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## Review of Education, Religion and Diversity: Developing a New Model of Religious Education

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**L. Philip Barnes**

***Education, Religion and Diversity:  
Developing a New Model of Religious Education***

*London: Routledge, 2014 pb 280pp \$48.95*

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Diversity and religion are hot topics in the field of education today and are not often spoken about in the same sentence, much less a whole book. L. Philip Barnes has identified the challenge of religious intolerance and has some significant things to say about developing respectful relationships between people from different communities and groups within a shared society.

The chapters in this book take the reader through a relatively recent, rich historical background of British religious education. Diversity, through the lens of religious education, is often the most difficult subject to broach. That said, religious education is often the perfect classroom setting in which to have those difficult conversations. Challenging religious intolerance has become more essential as our world, especially the UK, has seen dramatic growth in the number of immigrants moving into the country.

Historically the UK has always been recognized as a leader in providing a fairly neutral and secular religious education. Barnes begins with John Hull's position that "as countries become more conscious of internal moral and religious diversity, so they will come to appreciate the strengths of the British version of multi-faith religious education as the model best equipped to secure in pupils the values of toleration, moral integrity and civic virtue" (from "Religious Education in Germany and England: The Recent Work of Hans-Georg Ziebertz," *BJRE* 27, no. 1, pp. 5–17). My favorite part of the reading came in the study of how the enlightenment project moved to the liberal model of religious education. John Hull was introduced as one of the most well-written authors on issues of religion and diversity. The body of his work is staggering in its breadth and width in religious education as it intersects with diversity, and I am grateful for Barnes's introduction.

The very essence of this book speaks to the fundamental idea that when we respect other people, we should respect their beliefs and affirm their different philosophies of life and religion. The main argument in this

book is that the current models of religious education in Britain are limited in their capacity to challenge prejudice and religious intolerance (p. 244). Barnes calls this a *post-liberal* model and arrives at this very conclusion after 233 pages of deep and interesting religious history.

It would be a theologian's dream to consider carefully all the various phenomenological and religious understandings brought to the reader's attention in this book. Barnes sets the stage with a four-chapter case for why the present model of religious education is not serving the population of students currently in our schools. Personally, I have always been a bit envious of Britain's ability to have religious education as a subject. I had not thought deeply about how to integrate religious thought from around the world into a course decreed by a country with a national church.

Religion through the lens of diversity is considered within these four chapters as the distinction between modern diversity (1990s) and late modern diversity. Some language about postmodern diversity is used by social commentators, but the argument is that postmodern is too wide a designation for a specific subject such as religion. Globalization is studied in UK classrooms along with technological innovations, allowing immigrant communities to participate in the world in a different manner.

Chapters 5–8 delve into the demise of the phenomenological approach to religious education. This might be intimidating reading for the common layperson, yet the overarching theme is that there is a purpose to a phenomenological approach and its specialist terminology. This made way for the conviction that all religions mediate truth and salvation with a *religious* foundation both to challenge religious intolerance and to develop respect for others.

Barnes finishes with several chapters on postmodern thought as it relates to the religious classroom. His chapter "Religious Education and Moral Education" applies to those who work in faith-based universities that offer courses related to specific ideologies and formal denominations. Throughout the entire book he carefully constructs his argument related to the challenge of religious tolerance in the global environment.

For those who want to think deeply and critically about religious education inside and outside of Britain, this book is wide-ranging and provocative. It is best read in small chunks and digested slowly; approached in this way, it is rich and rewarding.

*Debby Espinor*