INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, 1940-1960

John L. Elias, Fordham University

A number of years ago I experienced the "imposter syndrome" that adult educator Steven Brookfield (2006; 1992) described as endemic to the teaching profession. I dared to teach a course in multicultural religious education. I had little experience in this area and had planned the course to be taught by a Kenyan woman who received a doctorate at Fordham, had taught the course often, and had lived in this country for a number of years. But the dean in his wisdom or desire to save money thought that I should teach the course.

So when I learned of this year's REA theme of intercultural dialogue and religious education I both wanted to write on the theme but also wanted to avoid any recurrence of the imposter syndrome. So I decided to do what I often do, retreat into an historical study. I have had to do this often since being a white, somewhat affluent, straight male I have been on the wrong side of many of the social revolutions in my life time, being defined as the enemy in the black struggle for power, an obstacle in the woman's liberation movement, a foe in the struggles between the poor and the affluent, an oppressor in the gay and lesbian revolution, and an impediment to the recognition of true multiculturalism.

Consequently, I have decided to go back to a time when intercultural relationships and education first received prominence from scholars in many academic areas, including religion and religious education. Though I consulted a number of books on the topic and other journals I found *Religious Education* most useful in researching this movement in

the 1940s and 1950s. It published many articles, symposia, reports on conferences, and book reviews devoted to intercultural or intergroup education. The two terms were then used interchangeably, though the term intergroup seems to weaken the concept of intercultural by focusing more on psychological changes in attitudes rather than true cultural diversity. After the 1960s the word multicultural has been the main term in this country while in Britain and other parts of the world intercultural education is the preferred language.

The most prominent religious educator committed to intercultural education during this period was Stephen Grant Cole, born in 1895, who wrote the most comprehensive articles in *Religious Education* on this subject. While a professor of religious education at Crozier Theological Seminary he wrote *History of Fundamentalism* (1931, 1961), considered one of the first books to analyze and interpret the fundamentalist movement in United States Protestantism. He also published articles in the *Journal of Religion*. For a number of years he was a researcher at the University of Chicago. In theology he embraced Protestant liberal theology; in religious education he was closely allied with the social religious education stance of George Coe, though he did offer criticisms of Coe's work (1940, 24-25).

From 1940 to 1944 Cole served as director of the service Bureau for Intercultural Education in New York City, concerned mainly with public school education. Still later, in the 1950s he was Director of Education for the National Conference of Christians and Jews in Los Angeles. Cole was the program director for two REA conventions, one on the intersection of theology and education and in 1953 the Pittsburgh convention on intercultural relations and religious bodies. Cole also wrote substantial books on

intercultural education: *Intercultural Education in American Schools:* (Vickery and Cole 1943) and *Minorities and the American Promise* (Cole 1954).

## SOCIAL CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE TIMES

As with any new term in education many efforts were made to define or describe intercultural or intergroup education in this period. Novak (1949, 160) writing at the time of the movement defined its purposes as: imparting a knowledge of different cultures existing in a community, fostering respect and understanding of these cultures, attempting to eliminate prejudice and discrimination, and promoting peaceful relationship among groups. Later, Nicholas Montalto (1982), the main historian of this period, described intercultural education as the effort to reduce interracial, interethnic, and religious tensions as well as raise minority self-esteem and integrate minorities into American society on an equal basis.

Intercultural education in the 40s and 50s emerged in the context of major national and international conflicts. Internationally, there were conflicts between democratic and totalitarian regimes, the persecution of the Jews and other minorities in Germany and elsewhere, the conflagration of the World War, and the beginnings of the Cold War. Nationally, in the 1930s problems focused on integrating new European immigrants into society, increased conflicts among blacks and whites, Christians and Jews, as well as Protestants and Catholics. Much of the social and cultural analysis dealt with widespread social prejudice, discrimination and segregation into ghettoes. Problems also revolved around ethnicity, religion and race.

Scholars of the time pointed out the presence of many cultures in the United States, the growing black population as well as large numbers of people with recent

European roots who suffered prejudice and stereotyping. Even though immigration had been drastically curtailed, intercultural conflict still abounded. While this diversity provided unrivaled opportunities, it also complicated "American social, economic, political, cultural and spiritual forces and problems, [since] inherent in our present population are certain dangers" (Adamic 1940, 2). Disturbing for scholars also were the 1940s conflicts among generations of immigrants as well as anti German, Italian, and Japanese feelings and actions during the war. Hundreds of groups emerged to suppress those considered foreigners and federal policies segregating these groups have now come to light.

Scholars involved in intercultural education in American schools recognized that problems of a religious nature had to be dealt with in intercultural education since religion is an essential aspect of culture and because historically in the country religion lay at the basis of some intercultural conflicts. They pointed out that the ban on teaching religion in public schools meant a ban on sectarian teaching, teaching to urge students to accept the doctrines of one religion over others. In their view there was legitimate room for dealing in an objective way with religious faiths and conflicts in courses in literature, social studies, and history. (Vickery, W. E. & Cole, S. G. 1943, 158-162.

Cole (1940) summed up the conflict of cultures as taking a wide variety of forms:

Determining factors in intergroup friction include national, ethnic, racial, religious and economic forces. In certain cases the contacts have eventuated in an accelerated assimilation of peoples into a homogeneous American folk. In many other instances minority groups are discriminated against by old-stock Americans, accentuating cultural differences and social conflict. (136)

In a later article Cole (1942) attempted to establish the place of Christian education in the crisis of cultures taking place at that time, observing that "according to

the verdict of history the forces of creative religion rise to their finest expression in periods of crises of culture" (80).  Examples of this crisis were the World War then taking place, crises in the economic community, tensions between rural and urban communities, and familial conflicts among generations.  For Cole the conflicts within religious groups, mainly between modernism or liberalism and neo-orthodoxy caused serious rifts among Protestants.  He called on religious educators to deal realistically with these issues in developing their theories of religious education.

Cole was still dealing with the issue of religion in intercultural education as late as the mid 1950s (Cole and Cole 1954).  He urged all educators to consider the important value that religions play in sustaining people, fostering the integrity of the human self and promoting social order (44).  For him religions were more than person faiths; they determined cultures and led in this country to "a wide diversity of cultural enlistments and wielded powerful influences in determining human relations in community life (44).

In his presidential address to the REA convention in 1946 F. Ernest Johnson (1946) analyzed domestic conflicts in terms of interreligious conflicts between Protestants and Catholics over the latter's perceived increase in political power in the country, economic tensions between labor and industry, and political tensions over the definition of what democracy is.  Johnson called for an ethic of group behavior in which moral standards in public life might be improved.  He challenged religious educators to move beyond exclusive emphasis on individual and family ethic by focusing also on the public sphere:

> If we as religious educators are to have any considerable influence on the course of democratic thought and life in America we must find ways in which to build attitudes and skills that will have meaning in the highly complex situations of

group life in which inferior ethical sanctions now have a dominant place. (1949, 200)

In a spirited discussion that followed his address a number of issues were raised. Discussants pointed out that religious groups appealed to different forms of authority, that there was a divergence of opinion about interreligious cooperation, that there were existing conflicts among religious groups; that an economic system had developed in the country which seems to offend the Judaeo-Christian tradition and that there were differences of opinion about the function of government in national life.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

Theoretical underpinnings of intercultural education focused on the values of democratic society. Education was for democratic living in which the priority of persons are to be recognized. This is contrasted with the authoritarian values of a totalitarian society. Discussions about the meaning of citizenship abounded. The merits of various models for dealing with cultural diversity were considered: assimilation, melting pot, or cultural pluralism. The latter was considered the preferred model in that:

> The different cultures, in so far as they remain living faiths, attitudes, tastes and ideas of distinct groups in our population, act on each other and, through cross fertilization, create new, distinctly New-World, American cultural traits. (Cole 1941, 141)

Johnson (1946) in his presidential address also examined some of the main bases for intercultural education: the weakening of the natural moral law, consequences of rapid change, rejection of absolutes and the philosophy of pragmatism. He saw the task ahead as finding a "basis for working relationships between groups that present important cultural and religious contrasts." He preferred the goal of cultural pluralism in which

unity and diversity are emphasized "even though they are obviously in dialectical relationship" (193).

Redden and Ryan (1951), philosophers of education at Fordham University, situated the basis of intercultural education in the Catholic interpretation of moral law as embracing principles that are universal, immutable, absolute, evident, obligatory, authoritative, and permanent.  For them in the United States:

> Democracy is founded on the fundamental principles of Christian democracy [which] are expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States and may be reduced to the following five: (1) recognition is given to God's existence and His eternal law, (2) all men are equal in the eyes of the Creator and before the law, (3) the inalienable rights of the individual have their origin in God (4) freedom and authority come from God and are governed by His law and  (5) government exists to preserve and protect, for each individual, the rights endowed on him by his creator. (3)

In one of his later articles on intercultural education Cole (1953) described what he considered the social forces that contributed to the philosophy and programs of intercultural education.  The social sciences provided a keener understanding of culture, subcultures and personality. A distinctive feature of culture is the network of human relationships existing within a group. An analysis of United States society reveals subcultures based on regions, structures such as urban or rural, social-economic grouping into classes, racial groupings, family heritage and religious groups.  All persons exist within cultures which influence them to a great extent.

Cole (1953) contended that there was at the time a growing awareness of the high degree of social prejudice, discrimination, and segregation that prevailed in the country. The affirmation of high ideas of a democratic society co-existed with many situations in which people were denied full participation in this society.  Many forms of prejudice

existed such as stereotyping, Jim-Crowism, nativism, ethnocentrism, religious bigotry and the authoritarian personality.  In his view while many groups had made efforts to combat these issues it became increasingly clear that much still had to be done.

Cole (1953) also pointed to the growth of psychological disciplines that made people more aware of the psychological needs of the human personality.  The growth of the human dynamics movement attempted to address personal development.  Depth psychologists focused more on the emotional needs of individuals.  Developmental psychology showed that at different stages people have different needs.  Humanistic psychology stressed a hierarchy of needs that individuals required to achieve maturity.

National citizenship was redefined in relation to world citizenship, given the struggles of the War and the Cold War, according to Cole.  The citizenship that had to deal with the reality of cultural pluralism demanded tolerance of other groups. Loyalty to the nation had to be balanced with loyalty to one's particular group, and there was need for re-thinking one's behavior towards people in this country as well towards people in other countries.  In Cole's view the existence of such institutions such as the United Nations forced many citizens out of an isolationist mentality.

As might be expected intercultural education was of great interest to Jewish educators, though their voices are not plentiful in the pages of *Religious Education*. Jewish involvement in the National Conference of Christian and Jews and their financial support for the Bureau for Intercultural Education attest to the importance they gave to this form of education.  Writing in the *The Reconstructionist* Werner Cahnman (1948) defended the thesis that intercultural education was key to combining the content of

Jewish faith transmitted in synagogues with the social action promoted by Jewish

community centers. He explained that:

> Intercultural activities that deserve the name presuppose cultural consciousness of the participants and if this is so, they are likely to lead Jewish youth in particular, not only towards a better understanding of their position as citizens, but also toward a desire to learn more about the meaning of their heritage. (11.)

In his view Jewish content programs and Jewish social action programs complemented

each other.

<div style="text-align:center">RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS</div>

The REA gave extensive treatment to intercultural education at the fiftieth

anniversary of the association, held at the University of Pittsburgh, November 8-10,

1953.  Cole (1953b) prepared a syllabus for the deliberations of the group in hopes that a

document would emerge from the meeting to improve intercultural relations throughout

the country.  The seriousness of this enterprise is shown in the fact that a ten person

committee met in Los Angeles for a six month's seminar to prepare the syllabus.

Committee members included Protestants, Catholics and Jews, many with a university or

college affiliation.  The syllabus consisted of nine sections, together with significant

quotations, pertinent discussion questions for religious educators and an extensive

bibliography.  The project was prepared in conjunction with The Commission on

Religious Organizations of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Inc.  Cole

was at the time Director of Education for the National Conference of Christians and Jews

in Los Angeles, California.

*Unit 1* deals with the diversity found in the United States: socio- economic class,

religious affiliation, racial group and country of origin.  Religious educators are asked to

ponder how religious groups deal with this diversity, what they make of the fact that

White Anglo Protestants are considered the majority group, what are the implications of having minority and majority groups, and whether religious groups adhere to the ideals of democracy and the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

*Unit 2* details the intercultural issues facing the country in the various areas of diversity. Religious educators are asked to consider how they deal with these issues in their religious bodies. *Unit 3* asks religious educators to discuss what their particular groups are doing to wipe out the evils of discrimination and segregation, describe hopeful trends and programs in this regard, examine their teaching materials for biases and ask whether members are committed to the cause of racial justice. *Unit 4* deals with issues contrasting the first class citizenship of Anglos with the second class citizenship of peoples of minority groups. Many questions are raised about how congregations and schools deal with the attitudes of members, whether these realize the harm that has been and continues to be done, what are the pro-social practices in their congregations, what conscious efforts are being made break down barriers with children, youth and adults, and whether there is a need for examining textbooks and reference materials that perpetuate stereotypes.

Conflicts among religious groups are treated in *Unit 5*, highlighting conflicts between Jews and Christians, and between Protestants and Catholics. While the curriculum states that conflicts between Jews and Christians have somewhat abated, it points out that tensions between Protestant and Catholic have increased with the activities of Protestant lobbies such as Protestant and Other Americans for Separation of Church and State in response to the perceived growth of Catholic political influence in the nation. The syllabus recommends that members of each faith group should be:

> (a) Genuinely loyal to their own religion, (b) appreciative of the significant beliefs and values of other faiths, and (c) committed to helping resolve the tensions between religion and cooperate with other religious groups in community affairs. (Cole 1953b, 358)

*Unit 6* treats the issue of "how to reconcile the diversity of human interests of the various social, economic, cultural and religious groups in this country with the cultivation of a strong unity of the American People" (358). Religious educators are asked to examine carefully their relationships with other faiths and investigate forms of intolerance or bias in teaching materials. *Unit 7* asks educators to be sensitive in their teaching about the considerable gap between the standards of excellence that the nation has set for itself and their actual achievement with regard to minority groups. *Unit 8* deals with forms of social prejudice.

## INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN PRACTICE.

In this period public school educators developed a number of approaches to intercultural education that ever since have influenced religious education. Three approaches seemed to dominate. They fostered a democratic atmosphere in schools contending that schools conducted in an authoritarian manner, characterized by rote learning, whose teachers indoctrinated students could not be conducive to promoting a democratic atmosphere. Secondly, they attempted to relate ordinary learning experiences to intercultural learning by dealing with real problems as well as events in American history where the rights of minorities were offended. The third approach regarded problems of human relation as the focus for direct experience and study. Different curricula were established for each of these approaches (Van Til, DeBoer, Burnett and Ogden 1950).

As early as 1945 Rachel Dubois (1945) had made the case for the teaching of religion in public schools in order to promote intercultural understanding. She argued that not dealing with the religion of students caused their social world to be fragmented. She quoted the prominent religious educator William C. Bower to the effect that religion could provide a basis and motivation for democracy. She even mentioned some sins to be confessed: intolerance, thoughtless or selfishness, rationalization or lying, fooling oneself, and involuntary segregation and discrimination (132-134).

The pages of *Religious Education* in the 1940s and 1950s published a number of descriptions of practices in intercultural or intergroup education. Corpus Christi, a Roman Catholic school in Manhattan, had a four month course in tolerance for eighth graders where students read books and articles about Catholic attitudes towards Jews. Children were taken to the museum of the Jewish Theological Seminary where they examined ceremonial objects from Jewish antiquity. Connections between Jews and Christians were highlighted. Other classes in the school were introduced to various aspects of the Jewish faith. At the end of the course students drew conclusions about the evil of persecution of Jews, communality among Christianity and Judaism and the inadvisability of a program of total assimilation of Jews into American society (Reed 1940).

Cunningham (1944) described how intercultural education might be integrated into the early grades of elementary school, presenting brief vignettes of how young children might be introduced to intercultural understandings. Her approach was to stress that even though people have many things in common, they are not all alike. She also emphasized that each group and each person makes a difference, that positive attitudes

are contagious and that all have the responsibility to respect others.  She ends the article

on the importance of actions:

> Only when we can link social action to our school programs for intercultural
> education can we hope to achieve our goal of peace and justice in which, even
> unto the youngest, we respect all men of whatever creed, race or nation. (90)

Eakin (1944) described best practices in intercultural education in Protestant

church schools in New Jersey, a Roman Catholic Church in New York City and a

synagogue in Philadelphia.  Other articles in *Religious Education* described best practices

in a Protestant church school in Orange, New Jersey, Catholic Churches, secondary

schools, nursery schools, and elementary schools (Bragdon1944; De Lourdes 1944;

Wright 1944).

Goldberg (1946) described how he as a professor of literature conducts what he

calls informal intergroup education. The basis of his approach is the shared moral and

spiritual heritage of Christians and Jews.  He describes his efforts as "unembarrassed and

creative participation in other religious traditions than my own" (181).  He writes about

how he involved himself in activities of Protestant and Catholic groups on campus.   In

his classes he introduced Christian students to the rich heritage of the Bible and the

religious references in the great English literature.  He directed Christian students to

sources in their tradition and in Judaism in order to considerably broaden their

perspectives.  Goldberg reported that he has appeared before many Protestant and

Catholic groups for purposes of dialogue and cooperation.  He realized that he has drawn

on his own experience but contends that what "he does other professors already have

done or could do by making to converge off-the-record intergroup education numerous

lines of professional development and personal experience" (181).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Intercultural education was a movement in the 1940s and 1950s that carried out the purposes of socially progressive education in trying to make education a force for social change. The movement was a significant step in dealing with many social divisions and conflicts. What religious educators like Cole, Johnson and others brought to the movement was the added concern with divisions and tensions between Jews and Christians as well as increased tensions between Catholics and Protestants. In his approach to religious education Cole was deeply influenced by George Coe's social theory of religious education. At the time of Coe's death he wrote one of the tributes to him in *Religious Education*. Cole was the chief link in intercultural education between the public schools and religious educators. The Intercultural Bureau in New York City which he directed focused on public education.

Some historians of the multicultural education movement contend that the earlier intercultural education movement of the 1940s and 1950s was ultimately a failure because it did not become institutionalized in public education, being viewed as a form of education merely for those schools in which there were racial conflicts (Banks 1988, Wilkenson 1997). My contention is that the earlier intercultural education made positive contributions that greatly benefited the multicultural movement succeeded it in the 1960s. In some way the earlier movement had a broader scope than the later movement in that its concerns went beyond race and ethnicity to include religion and social class as explicit areas of interest.

The intercultural movement has to be judged by what it was attempting to do in responding to the pressing issues of their day. Contrary to what critics of the movement

say, the movement had a broader ideology than the melting pot image, although that philosophy is found in some writings.  Many interculturalists grappled seriously with the issue of cultural pluralism, never resolving it, nor is it fully resolved today.  The tension between unity and diversity will always be an issue in a country that is constantly trying to integrate waves of newcomers while it is still dealing with the integration of former groups.  This is even truer when one considers the ever changing landscape of this nation.

While it is true, as Banks (1988, 14-15) asserts, that the interculturalists did not attend sufficiently to the issue of race and were more concerned with ethnicity and religion, they did raise important issues that were carried over into the multicultural movement.  However, by the late fifties interculturalists like Cole began to deal more seriously with the issue of race, especially in response to the civil rights campaign of Dr. Martin Luther King (Cole 1958). They debated the meaning of democracy and cultural pluralism.  They attempted to deal with the problems of prejudice, discrimination, separation and exclusion.  They did attend to teacher education and developed extensive materials to be used in schools.  They paved the way for the more encompassing movement that began in the 1960s and continues to this day.

REFERENCES

Adamic, L. 1940. *New York Times Book Review*, December 29, 2.

Banks, J. 1988. *Multiethnic education: Theory and Practice*. 2nd ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Bragdon, C. R. 1944. Intercultural education: Bests practices in secondary schools. *Religious Education 39*, 94-97.

Brookfield, S. 2006; 1992. *The skillful teacher*. 2nd edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cahnman, W. J. 1948. Intercultural education and Jewish content. *The Reconstructionist 14*, April 29, 9-15.

Cole, S. G. 1941. Intercultural education. *Religious Education 36*, 131-146.

Cole, S. G. 1940. Where education and theology meet. *Religious Education 35*. 18-25**.**

Cole, S. G. 1942. The place of Christian education in a crisis of cultures. *Religious Education 37*, 80-94.

Cole, S. G. 1953a, Trends in intergroup education. *Religious Education 48*, 29-37.

Cole, S. G. 1953b. Religious education and intercultural relationships. *Religious Education 48*, 351-368.

Cole, S. G. & Cole, M. W. 1954. *Minorities and the American promise: The conflict of principles and practice*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Cunningham, R. 1944. Even unto the youngest: An interpretation of intercultural education. *Religious Education 39*, 87-90.

De Lourdes, Sister M. 1945. Intercultural education in and through the nursery school. *Religious Education 40*, 133-140.

Dubois, R. D. 1945. *Build together Americans: Adventures in intercultural education for the secondary school*. New York: Hinds, Hayden & Eldredge.

Eakin, M. M. 1944. Best practices in church and synagogue schools. *Religious Education 39*, 91-93.

Goldberg, M. H. 1946. Intergroup education, off the record. *Religious Education* 41, 132-135, 181.

Johnson, F. E. 1946. Forces that give rise to ferment in religious communities today. *Religious Education 41*, 193-202.

Montalto, N. V. 1982. *A history of the intercultural movement 1924-1941*. New York: Garland.

Novak, C. 1959. A survey of intercultural education in Catholic elementary and secondary schools of the United States. *American Catholic Sociological Review 10*, 3, 159-171.

Redden, J. D. & Ryan, F S. 1951. *Intercultural Education*. Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company.

Reed, E. E. 1940. Study in tolerance. *Religious Education 35*, 236-237.

Van Til, W., DeBoer, J. J., Burnett, R. W. & Ogden, K. C. 1950. *Democracy demands it: A resource unit for intercultural education in the high school*. New York: Harper and Row.

Vickery, W. E. & Cole, S. G. (1943). *Intercultural education and in American schools*: *Proposed objectives and methods*. New York: Harper.

Wilkenson, Barbara, ed. *Multicultural religious education*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Wright, D. 1945. A group of eighth year olds finds new friends. *Religious Education 40*, 140-145.