

Religion and Belief Literacy as a Chain of Learning: how we understand religion and belief across spaces of learning

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Foreword and Acknowledgements

This book brings together research and thinking over ten years about the relationship between religion and belief and the public sphere. It reflects my journey through three distinct phases. In the first I wanted to open up the connections between religion and belief and public policy at a time when many were noticing how much policy-makers were suddenly saying on a topic which had previously been marginal to the point of invisibility. In this I had the experience of repeatedly coming up against a widespread lack of ability among policy-makers to talk about religion and belief in the first place, despite much appetite to do so.

This necessitated a second phase – which in many ways was a sideways step, designed to address this deficit. In this stage the notion of ‘religious literacy’ became central. This was the stage in which I wanted to work out an approach by which actors and organisations could recover the ability to talk well about religion and belief, whatever their own particular stance. In this book this has evolved in to ‘religion and belief literacy’, as the introduction explains.

After five years working to open up this idea, and making it available to a policy-making audience, I have more recently returned to the bread and butter of exploring connections between religion and belief and public policy. This has included work on religion and belief in media, civil society and law but the main focus has been on the policies and practices framing schools, universities and professional training, especially in the area of health and social care. The book is an exploration of religion and belief in these learning spaces, examined through the lens of religion and belief literacy.

I have had the good fortune to work with many excellent colleagues in this area over the years, and I am especially grateful to Chris Baker, Beth Crisp, Grace Davie, Abby Day, Matthew Francis, Panagiotis Pentaris and Tim Stacey for their collegiality and hard work as we unpicked the issues together in various projects and fields. In this book, particular thanks are due to Martha Shaw and Alp Arat who worked with me on reviews of the policy and literature, especially around religion and belief in workplaces and professions (Alp)

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