Religious Formation / Educating / Religious Knowledge

1 Introduction

The field of religious education offers a wide variety of approaches for forming people to understand religious beliefs and practices and educating about religion(s) and the religious dimensions of life. Is this wide variety a lush, fruitful garden or an overgrown one that is an impenetrable jungle? While it may seem to some to be an identity jungle or jumble, this brief historical account and conceptual analysis shows that the field of religious education is an abundant and even overflowing garden, offering rich resources for envisioning religious formation and education.

Written from the perspective of two religious educators working in the United States who have been deeply involved in the Religious Education Association, a North American-based yet internationally oriented academic organization, this entry explores the history of the modern religious education movement that began in the United States. We will consider how, after the founding of the Religious Education Association in 1903 and the subsequent emergence of religious education as an academic field of study, most of the early twentieth century religious educators adopted a humanistic educational perspective in exploring the religious dimensions of personal and social life. We will also discuss an effort in the mid twentieth century to reground approaches to religious education in theology, how this led to what some have considered to be an ‘identity crisis’ in the field of religious education, and then consider one significant response to this crisis. Based on our historical review of the development of religious education, we will offer a typology for understanding contemporary approaches to religious education. Our aim is to show how those who are interested in issues of religious formation and education, once they become familiar with the interplay of humanistic and theological perspectives within the field of religious education, can learn to see the pathways through the religious education garden and gain access to its fruit.

2 The Original Vision of the Field of Religious Education

In 1902, then-President of the University of Chicago William Rainey Harper issued a “Call for a Convention to Effect a National Organization for the Improvement of Religious and Moral Education Through the Sunday School and Other Agencies” (REA Archives no date). In February 1903, Harper’s call for a convention brought together
in Chicago three thousand persons from the United States, Canada, and four other
countries, and led to the founding of the Religious Education Association (REA).
The aims of the new organization were to improve the religious formation and edu-
cation of Sunday schools, draw attention to the need for improvements in moral and
religious education not only in congregations but in homes, public schools, and
other agencies, and bring together scholars from educational and religious / theolog-
ical / biblical fields of study to work collaboratively to generate research that could
guide religious and moral instruction in a more intentional and academically rig-
orous manner (REA 1903, 237–239).

At the time of its founding, the field of religious education was part of the ongo-
ing development of liberal theology. In fact, as historian Sidney E. Ahlstrom pointed
out, “[a] revised estimate of the purpose and power of religious education” was “a
vital element” in the liberal theology movement in the early to mid-twentieth century
United States (2004, 761). Most of the founders and first-generation researchers in re-
ligious education, including such significant religious education theorists as George
Albert Coe, Harrison S. Elliott, William C. Bower, and Sophia Lyon Fahs, grounded
their work in liberal theology, most notably, in beliefs in the imminent presence of
God in human personal and social life, the importance of human freedom, the ca-
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the potential to invigorate the investigation and formation of religious life in multiple
domains. “The field is limitless and inviting,” Sanders declared (1904, 3). Sanders
and other first generation religious education researchers imagined religious educa-
tors contributing to efforts to promote the religious and moral development of per-
sons, teach about religion in private and public schools and other social contexts,
form people in religious beliefs and practices within families and religious commu-

nities, and educate people to understand the role of religion in public life. Most of the
founders of the Religious Education Association were North American, white, male,
mainline Protestants, and they sought to create an organization that would welcome
women as well as men into the field of religious education and would have an inter-
national reach in uniting people of all races, religions, and nationalities in a shared
effort to foster the religious development of humanity. To what extent these founding
aspirations were actualized through inclusive practices and perspectives is subject
for another discussion. (The wide scope of the interests of the founders of the REA
is evident in the proceedings of the founding convention, see REA 1903.)

The founders of the REA envisioned religious education as a field at the cross-
roads of education and religion/theology. However, two concerns led the majority
of first-generation religious education theorists to place greater emphasis on educa-
tion than theology. First, in addition to being inspired by the humanitarian campaign
of that era, Coe and the other scholars of the field at the time were interested in the
then-influential theories of teaching, learning, and curriculum development that
were grounded in the humanistic perspective of the seventeenth to nineteenth cen-
tury Age of Enlightenment in Europe. They were also influenced by John Dewey’s ed-
ucational philosophy. Dewey posited that all education should be experiential and
focused on equipping people for life in society. Hence, Coe and most of the first gen-
eration of researchers in religious education focused more on education than theol-
ogy because they wanted to incorporate what they considered to be valuable insights
from modern educational theories and approaches into the educational efforts of
churches, synagogues, and other religious bodies (Coe 1919, 3–10; Elliott 1940,
34–62).

Second, Coe sought to distance himself as much as possible from his own theo-
logical convictions in order to view religion as a human universal and to investigate
religious beliefs and practices with the disinterested eye of an objective, scientific ob-
server (1916, ix–xv). Due in large part to the influence of Coe, many of the early re-
igious education theorists thought that if they could step back from their personal
theological convictions and the theology of their religious community, they could
work together to understand how parents, religion teachers in schools, Sunday
school teachers, and other religious education practitioners within and beyond reli-
gious communities could teach people to understand religion(s) from an objective
viewpoint and nurture religious growth as the culminating aspect of human develop-
ment. (The understanding of religious education presented here developed between
1903 and 1950. It is expressed in its fully developed form in Elliot 1950, 195–202.)
Additionally, Coe thought the church needed to be reformed and updated if it
were to thrive in the modern era. He envisioned the “Christian tradition” as a “living being” but as “one needing surgery” (1916, xii–xiii). Following Coe’s lead, many of the first-generation researchers in religious education were interested in teaching people to step back from their theological convictions and examine them critically so they could, to use Coe’s image, provide surgical treatments for the illnesses afflicting the religious bodies of which they were a part.

3 The Original Vision Challenged

From the beginning, the founding vision of the field of religious education was challenged, with its underlying liberal theological convictions being the most frequent target of critique. In the 1930s, growing concerns about what came to called liberal religious education were expressed in Norman Egbert Richardson’s *The Christ of the Classroom* (1931) and Walter Scott Atchamn’s *The Minister and the Teacher* (1932), and the liberal theological presuppositions that undergirded the religious education movement received a blistering critique in Elmer G. Homrighausen’s *Christianity in America: A Crisis* (1936). A tipping point was reached after H. Shelton Smith offered a sharp and detailed critique of liberal religious education in *Faith and Nurture* (1941). Stated briefly, critics argued that liberal religious educators did not attend fully enough to the limitations of human finitude, the reality of sin, human beings need for and dependence on God, and the distinctiveness of the revelation of God in Christianity, including, and for many, especially in Christian Scripture. The significant shift that took place at this time led to the increasing use of the term ‘Christian education’.

Rather than focusing on the religious development of humanity, many religious educators now focused on how Christian communities formed and educated people, especially children, in Christian faith.

Several decades of development in the field of religious education were then encapsulated in Randolph Crump Miller’s *The Clue to Christian Education* (1950). Miller argued that as Christian educators balanced concerns for theology and education, theology must always come first. From a theological perspective, Christian educators should consider the relationship between God and learners and then consider what curriculum would best nurture the ongoing development of this relationship (1950, 5). Frank E. Gaebelein’s *The Pattern of God’s Truth* (1954) and Lewis Joseph Sherrill’s *The Gift of Power* (1955) also made important contributions to the field of religious education during this era. While they offered differing approaches to Christian education, they grounded their views in the shared conviction that Christian education must begin with an openness or receptivity to God’s redeeming truth and power at work in the lives of fallible and sinful persons and communities. Like Miller, Gaebelein and Sherrill placed Christian theology at the center of Christian education. However, they went beyond Miller in showing that in addition to drawing insight from the academic field of education, Christian educators can utilize resources from depth psychology, philosophy, the study of the arts, and a wide range of other fields of
study in nurturing people to be open and responsive to the presence of God in their
lives.

The critiques of liberal religious education and the development of Christian ed-
ucation enabled the field of religious education to continue to evolve and adapt to
the social and cultural changes of that took place in the first half of the twentieth
century. They also ensured that the field of religious education remained rooted in
the theological perspectives of mainline North American Christian denominations
that were primarily white and middle class. Still, they did not dampen entirely the
expansive and inclusive founding vision of the field. Additionally, questions about
the nature and purpose of religious education continued to be raised, and the
field was plunged into an identity crisis. To consider how religious educators re-
sponded to this crisis we can look ahead to one effort to mark the semi-sesquicenten-
nial of the founding of the REA.

4 Who Are We? Reimagining Religious Education

In 1978, on the 75th anniversary of the REA, Professor of Religion and Education John
H. Westerhoff III of Duke University Divinity School edited a collection of essays from
twenty-one contributors to chart the identity crisis in the academic guild of religious
education. Titled Who Are We? The Quest for a Religious Education (1978), the volume
offered a topography of the diverse and richly textured scholarly landscape of reli-
gious education as it had developed from the founding of the REA to that point in
time. In the introductory and concluding essays of the collection, Westerhoff argued
that the identity crisis in the field could be overcome if religious educators remem-
bered the history of the religious education movement and refined and then reaf-
ffirmed the expansive founding vision of the field.

In his introductory essay, Westerhoff summarized the expansive vision of reli-
gious education developed by the first generation of religious education researchers,
noting that the founders of the REA sought “to broaden the nation’s understanding
of religious education, and to generate new thought in this foundational aspect of
national life” as well as to reach out “ecumenically and internationally” (West-
erhoff 1978, 2). He added that the founding vision of the field had not been realized fully
and that the members of the REA were still mainly “older liberal intellectuals.”
Yet, he also noted that the organization had benefited from “the gradual addition
of women, blacks, Roman Catholics, Jews, and Canadians” (Westerhoff 1978, 3),
and that at that time “significant numbers of Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Protestant
educators comprise the REA” (Westerhoff 1978, 3). Westerhoff suggested that religious
educators should work to realize the founding vision of the field more fully, and that
this effort could enable them to contribute to efforts to fashion national “unity and
purpose” in the face of new socio-cultural, economic, and political realities (West-
erhoff 1978, 2).
In his concluding essay, Westerhoff affirmed the continuing importance of the founding aim of the Religion Education Association to unite people interested in the intersection of education and religion. Reflecting the concerns voiced about liberal religious education over the preceding seventy-five years, Westerhoff added that religious education researchers needed to examine educational approaches critically from a religious perspective. He wrote:

Education is an intentional, valuable, long lasting, interpersonal activity of the whole person which involves knowing and understanding in depth and breath. The religious is concerned with the depth dimension of life, people’s ultimate concerns and commitments, and the search for the transcendent. Insofar as any educational effort deals with patterns of belief or commitment concerning goodness, truth, or beauty it is religious. In one important sense, then, all education is religious. Similarly, a concern for religion implies a critical look at education. (Westerhoff 1978, 264)

In accord with the founding vision of the field, Westerhoff also called for religious educators to renew their commitment to educating people about the world’s various religions in order to prepare them to address issues of religion in public life responsibly. And he noted the importance of education about Christian, Jewish, and Humanist worldviews, religious education in church and synagogue schools, and catechesis (which is education to embrace the beliefs and practices of a religious tradition) (1978, 266–272).

Additionally, Westerhoff suggested one significant revision to the founding vision of the field of the religious education. In accord with the critics of liberal religious education, Westerhoff called religious educators to center their religious education outlooks in theology. He wrote: “Our crisis of self-understanding and our fuzziness of identity is essentially theological” (Westerhoff 1978, 6).

In discussing the theological foundations of religious education, Westerhoff, drawing insight from Ian Knox’ Above or Within?, asked: “does God erupt into human affairs from within the world itself, or does God irrupt into human affairs from above and outside the world?” (Westerhoff 1978, 7). Westerhoff’s response was, essentially, “both.” Taking into account the theological beliefs of liberal religious educators and the critiques of these beliefs that had been voiced during the preceding fifty years, he posited that religious educators should balance a sense that God reveals Godself by being present to humanity through the natural world and everyday life experiences (God’s immanence) with a sense that God also reveals Godself supernaturally as Other (God’s transcendence).

The eighteen chapters of Who Are We? support the analysis Westerhoff presents in his introductory and concluding essays. Chapters 1 through chapter 9, originally published from 1903 to 1953, document the original vision of the religious education movement and the shift from a focus on human religiousness to an emphasis on the theological foundations of education in faith. In the latter part of the book, the especially noteworthy chapter by Olivia Pearl Stokes connects efforts to educate in the Black Church with the religious education movement. Stokes proposed a teach-
ing-learning process for black ethnic church schools that is based on Paulo Freire’s problem-posing approach to education (Stokes 1978, 218–234). In Stokes’s essay, and the editorial decision to include it, we detect the trace of a distinctive stream of not a liberal but rather a liberationist orientation for religious education, one that critiques both liberal religious education and theo-centric Christian education’s inattentiveness to the plight of minoritized persons and communities facing oppressive social realities. Stokes is one of only two women who contributed to *Who Are We?* – while the REA sought to welcome women into the religious education guild from its founding onwards, it was not until the 1970s that gender inclusivity began to emerge with notable momentum in the field. Essays by Gerald Sloyan and Alvin I. Schiff tell the stories of education in faith in Catholic and Jewish communities, respectively, and how these efforts intersect with the inclusive vision of the field of religious education (1978, 123–132, 181–192). The remaining chapters in the last half of the book present various proposals offered from 1965 to 1974 for envisioning the interplay of religion and education in efforts to form or educate religiously.

*Who Are We?* expressed the spirit of the times, and this spirit has continued to hold sway in religious education. Most religious educators from then till now have opted to continue to work from the broad and inclusive understanding of religious education that was first articulated by the founders of the Religious Education Association in 1903. Most religious educators have also situated the field of religious education in relation to the field of theology. The most significant development since the publication of *Who Are We?* has been the rise of practical theology as a field of study that has had a pervasive influence in the ongoing development of religious education. In the next section we will explore the ongoing development of the religious education movement from the 1970s to the present by looking at three distinct, although somewhat overlapping, types of contemporary approaches to religious formation and education.

## 5 Present-day Approaches to Forming and Educating Religiously

A typology is a way of categorizing similar things, in this case, similar approaches to religious formation and education. While there are a range of religious educational approaches of each type, approaches of each type have similar features, not unlike the family resemblances of a lush garden’s flora and fauna.

The first type consists of a group of approaches that envisions religious education as an interdisciplinary field of study closely aligned with practical theology. Religious educational approaches of this type situate religious education in relation to theology and balance religious/theological and educational modes of analysis. They view the field of religious education as a continuous effort from 1903 to the present to understand the religious dimensions of the human person and/or the human long-
ing for God, to explore the fundamental dynamics of teaching and learning, and bring these two together in considering how best to educate in faith. In *Who Are We?* Westerhoff presents one of the early sketches of this type. Classic articulations are expressed in Thomas H. Groome’s *Christian Religious Education* (1980), Mary Elizabeth Moore’s *Education for Continuity and Change* (1988), Charles R. Foster’s *Educating Congregations* ([1994] 2006), and more recently, Boyung Lee’s *Transforming Congregations Through Community* (2013). A fairly recent expression of this type that subsumes religious education within practical theology as a distinctive educational subfield of theology was presented by Hyun-Sook Kim. Kim pointed out that liberal theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher thought of practical theology as the ‘crown’ of theology; he claimed that all other theological sub-disciplines should support the efforts of practical theologians to educate people to integrate their theological beliefs into their everyday lives (Kim 2007, 419–420). Kim added that Schleiermacher’s vision of practical theology was never realized, and she suggested that the field of religious education emerged as a way of redefining practical theology and reclaiming a focus on educating in faith as being a central concern of the field of theology (Kim 2007, 420–421, 431). Kim also suggested that it is now time for religious education to return home by relocating itself within practical theology (Kim 2007, 431–433). Overall, type one contemporary approaches consider how educational theories and methods that have been used in the past can be refashioned or further developed in the present and future to nurture a viable theological understanding of life and the world.

The second type is a group of approaches that envision religious education as a multi-disciplinary rather than inter-disciplinary field of study integrated within practical theology. The approaches to religious education developed by Gaebelein and Sherrill, who were mentioned earlier, as well as the approach of C. Ellis Nelson (1967), are forerunners of this type. Approaches of this type situate religious education in relation to theology, balance theological analysis with an effort to use the resources of the field of religious education as well as those found in other fields of inquiry to encourage full personal and social development within specific life contexts. One expression of this approach is found in the work of Richard Robert Osmer.¹ Osmer identified himself as a religious educator and practical theologian. He defined practical theology as “that branch of Christian theology that seeks to construct action-guiding theories of Christian praxis in particular social contexts” (Osmer 2005, xiv). Osmer eschewed what he calls a generic, or single focus model of religious education (Osmer 2005, xiii). Instead, he has opted for a multi-disciplinary approach, stating that “multidisciplinary thinking marshals the perspectives and analysis of many fields to understand complex, dynamic systems out of the rec-

¹ For brief accounts of other expressions of this approach see the biographies of Hulda Niebuhr, Nelle Morton, and other significant mid-twentieth century religious educators in Barbara Anne Keel-ey’s *Faith of our Foremothers* (1987).
ognition that no single frame or perspective can adequately understand everything going on in such systems” (Osmer 2005, 60–61).

In contrast to approaches of the first type, approaches of the second type have a heightened concern for religious education as a multimodal and multi-faceted mode of inquiry; they are less concerned with defining religious education as a distinct and historically continuous field of academic and pastoral inquiry that can be distinguished from other fields, such as pastoral care and counseling, pastoral leadership, and ethics, by an intentional, interdisciplinary focus on human religiousness and human learning. For instance, Osmer’s primary focus is on using multiple lenses of analysis to explore “Christian praxis in particular social contexts.” (Osmer 2005, xiv) Then, he draws insight from educational and religious educational as well as other modes of analysis to discuss ways of refashioning the teaching ministry of Christian congregations in these contexts. According to Osmer, after using multiple modes of analysis to understand the dynamics of life in specific life contexts, practical theologians can discuss the goals of the teaching ministry of congregations in those contexts in terms of handing on the teachings of Scripture and tradition, providing moral formation, and equipping Christians to discern the Spirit’s guidance in their lives (Osmer 2005, 54–55). Osmer envisioned efforts to realize the goals of the teaching ministry of congregations being animated by a willingness and desire to participate in the theo-drama of the continual unfolding of God’s actions through the church (Osmer 2005, 203–236).

Another example of a multimodal and multi-faceted, type two approach is found in Religious Educators are the Future by Dori Baker and Patrick B. Reyes. They highlight the work of religious educators who are “re-purposing their religious traditions” to address pressing “matters of human existence” by combing an educational perspective with other modes of analysis in hybrid perspectives (Baker and Reyes 2020, 1). According to Baker and Reyes, “[r]eligious educators heal the world.” They “tether religious education to matters of human existence,” as they consider issues “from climate change to mass incarceration, from racism to international immigration” (Baker and Reyes 2020, 1). As envisioned by Baker and Reyes, religious education encompasses “faith leaders” ministering in the “streets” and “educators and activities” who address a wide range of issues and needs in a vast array of contexts in ways that form and educate people to view their lives from a faith perspective (Baker and Reyes 2020, 1). Additionally, Baker’s and Reyes’s approach could be delineated further as a distinctive subcategory of type two approach in that it sustains the liberationist orientation advanced by the previous generation (Stokes 1982; Freire 2018) and stands alongside more recent works by Anne Streaty Wimberly (2005), Allen Moore (1988), Yolanda Smith (2004), Daniel Schipani (1988), and Evelyn Parker (2017). In their focus on pressing human needs, these theorists show how the spirit of the humanitarian reform campaign of the early twentieth century and the theology of the Social Gospel continue to inform the ongoing development of the religious education movement.
The third and least common type of contemporary approaches to religious education envisions religious education as an educational field of inquiry and practice, and calls religious educators to resist or reframe the turn to theology in religious education. One expression of a type three approach is found in the work of James Michael Lee, who first presented the approach in fully developed form in *The Shape of Religious Instruction* (1971). Lee argued that religious instruction, like all other modes of education, needs to be based on scientific studies of teaching and learning. He contended that when theology trumps educational science, religious education too often becomes a form of religious imperialism or religious indoctrination. Like Coe and other early twentieth century religious educators, James Michael Lee thought religious educators need to distance themselves from the field of theology if they want to teach people to reflect critically on their theological convictions and those of their religious community.

The third type also includes the approaches developed by those whom Kieran Scott has labeled “reconceptualist” religious educators, a group which includes, most notably, Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran (Scott 1984, 333–337; see also Harris and Moran 1998). Based on the claim that the complex and polyvalent religious experiences of persons and groups have not and can never be explored fully in any theological system, the reconceptualists reject Miller’s contention that theology is the key to religious education. Instead, they call on religious educators to develop an educational language for naming, reflecting on, and learning from religious experience. In *Teaching and Religious Imagination* (1987), Maria Harris offered one model for how this can be done. She discussed the connection between religious experiences and the imagination and uses the language of teaching to show how religious educators can guide people to reflect on and learn from imaginative experiences in ways that can enable them to become more aware of the religious dimensions of life.

Like Coe and other first-generation religious education theorists, the reconceptualists call religious educators to step back from their particular theological commitments and those of their religious communities. However, as Moran contends, they do not aspire as Coe did to view religion from a scientific, objective, and totally disinterested perspective. Rather, Moran argued that religious education is “neither proselytization nor antiseptic observation” (Moran in Westerhoff 1978, 237). Religious educators should, according to Moran, begin with a deep interest in religious knowing, that is, in exploring various ways people learn about religion and learn to be religious throughout the life cycle (what Moran calls lifelong learning) and in all aspects of life, including family life, work, leisure or recreation, as well as in education that takes place in schools (what Moran calls life-wide education) (Moran 2016, 214–231).

In conclusion, in *Who Are We?* Westerhoff suggested that education is valued because it “involves knowing and understanding in depth and breath.” He then claimed that “the religious is concerned with the depth dimension of life,” and that all education is religious insofar as it deals with this depth dimension, and especially with
issues of “goodness, truth, and beauty.” Westerhoff also noted that a concern for balancing educational and religious outlooks has been central to the religious education movement since its founding (Westerhoff 1978, 264). The three types of contemporary approaches to religious education that we have described continue the effort to balance concerns for education and the religious. However, each type envisions this balancing in a different way. What we have described as type one contemporary approaches envision forming and educating religiously as a process, essentially, of theological education, with religious educators beginning with clearly discernible interests in one or more aspects of education in faith, which they approach from a theological perspective that is developed through an alignment with the subfield of practical theology. Type two contemporary approaches are grounded in the efforts of those whose primary academic affiliation is with the field of practical theology, and who as practical theologians, and in some instance also as liberation theologians, address issues of educating in faith. They combine an effort to develop a theological understanding of the depth or religious dimension of life in particular personal and social contexts with a concern for constructing multi-disciplinary approaches for educating for deep religious understanding and religious praxis in these contexts. Type three approaches begin with the premise that the depth / religious dimension of life is dynamic, complex, and polyvalent and can be known most fully through an intentional educational process.

As stated earlier, while a professional society like the Religious Education Association aspires in its aims to be international and interreligious, many of its membership are scholars of Christian religious education. Thus, while they may be scholars who adhere to approaches of all three types proffered above, and while there is a continuum of positions demarking the preferential options for the religious/theological versus educational concerns, there is a shared assumption that the foundation of Christian religious educational work is a commitment to understanding the depth dimension of life in the light of the saving and liberating life of Jesus the Christ. Religious education theorists of other faith traditions ground their work in other worldviews and belief systems (e.g., Judaism, Islam, Buddhism). Part of the richness of religious education is that it provides a forum for people of differing religious traditions to discuss the intersection of education and religious sensibilities.

We propose that the field of religious education be envisioned as a verdant garden dotted with fruit of many kinds and colors. There are differing religious educational needs in the diverse life contexts of our contemporary world, and we suggest that with its rich variety of nourishing fruit, the field of religious education has much to offer those who can navigate the pathways of its garden. We also propose that religious education scholars seek a fuller sense of the history of the religious education movement and explore more fully the strengths and limitations of various ways of providing religious formation and education so that they can guide people through the religious education garden. The perceived identity crisis in the field of religious education festered because religious educators too often do not have a clear enough sense of how the distinctive identity of the field has developed over the course of the
past nearly 120 years. Additionally, developments in the field of religious education over the past seventy plus years suggest that religious education may be best situated as a theological discipline, a generative co-conspirator with practical theology. However, an understanding of the history of the field also suggests that religious educators should include in their approaches to religious formation and education an intentional, educational concern for teaching people to reflect critically on the religious dimensions of life and on their theological convictions and those of their religious community. At the same time, this history suggests that it is not easy to bring together a theological (theo-centric) perspective and an educational concern for human religious development and liberation. While religious education may find a home within theology, religious educators – at least those who have an expansive sense of the religious dimensions of personal and social life – may never be fully at home there. And it may not be such a terrible plight.

Finally, we have discussed the religious education movement that began in the United States in 1903. From its start, this movement has sought to expand and become ecumenically Christian, inter-religious and international, and since the latter part of the twentieth century the movement has connected with traditions and contemporary efforts to educate religiously in various faith traditions and contexts throughout the world. Today, the Christian religious education garden discussed in this essay is ever more verdant within the biodiversity of multifaith and interfaith expressions of religious formation and education. It is also ever strengthened by better attunement to how liberationist religious education advances both theological and ontological freedom for human societies and the created world. If we could unleash our imagination and explore the varied pathways through the contemporary religious education gardens, we would have at our disposal rich resources for faith formation and education.

Bibliography


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