be easier to facilitate and minority students would be better protected.

Supporting Our Collective Ability to Understand Conflict

While not all conflicts involve religion, some do. Even without addressing the factor of religion, research suggests that teachers avoid teaching about specific conflicts and their causes (Bickmore 2006, 2011, 2014; Sears, Clarke and Hughes 1999; Parker 2013). While one might sympathize with the reasons for this avoidance (time, lack of knowledge, fear of giving offence), commentators point to the resulting reinforcement of dominant belief systems and

marginalization of dissent (Bickmore 2015, 18; Parker 2013). Paying specific curricular attention to religion may help unpack some of the power dynamics embedded in conflicts and promote both democratic ways of living together and peacebuilding efforts.

Scholars often write about the "ambivalence" of the sacred (Little and Appleby 2004) or the potential of religion to underwrite both conflict and peace. When religious identity is invoked in a conflict, the conflict can become more intractable (Hayward and Marshall 2015), as seen in the violence between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, Muslims and Christians in Nigeria and Kenya, and Sunnis and Shi'as in Lebanon and Iraq (Cox, Orsborn and Sisk 2015, 1). However, an exclusive focus on religiously inspired violence distorts religion because it ignores both the much greater violence committed by secular states (Armstrong 2014; Cavanaugh 2009) and the contributions of religious actors to peacebuilding (Casanova 1994; Dubensky 2016; Hayward and Marshall 2015). In a report examining the opportunities for international peacebuilders to support societies that have been deeply divided by religious, sectarian or ethnic violence, the authors remind readers that every religion is internally diverse and interacts with other social cleavages, such as identity politics and systems of government (Cox, Orsborn and Sisk 2015, iii). A conclusion drawn from the case studies examined in the report is that religion cannot be ignored in peacebuilding efforts. As the study notes about Sri Lanka, "The lack of attention to religious dynamics by outsiders seeking to strengthen peace in Sri Lanka—both as part of national peacemaking and local-level peacebuilding—meant that religious leaders felt threatened by the peace processes, and so became more strident in opposition over time" (Cox, Orsborn and Sisk 2015, 22). Religion can be both an aspect of conflict and part of the solution, but religious identities are important and cannot be ignored.

Peacebuilding efforts address the causes of conflict by examining its structural, cultural and relational aspects. Religious peacebuilding is "peacebuilding 1) motivated and strengthened by religious and spiritual resources, and 2) with access to religious communities and institutions" (Dubois 2008). Religious peacebuilding is evidenced in Quaker conciliation efforts in the Nigerian civil war, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone during the 1999 peace negotiations, the ceasefires negotiated by Muslim and Catholic clerics in Bosnia, and the education and advocacy efforts of an organization comprising both Israeli and Palestinian women (Dubois 2008; see also Little and Scott 2004).

Bringing the learning closer to home, if nonviolent conflict is a component of democratic civil life and the aim of difficult citizenship is to foster understanding and democratic decision making, then learning how to engage religious differences is an integral aspect of citizenship education. As a caveat, it is important to add that while religious differences are important to study, they need not be so insurmountable as to overwhelm common human needs and desires for flourishing.

Sometimes conflict brought about by religious groups contributes to the common good. Internationally, one need only think of how the African-American churches provided leadership to the American civil rights movement and church involvement in the antiapartheid movement of South Africa. Mahatma Gandhi provided a model of nonviolent resistance that many aspire to follow. In Canada, various churches protested the Canadian government's 1973 recognition of the Chilean military junta that overthrew the elected Allende government. Responding to the oppressive and torturous tactics used by military dictatorships throughout Latin America, they joined others in advocating for an immigration system that would recognize refugees as a distinct category. The revamped *Immigration Act, 1976* incorporated this and many other changes (Gunn 2018). Canadian Sikhs provide another example, working tirelessly to expand the concepts of *citizenship* and *human*. They continue struggling for religious freedom, both for themselves and for other religious minorities (Nayar 2013; Jakobsh and Walton-Roberts 2016).

In other situations, the participation of religious actors in Canadian public life led to hostility, particularly when they protested social change. This occurred in the early 2000s, when various religious groups, several of which formed the Interfaith Coalition on Marriage and Family, protested same-sex marriage. The debate was emotionally charged, with some groups on both sides ramping up the rhetoric but others displaying more nuance (Rayside and Wilcox 2011). The tenor of the debate revealed how difficult it was for many Canadians to engage with each other on substantive issues when religion was involved. More recently, many of the parents who protested Ontario's revamped sex education program in 2015 did so for religious reasons. In these types of controversies, involved parties claim competing rights and easily entrench into enclaves. Religious literacy

could help mediate such disputes by offering such approaches as insisting on public space for all respecting views, broadening intellectual and cultural horizons, and offering knowledgeable critiques (Dinham and Jones 2010, 6).

Teaching for religious literacy, studying conflicts, including those that involve religion, and examining how religion also supports peacebuilding helps students see themselves in the curriculum. By studying conflicts in democratic countries, students see examples of religious people like themselves engaging as citizens in their societies. Studying conflicts in nondemocratic situations helps students understand the benefits of democracy and how religious communities can still work as peacebuilders. In both instances, students receive tools to evaluate religious identity and the ways in which religious actors participate in public life.

Stories of religious peacebuilding abound, but they are not easily found in the news. While stories of religion and conflict cannot be ignored, if the conflict is not violent it is not necessarily negative, as Bickmore reminds us. But equally important, the negative stories told in the classroom must be balanced with stories in which religion and religious communities contribute to public life in a positive manner, such as the participation of Muslim leaders in Tunisia's transition to democracy (Stepan 2016) and the complex role of religious institutions in various transitions from authoritarian rule to democracy (Casanova 1994; Künkler and Leininger 2009).

Enhancing Our Collective Knowledge About Democracy

For over a decade, Freedom House has been chronicling the decline of freedom around the world, painting a grim picture of emboldened authoritarian regimes and rising xenophobic sentiments (Puddington and Roylance 2016). These reports point to the need for, and importance of, citizenship education. Each generation must learn for itself that democracy is "a process which needs continual renewal" (Osler 2010, 220).

Educating about religion contributes to democracy. Religion can shape world views—which are visions and ways of life (Valk 2017, 234)—and thus contain the capacity to transform lives and promote particular ways of living and being (Bramadat 2009, 15). It is this ability to affect the way citizens participate in the public sphere for both good and ill that makes religion relevant to democracy. As members of religious communities bring their ways of living and being into the public sphere, they desecularize public spaces. Education about religion, then, is an important component of citizenship education (Jackson 2003).

In the process of learning about democracy, one encounters religion. The relationship between democracy and religion is multifaceted (Calhoun 2011; Freston 2008). On one hand, participation in a religious community can develop the civic virtues and social capital necessary for civil engagement (Brusco 1995; Freston 2008; Habermas 2006). Religious groups operate humanitarian nongovernmental organizations and spawn movements such as Jubilee 2000, which mobilized Christian communities to lobby governments to forgive the debts of the world's poorest nations. On the other hand, adherents of one religion, usually the dominant religion, may restrict the citizenship and rights of others, including women and minority religious or cultural groups (Hemming 2011). In some countries, extreme tensions exist between or within religious groups (Kakar 1996; Rasmussen 2007) and religiously inspired terrorists threaten both human life and democratic institutions (Esposito 2015; Juergensmeyer 2010).

In fact, democracy empowers religion. The spread of popular sovereignty and freedom has contributed to both the desecularization of identities and sacralization of public spheres in countries ranging from India to Turkey to Mexico, and even the United States. Those who study religion and public life note how the religiously plural nature of modern countries and the ability of citizens to choose their religion has resulted in greater adoption of religions that are orthodox, conservative and public (Shah and Toft 2009). Student knowledge of both religious democratic engagement and the challenges that religious conflicts pose for democracy can develop a more nuanced understanding of democracy itself, of the resources within communities, of how communities and democratic structures either work with or against each other, and of the religious impulses that contribute, help construct or might be in opposition to the goals of citizenship and democracy.

Today, many western democracies with roots in Christianity are struggling with religion in public life (Spencer 2016; Woodberry 2012). In some countries, the relatively recent presence of Islam is challenging long-held Christian and secular worldviews (Hemming 2011) as well as Christian privilege, while in others the idea of comprehensive religion is foreign to the secular elite (Bramadat 2009). Despite Canada's long history of immigration, the country has had an

inconsistent response to religious pluralism. Christian privilege remains, as even secularism in Canada is described as Christian (Seljak et al 2008). Democratic structures are dynamic, responding to fluid social needs. Religious diversity challenges those structures to be more creative and adjust to greater change. The concept of *difficult citizenship* prepares students to engage with such challenges, and religious literacy is a necessary component of such citizenship.

Conclusion

There is nothing easy regarding the teaching about religion, and missteps can cause backlash and fears from parents (Wertheimer 2015). Internal heterogeneity means that religious communities can vie for control over how a tradition is interpreted and taught (Kamat and Mathew 2010). These are legitimate concerns for educators. Yet they also reveal how religion can no longer be relegated to the private sphere, in part because it is undemocratic to do so, and in part because it diminishes citizenship education.

A robust citizenship education can be enhanced by a curriculum that consciously includes religion (as well as spirituality and nonreligious world views). Social studies cannot escape serious examination of religion, whether it be to challenge simplistic stereotypes, evaluate religious arguments, discern religious contributions to such central social and political themes as citizenship, pluralism and living together well, or to discuss links between religion and identity. Religion matters, not only to those who self-identify as religious, but to all citizens, just as secular world views matter to everyone, and not only those who consider themselves secular. When citizens have some degree of religious literacy, they have a deeper grasp of history and current events and a broader basis on which to know and interact with their neighbours. Such civic engagement helps fulfill the goals and purposes of social studies.

Notes

1. Borrowing from Protestantism, colonial rulers emphasized God, belief, official acts and places of worship. Several of these emphases do not apply to Buddhists, Taoists, Confucians and Hindus.

2. Quebec offers a mandatory Ethics and Religious Culture course.

3. While Alberta's social studies curriculum uses the term *multiculturalism*, the program rationale describes diversity under the category of pluralism (the heading reads "Pluralism: Diversity and Cohesion" [Alberta Education, 2005a]). Some proponents of pluralism claim that the term does not assume a majority culture, but others point to its prescriptive element and embedded power dynamics. Within the concept of pluralism, the questions of what "counts" as religion and who decides are important and contested. See Bender and Klassen 2010.

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