

## School and religion as a mirror of state and religion? – Bangladesh, England, Israel and Vietnam

### Introduction and indications that school and religion might reflect state and religion

The stimulus for this chapter was an insight about religion in schools in England turned hunch about school-religion relationships in other national contexts. The insight concerns my home and professional context of England, where I taught Religious Education to secondary school students (between 11 - 18 years old) for 10 years, and subsequently took on a role in higher education, specialising in secondary school Religious Education. Over a decade later I continue to hold the latter role. Once I had come up from my immersion in the school Religious Education classroom to teach and research *about it*, as well as about other aspects of religion and schools, I began to see religion in schools in England from a different perspective. I began to understand that the extent to which one understands the relationship between school and religion (including what happens in the Religious Education classroom) in England depends upon the extent to which one understands the relationship between state and religion in England. As Fraser elaborates in chapter 21 of this handbook, such an understanding necessarily incorporates history and legislation. For example, the legal right of parents/carers to withdraw their children from school worship and Religious Education lessons cannot be understood without understanding concerns over “one-school areas” in England in the 1800s. More on this later.

Despite my specialism and experience, it took a set of visits to schools in other countries to “breach [my] naivete” (Taylor 2007, 13). The visits were part of the Erasmus+ Religious Education and Diversity (READY) project (<http://www.readyproject.eu>). Following Taylor, prior to these visits I understood some of the different relationships between school and religion, and between state and religion, in *theory*. The visits were in part intended to offer lived experience of school-religion relationships in the project countries (Austria, England, Germany, Scotland and Sweden). They were experienced alongside colleagues with the specialisms and experience that come from living and working within a country context. A key element in our pedagogical model was our conversation on the way to and from schools and teacher education university departments. Although I cannot recall all the details of the conversation, I remember I was waiting for a train to visit a school in Vienna when I had the thought that what we are looking at when we look at the place of religion in schools is the relationship between religion and state on a micro level. Another way of expressing this is that school-religion relationships reflect state-religion relationships – hence the titular question. This insight seemed to ring true in all five of the project countries, where previous or current state-religion relationships influence, for example: the scheduling of the school day, week and year; whether schools are required to make provision for worship; whether religion is taught about in schools, who teaches about it and what (or who) gives them the authority to do so? In this chapter, I ask whether state-religion relationships similarly influence the place of religion in schools in a more diverse set of countries, namely in Bangladesh, England, Israel and Vietnam. The term ‘state’ can be used in a range of ways, so a note on how it is used here is worthwhile. In this chapter ‘state’ is used generically to refer to a body which has legislative authority over a jurisdiction, including schools. Generally, I use ‘state’ synonymously with ‘country’. In the USA, for example, I refer to the Federal

Government as the country state, and clarify where I am instead referring to individual states.

Neither myself nor my READY project colleagues became “natives” of the contexts we visited but we saw and understood the differences about the place of religion in schools more clearly because of the expertly guided visits. For my part (because I cannot speak for others on this), I became increasingly (and increasingly uncomfortably) aware that my longstanding “beliefs [about the appropriate or ‘normal’ place of religion in schools were] held within a context or framework of the taken-for-granted” (Taylor 2007, 13). Taylor likens this realisation to catching a bug:

But now perhaps I have caught the bug, and I can no longer be naïvely into my research, but now take account of what I have been leaning on, perhaps entertain the possibility that it might be wrong. This breach of naïveté is often the path to fuller understanding... You might be just operating in a framework in which all moves would be in one of the cardinal directions or up or down; but in order to function in a spaceship, even to conceive one, you have to see how relative and constrained this framework is.

(Taylor 2007, 13)

Some years on from having “caught the bug”, I take issue with Taylor’s assertion that “I can no longer be naïvely into my research”. Although there might be a niggling discomfort in the knowledge that I would be (albeit inauthentically) falling back into old assumptions about the way the world is and should be, it would for the most part be easy and comfortable to fall back onto “what I have been leaning on”. It takes effort and can be uncomfortable to stay on “the path to fuller understanding”.

As with my fellow authors of this handbook, I had to select countries to focus on. One criterion for selecting countries was obvious – to contribute to the attempt to produce a truly global scan, I needed to include countries from the Global North and Global South. Given my knowledge, expertise and lived experience relating to school, religion and state, England was an obvious first choice. Then I simply had to choose from the rest of the world. The literature seemed to offer a straightforward way of selecting countries – step 1: pick a taxonomy of state-religion relationships; step 2: use this taxonomy to identify countries. I offer a brief account of some contrasting taxonomies. I then attend to state-religion and school-religion relationships in each country. This is inevitably partial and the distinctions between countries are such that straightforward comparison is not entirely possible. What I have been able to find out and say about each country is limited to what is available in English. I have selected the details, examples and vignettes that follow with the intention of characterising state-religion and school-religion relationships in each country. It is certainly the case that a different author writing about the same countries would make some different selections. That said the characterisations presented here chime with those presented elsewhere in the literature.

I follow the country account by returning to state-religion taxonomies to critically reflect upon their usefulness. For the purposes of this chapter, a taxonomy's usefulness is dependent upon the extent to which the following questions can be answered positively:

- Can the taxonomy be applied to a diverse range of countries relatively easily, that is, without requiring caveats to the extent it becomes meaningless?
- Could the taxonomy serve as a reliable guide to anticipation (Uhrmacher 1993)? That is, if a layperson were to visit a country for the first time, would the categorisation of that country according to the taxonomy support their orientation?
- Could the taxonomy serve as a reliable guide to anticipation for visits to the schools of a particular state?

Before offering some closing words, the threads of this chapter are brought together to answer the question of how far state-religion relationships are reflected in school-religion relationships.

### Taxonomies of state, in brief

There are a range of taxonomies and they have been produced from within a range of disciplines for a range of distinct purposes. As I considered which taxonomies might meet the criteria of usefulness for the purposes of this chapter, it quickly became clear that some could be immediately ruled out. For example, Ahmed (2017) deliberately excludes atheist states and theocracies from his taxonomy on the basis that neither "provide for some autonomy and pluralism in matters of religion" (Ahmed 2017, 7). This may suit Ahmed's purposes, but it is insufficiently comprehensive to apply to a diverse range of countries. Conversely, the taxonomies of Cliteur and Ellian (2020), Mazie (2006), and the Pew Research Center (2017) *can* be applied to a range of countries. I will say a few words on them here, before critically reflecting upon their usefulness later in the chapter.

Cliteur and Ellian (2020) state:

... every country can choose from these five options to organize its relationship with religion... (i) the atheist state; (ii) the theocratic state; (iii) the state with an official state Church [sic]; (iv) the multiculturalist state, and (v) the agnostic state.  
(Cliteur and Ellian 2020, 104)

Throughout the paper, they identify the agnostic state as synonymous with the secular state. The notion that a country can *choose* to organise its relationship with religion in a particular way is overly simplistic, and as such erroneous. Nevertheless, the clarity of the title of each model and the seeming ease of distinguishing between them qualified Cliteur and Ellian's taxonomy as a viable contender for meeting one criterion of usefulness - the criterion of easy application to range of countries with minimal need for caveats.

Cliteur and Ellian's assertion that "Marx's atheism became the basis of a *state doctrine*" (2020, 106) implicitly asserts the synonymy of 'atheist' and 'communist' when it comes to states. Their identification of the former Soviet Union and former communist regime of Albania as examples of atheist states supports this. The exclusion of current atheist states in the examples offered by Cliteur and Ellian is curious and potentially misleading, offering the impression that the atheist state is consigned to history. Whereas Vietnam, one of our countries in focus, currently identifies as atheist and communist.

Pew Research Center, identify four categories of state-religion relations, with Vietnam being explicitly categorised as the last of:

- **States with an official religion** confer official status on a particular religion in their constitution or basic law...
- **States with a preferred or favored religion** have government policies or actions that clearly favor one (or in some cases, more than one) religion over others...
- **States with no official or preferred religion** seek to avoid giving tangible benefits to one religious group over others...
- **States with a hostile relationship toward religion** exert a very high level of control over religious institutions in their countries or actively take a combative position toward religion in general.

(Pew Research Center 2017, 5)

My initial assessment is that, despite offering one less category, the Pew Research Center offers basic and clear descriptions of relationships between religion and state which seem to distinguish clearly between types of relationship and seem easily accessible and applicable. This compares to Cliteur and Ellian's (2020) offering of 'multiculturalist', for example, which unlike the Pew categories requires further explanation. We have already seen Cliteur and Ellian's erroneous use of 'church'. Mazie (2006) does the same. Nevertheless, his taxonomy constitutes an alternative worthy of consideration:

- (1) Separation of church [sic] and state (unaffiliated/highly tolerant)
  - (2) Institutionalised religious pluralism (loosely affiliated/tolerant)
  - (3) Anti-religious (unaffiliated/intolerant)
  - (4) Theocratic (strongly affiliated/intolerant)
  - (5) Established religion (affiliated/tolerant)
- (Mazie 2006, 6)

Having mapped the previous two taxonomies onto Vietnam relatively easily, it is worth noting that cases could be made to identify Vietnam with any of the first three of Mazie's models. This is discussed in the section on Vietnam.

Later in the chapter I offer a critical consideration of the taxonomies introduced here. In doing so, I centre on the extent to which each taxonomy meets the criteria of usefulness articulated in this chapter's introduction. The least that can be said in favour of these taxonomies is that they helped me select the divergent countries of Bangladesh, Israel and

Vietnam. I shall attend to each of these in turn following a consideration of how far the place of religion in the schools of England reflects the country's relationship between state and religion.

### The case of England

I was born, grew up and went to school in England, and have more than two decades of experience working in the education sector. I present the case of England first to "take account of what I have been leaning on" (Taylor 2007, 13), of what framework I have been operating in.

England, along with Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, is part of the United Kingdom. Although the United Kingdom is an independent sovereign state, the four countries have varying levels of autonomy. As such, a focus on the relationships between state, religion and schools in England does not constitute a focus on said relationships across the UK. This is worth saying, firstly, as a corrective to England being too often erroneously presented as synonymous with Britain or the UK. Secondly, to acknowledge important distinctions between countries. That said the four constituent parts of the UK are often grouped together appropriately. Whether or not the Pew Research Center's (2017) identification of the UK as a single entity is appropriate is debatable outside of the scope of this chapter. In any case, it is of relevance to our discussion here to note that the UK as a whole is among "just 13 countries (including nine European nations) [to] designate Christianity or a particular Christian denomination as their state religion" (Pew Research Center 2017, 3). For the Pew Research Center, England (as part of the UK) is a "state with an official religion". England readily fits Cliteur and Ellian's "state with an official state Church" (2020, 104), although the authors do not explicitly apply this category to England. England also fits Mazie's "established religion (affiliated/tolerant)" (2006, 6), and Mazie explicitly identifies the country as doing so. Mazie points out that "many states with established churches protect the rights of religious minorities to a significant degree, often as strongly as states in the separation or institutionalised religious pluralism models" (2006, 7). England is a case in point. However, Christianity and in particular (unsurprisingly given its title) the Church of England is certainly privileged in relation to other religions. The Church of England is the parent Church of the worldwide Anglican communion.

The sense in which the Church of England is the official state religion England is bound with the country's monarchy. The Monarch is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England and a member of the Church of Scotland. The Anglican Church became disestablished from Ireland (in 1871) and Wales (in 1920) due to religious and political disagreements. The Prime Minister is responsible for advising the Monarch on Church of England appointments, Anglican Bishops hold seats in the House of Lords (a chamber of the UK parliament), and changes in Church laws require approval from parliament (Torrance 2022). In the past the head of state and the head of the Church of England were one and the same, and there were financial advantages for the state church. Now neither of these are the case – "not since the first half of the 19th century has the Church of England received any grant not equally available to other denominations" (Torrance 2022, 6).

Since 1688, the Monarch commits to being “Defender of *the* faith” – that is the Anglican faith. In 2022, the heir to the throne is Prince Charles, who has committed to being “Defender of faith”. The Constitution Unit of UCL (University College London) clarify the significance of this:

In practice, religion is protected by laws made by parliament or as a result of international agreements like the European Convention on Human Rights. But drawing attention to the need for protection in this and other ways is how the sovereign can reinforce society's support for the principle of religious freedom. (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research-areas/monarchy-church-and-state/accession-and-coronation/planning-next-accession-and#Q15>)

It is worth noting the likelihood of the public expecting this kind of support for such commonly held values as religious freedom. This is particularly where the Monarch is associated with the Church, as articulated by Grace Davie in her account of “vicarious religion”:

... the projections we place on the royal family, whose roles are all the more ambiguous when the monarch is also the head of the church. We love royal weddings, but we feel somewhat ambivalent about royal divorces. We are sorry when they happen because this is a model that we wish to have upheld. Even if most people no longer subscribe to the conventional model of family life, it's a good thing if somebody does — on our behalf. That's what I mean by vicarious. (Davie 2005) - <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2005/12/05/believing-without-belonging-just-how-secular-is-europe/>

Despite the decline in religiosity in England, the non-Church-going public generally have high expectations of the Church of England and care deeply about the moral positions the Church takes. Again, Davie articulates this well:

... churches offer space for vicarious debate of unresolved issues in modern societies. This is obviously directed at the debate about homosexuality. I'm not convinced that the society in which I live is clear about homosexuality and the church is not. This is a confused church in a confused society. But I find it very hard to understand why the secular press should pay so much attention to senior appointments in the Anglican Church at home and abroad if this is simply a marginal institution that is no longer important. If it really is a marginal institution in our society, then who cares who does what? But we do seem to care. ... there's an important ambiguity here. (Davie 2005) - <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2005/12/05/believing-without-belonging-just-how-secular-is-europe/>

In the work of Grace Davie, a stated focus on Britain is not erroneous - it encapsulates the four nations. Davie argues that religion in Britain is paradoxical (Davie 2015, Davie 2017). In *Religion in Public Life: Levelling the Ground*, she summarises some of the factors “shaping

the religious life of Britain, which not only change and adapt over time, but push and pull in different directions” (Davie 2017, 15-16). One of these is obvious when looking at the schools of England. We could appropriately add “and State” to the end of the first sentence which articulates one of Davie’s shaping factors:

The role of the historic churches in forming British and indeed European culture. This is easily illustrated in the sense that the Christian tradition has had an enduring effect on time (calendars, seasons, festivals, holidays, weeks and weekends) and space (the parish system and the dominance of Christian buildings)...  
(Davie 2017, 16)

The holidays of the vast majority of educational institutions in England, from nurseries to universities are scheduled around the major Christian festivals. It is common for educational establishments to refer to ‘Christmas’ and ‘Easter’ holidays. We have not (yet?) moved away from these religious designations, unlike countries such as the USA, where most schools have ‘Winter break’ (always at Christmas) and ‘Spring break’ (not necessarily coinciding with Easter). As for other annual breaks in England, it is not unusual for the summer mid-term break to be designated as ‘Whitsun’ - this school holiday is scheduled around this Christian festival which marks the day of the Pentecost. Some universities and privately funded schools even refer to ‘Michaelmas’ and ‘Lent’ terms. The scheduling of the educational year is, by design, hugely advantageous to practising Christians. But not only Christians. A YouGov poll published in 2020, reports that 93% of 1,824 respondents in England celebrate Christmas. The same poll reports that 54% of respondents indicate they “do not regard [themselves] as belonging to any particular religion”. This “enduring effect” of the Christian tradition shows no sign of waning – as a confirmed agnostic who gets out the decorations and puts up the tree a little earlier than is reasonable each year, I can attest to this.

In terms of space, the number of schools buildings in England which are visibly Christian is notable. This is particularly the case for primary schools (for pupils aged 5 – 11). In England, the vast majority of “schools of a religious character” are primary schools and are of Christian character. This is symptomatic of the enduring effect of the role of the historic churches in forming the school system in England, and a legacy of the negotiations between religion and state which began when the government of England finally took an interest in, and some responsibility for, providing school education for all. At this point, it is worth noting that the focus in this section is confined to state-maintained, or state-funded, schools, which make up 22,060 (approximately 90%) of the 24,454 schools in England in 2022 (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics#dataBlock-3f19bbe5-d552-47ff-9eae-8839f9fb3cd6-charts>).

The churches have been providing school education (initially to a few) in England, since the Middle Ages. By the time the State took an interest, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christian societies dominated elementary school education. The *British and Foreign School Society for the Education of the Labouring and Manufacturing Classes of Society of Every Religious Persuasion*, founded in 1808, represented dissenting congregations and some liberal Anglicans. The *National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church* was established in 1811 by the Church of England. In order to attend

*National Society* schools, pupils had to attend the parish church. The National Society was wealthier so built more schools, and by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of schools were Anglican. In 1833 the government contributed £20,000 to the cost of building schools attached to the societies. By working with the societies in this way, and making daily Bible reading a condition of receiving funding, the state was insisting on the union of secular and religious education. Following mass immigration from Ireland *The Catholic Poor School* society was established in 1847 to enable receipt of government grants. By 1850 the society had built approximately 500 schools. Nevertheless, the *National Society* remained dominant, leading to the problem of one school areas – if an area only had one school it was most likely to be Anglican, leaving non-Anglican families to choose between an Anglican education or no education. To resolve this problem, in 1850 the government introduced the ‘conscience clause’. This clause enabled the parents of other creeds to send their children to school at the same time as securing exemption from religious instruction and worship. In over 170 years later schools have changed enormously. The ‘conscience clause’ has remained a constant for both school worship and classroom religious education.

That most of England’s schools of religious character are primary schools (for ages 5-11) is a legacy of the dual system of education established by Forster’s 1870 Education Act. The act made school education compulsory for 5-10 year olds. It also allowed churches who met certain conditions to continue to provide schools. The government filled any remaining gaps in provision with Board Schools. As the school leaving age gradually rose with subsequent education acts, the government established a greater number of schools than churches could – thus the scales of the schools of religious character have become increasingly heavier on the side of primary schools.

In 2019, there were 6,802 state-funded schools of a religious character in England – 34% of state-funded mainstream schools. Primary schools accounted for 6,179 of state-funded schools, or 37% of state-funded primaries. By contrast, the 623 secondary schools of a religious character amounted to 18% of state-funded mainstream secondaries. In 2019, 26% of all primary schools in England were Anglican; 9% of all secondaries were Catholic. Less than 1% of all state-funded mainstream schools were non-Christian faiths schools (<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06972/SN06972.pdf>). Maintained schools of a religious character in England include, in order of most numerous first, Christian (mostly Church of England then Catholic) schools, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and Seventh Day Adventist.

Collective Worship, Religious Education and provision for Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development (SMSCD) are required in state-maintained schools in England – whether they are common schools or of a religious character. SMSCD is certainly interpreted as being religious in schools of a religious character, and the spiritual aspect is sometimes interpreted in a religious way in common schools. Further discussion on this would be outside of the scope of this chapter but it is worth noting the requirement. The nature of Collective Worship and Religious Education is determined by the kind of school, as is who takes responsibility for Religious Education and Collective Worship.

If we were painting Religious Education in England with a broad brush, it would be appropriate to describe it as having moved from religious (Christian) instruction to a non-



confessional, multi-faith approach. In their 2018 report, the *Commission on Religious Education's* recommend that the subject title be changed to 'Religion and Worldviews to reflect its broadening remit (Commission on Religious Education, 2018).

Religious Education teachers in state-maintained common schools in England do not require approval from a religious body. Nevertheless, might we assume that those opting to pursue a career in Religious Education are likely to be religious themselves? Research published by Nixon, Smith and Fraser-Pearce (2021) demonstrates that such an assumption would be wrongheaded. Survey responses from 238 secondary Religious Education teachers (teachers of 11-18 year olds) in England indicate that nearly half (110 respondents, or 47.6%) of secondary Religious Education teachers in England have no religion. The last published census of England and Wales (2011)<sup>1</sup>, 25% of those responding to the question 'What is your religion?' selected 'No religion'. Secondary Religious Education teachers in England are less likely to be religious than members of the wider population.

Despite this finding and over two decades of working in Religious Education in England, I still find myself anxious about people's assumptions when I reveal my identity as a Religious Education specialist. Responses are more often than not awkward, seemingly pregnant with assumptions (and often accompanied by suspicion) about who I am and what my intentions might be. Ironic, given that one of my main drivers as an RE teacher was to enable learners to think for themselves about religion and make their own decisions. I am not alone in this. Copley (1997), Sikes and Everington (2001) and Wright (1993) and Copley (1997) note the suspicion and apprehension with which RE teachers can be viewed with. As Nixon, Smith and Fraser-Pearce observe: "assumptions and projections of religiosity are often normative for those teaching the subject" (2021, 3). Popular views matter, and are entangled with what Nixon, Smith and Fraser-Pearce suggest are state imposed impediments to Religious Education's full establishment (and recognition) as "an educational exploration of religious traditions and wisdom traditions" (2021, 18):

... certain historical statutes ... , despite their origins in a more Christian UK, remain influential. The common conflation of Religious Education and Collective Worship ... and the persistence of the parental right of conscientious withdrawal continue to preserve the ideas that RE is confessional and, linked to this, that it is objectionable. (Nixon, Smith and Fraser-Pearce, 2021, 18).

### The case of Vietnam

Vietnam was selected as it seemed a good fit for Cliteur and Ellian's (2020) atheist state. Earlier, I note that they at least implicitly identify atheism with communism in this model. Vietnam identifies as both an atheist and a communist state. According to Mazie's typology (2006), an atheist state could fit somewhere within these three models:

#### (1) Separation of church and state (unaffiliated/highly tolerant)

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, the 2021 census data is still to be published. The census which covers England has England and Wales in its jurisdiction. The population of Wales is relatively small – 3,063,000 in 2011. The census data can be considered representative of England.

- (2) institutionalised religious pluralism (loosely affiliated/tolerant)
  - (3) anti-religious (unaffiliated/intolerant)
- (Mazie 2006, 6)

The answer to the question of which model Vietnam fits would depend upon who one asks. An official governmental response could reasonably make the case for model one – indeed, official documents present an unaffiliated and highly tolerant state, with Article 24 of the Constitution stating:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of belief and religion, and has the right to follow any religion or to follow no religion. All religions are equal before law.
2. The State shall respect and protect the freedom of belief and religion.
3. No one may violate the freedom of belief and religion, nor may anyone take advantage of a belief or religion in order to violate the law.

(<https://vietnamlawmagazine.vn/the-2013-constitution-of-the-socialist-republic-of-vietnam-4847.html>)

For adherents of those 38 religious organisations (from within 16 religious traditions) recognised by the Government, we might assume the state is likely experienced as tolerant. That religions are required to register, *and* that not all applications are approved, is enough to downgrade the state from ‘highly tolerant’ to ‘tolerant’. It is worth noting that religion is not alone in requiring state approval – much in Vietnam is tightly regulated, with the media being one of the most tightly regulated in the world. Vietnam is unlikely to be defined by anyone as even loosely affiliated, which in part rules out the second of Mazie’s models listed in this section. In advance of considering the treatment and experiences of members of the 38 state recognised religions, we are left with a combination of Mazie’s models and can describe Vietnam as an ‘unaffiliated state which is selectively tolerant or intolerant’. However, following a far more extensive examination of relevant documentation than the one I conducted for this chapter, the Pew Research Center (2017) explicitly identifies Vietnam amongst “states with a hostile relationship toward religion”, along with 9 other of the 199 countries/territories analysed - Azerbaijan, China, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Korea, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. According to Human Rights Watch:

While authorities allow many government-affiliated churches and pagodas to hold worship services, they ban religious activities that they arbitrarily deem to be contrary to the “national interest,” “public order,” or “national unity,” including many ordinary types of religious functions. Police monitor, harass, and sometimes violently crack down on religious groups operating outside government-controlled institutions. Unrecognized religious groups, including Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Christian, and Buddhist groups, face constant surveillance, harassment, and intimidation. Followers of independent religious group are subject to public criticism, forced renunciation of faith, detention, interrogation, torture, and imprisonment.

(<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/vietnam>)

For the last century Vietnam has variously been independent, colonised, divided and at war, until the North Vietnamese victory in 1975 and the reunification of the country under the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) in 1976. The struggle for independence has been long. Bouquet explains what he describes as a more positive relationship with *some* religions in terms sustaining and “building the fatherland” (2010). He reports that atheism is no longer a requirement for membership of the CPV and that “the party even opens its doors to religious members” (Bouquet 2010, 101). Where a religion’s interests and priorities cohere with those of the CPV, the state has moved towards working with that religion. Bouquet argues that the pressure on the CPV to cooperate with some religions is external (International) and internal (domestic). In terms of the domestic, since the 1980s Vietnam has experienced the mass (re)emergence of religious movements (Hoang 2017). Bouquet considers the CPV’s options for response:

... the development of a vigorous religious revival may have been difficult to repress, as it was rather general and as it mainly stemmed from individuals or families, not from organized structures which could have been manipulated by hostile forces.

I argue this was a choice of the party-state; rather than facing a costly, ideological fight against a popular religious revival, it opted for a softer approach on religious issues. More than the ideological shift of 1990, the deepening interest showed by authorities in religious issues, and even more the recent co-options of religious expressions by the state, show that the adoption of a strictly coercive, confrontational approach is mor and more unlikely, and that using religious trends instead of curbing them is preferable, at least as long as such a use does not lead to a challenge of the party-state’s leadership.

(Bouquet 2010, 104)

Thi Minh Ngoc’s (2013) account supports this interpretation: “As religions grow, the Vietnamese government and the Communist Party also amend their policies, creating a more favourable environment for religious development” (2013, 391). In terms of the external pressure, Vietnam’s place on the world stage has changed since the collapse of European socialism. As such, Bouquet argues, to improve international relations Vietnam has had to soften their treatment of and stance on religion. Reports such as that from the Human Rights Watch cited above contribute to the external pressure.

As we turn to look at schools in Vietnam, it seems that performance on international pupil assessments is likely to enhance the country’s image internationally. Vietnam made international headlines with PISA scores which exceeded the USA and the UK (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-33047924>). London (2021) puts the success of Vietnam’s educational programme in part down to the country’s long struggle for independence. Vietnam has undergone several waves of education reform since its 5% literacy rate under French rule (Han, Khaing and Farrar 2022). By 2010, according to state accounts, universal primary and lower secondary education was achieved. Much had been achieved in advance of the passing of Resolution 29, referred to by Han, Khaing and Farrar as “one of the most significant pieces of education legislature in the country’s history” (2022, 100):

Resolution 29 was guided by the principle that investments in education result in long-term investments in economic development, and thus put Vietnam's education system at the top of socioeconomic development plans. Beginning in 2013, national and local governments unrolled a series of reforms based around a small number of linked key policy levers: targeted investment, a changed curriculum and pedagogy, and a focus on teacher quality.

(Han, Khaing and Farrar 2022, 100)

According to Han, Khaing and Farrar (2022), Resolution 29 was in part enacted to increase the involvement of the state in education. According to London (2021), education is of central to importance to the Communist Party of Vietnam. The depth of involvement of the State in education, as well as the State's prioritisation of education, is evidenced in that most school principals and teachers are members of the party. Despite its commitment to education, the CPV's budget is too limited to fully fund high quality school education. Hence the policy of 'socialisation':

The concept of 'socialisation' in Vietnam's *Doi Moi* [socioeconomic renovation] ... denotes discourses, policies and practices that help mobilise resources for development activity among a variety of social actors. This mobilisation is considered primarily as a cost-sharing scheme between the state and non-state actors... This cost-sharing takes two forms: co-production and co-payments ... and is justified by an affirmative discursive storyline '*Nhà nước và nhân dân cùng làm*' (the state and people work together).

(Dang 2020, 1174)

I note this to acknowledge the peculiar nature of state schools in Vietnam, where the cost is shared in differing ratios by the state and members of the public, including parents/carers.

According to Thi Minh Ngoc: "religious groups are engaged in preschool education, general education, and vocational training. Religious groups that provide education must do so in compliance with the Education Law" (2013, 392). Thi Minh Ngoc references Article 19 of the Education which she describes as prohibiting evangelisation, religious ceremonies and superstition. Buddhist and Catholic religious organisations run some kindergartens in Vietnam. Thi Ming Ngoc reports that the quality of teacher education is higher for Catholic schools than Buddhist, but that some teachers are untrained. In the Buddhist preschools, the teachers are Buddhist clergy or laypeople; in the Catholic preschools they are "mainly religious sisters [who] consider their work at nursery school a task entrusted to them by their church" (Thi Ming Ngoc 2013, 393). Thi Ming Ngoc reports on her interview with the principal of a Catholic kindergarten:

She said the school was highly regarded among many parents who wanted to send their children to school. Although the school is operated by Catholic nuns, children are admitted regardless of their religious affiliation. The children do not need to pay an admission fee. The nuns working at the kindergarten were trained at teacher training schools of the state and participate annually in the continuing education

program. The curriculum complies with the standard curriculum provided by the Hanoi Department of Education. It does not include doctrinal education in its program. Unlike public schools, however, children have been taught to say grace before having meals.

(Thi Ming Ngoc 2013, 393-4)

Thi Ming Ngoc describes this kindergarten as private, yet with its teacher preparation and curriculum, it is not separate from the state which officially prohibits evangelisation and religious ceremonies. Whilst grace in advance of a meal might not be considered a ceremony or direct evangelisation, teaching children to engage in a religious act does not constitute an atheist or neutral stance on religion. If, as seems to be the case, grace is not accompanied by an explanation of related doctrine, we might describe this as what I have described elsewhere as “weak confessional education”: “strong confessional education is delivered in order to nurture belief in a specific doctrine, whereas weak confessional education is intended to nurture non-specific religious or quasi-religious belief in preference to atheism” (Pearce 2019, 301). In any case, the occurrence of a practice such as grace does not cohere with official state policy.

### The case of Bangladesh

Accepting that Vietnam had a long history in advance of its current state of independence under the Communist Party of Vietnam<sup>2</sup>, Bangladesh is the youngest of the countries considered in this chapter. It was finally founded in 1971, following a nine-month war for independence. Sajjad (2021) describes Bangladesh’s founding as a “violent birth, with some of its roots in the 1947 partition of India”; Islam (2018) refers to a “blood-soaked emergence”. The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (established in 1972) stipulates secularism as a principle of state policy, and commits to freedom of religion as a fundamental right:

Subject to law, public order and morality –

(a) every citizen has the right to profess, practise or propagate any religion;

(b) every religious community or denomination has the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions;

(2) No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or to take part in or to attend any religious ceremony or worship, if that instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own.

(<http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-367.html>)

At the same time it identifies a state religion for Bangladesh:

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<sup>2</sup> The origins of what is now known as Vietnam are debated (Holcombe 2017), but the country in some form certainly dates to Before the Common Era (BCE).

The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions.

This section will consider how far these official proclamations are realised “on the ground”. Bangladesh is of “27 countries (including most in the Middle East-North Africa region) officially enshrining Islam as their state religion” (Pew 2017). On balance, it seems that Cliteur and Ellian’s (2020) model of “the state with an official state Church [sic]” is the best fit for Bangladesh. (The erroneous use of ‘Church’ in a taxonomy offered as a model for global application has already been noted.) Cliteur and Ellian’s taxonomy includes a secular model in which secular often used as synonymous with agnostic. Bangladesh’s identification as having a state religion and as being committed to secularism, along with Cliteur and Ellian’s synonymisation, points to the possibility of a state being both religious and agnostic/secular. These need not be mutually exclusive if a state can itself be religious at the same time as treating citizens equally, and not discriminating between them, in relation to religion (or lack thereof). Madaul Islam suggests this is yet to be realised in Bangladesh which “as a separate state and a pro-secular democratic Muslim majority country, has continued to struggle with finding a balanced approach to secularism” (2018, 20). This deficit of balance raises the question of which takes priority – Islam or secularism. We might read something into where and how the stated identifications of secular and Muslim appear in the constitution. The identification of the state religion as Islam appears early on as Article 2A in its entirety, whereas secularism is identified as one of four fundamental principles in Article 8.1, in part two of the Constitution. If this still appears inconsistent, Chaney and Sahoo’s account of Bangladeshi secularism is instructive: “secularism refers not to the separation of religion and politics, but the peaceful coexistence of diverse religious communities and the exercise of religious freedom” (2020, 193). Moreover, the state’s commitment to equality in and freedom of religion is clearly and consistently articulated.

Unlike present day England, in Bangladesh the state religion enjoys majority adherence. Leaving aside the limits of official census data:

The last official state-wide census revealed that, of Bangladesh’s 152.5 million people, Sunni Muslims constitute 90% of the population and Hindus make up 9.5%. The remainder is predominantly Christian (mostly Roman Catholic) and Theravada-Hinayana Buddhist. Other minorities include, Shia Muslim, Bahais, animists and Ahmadiyya Muslims.  
(Chaney and Sahoo 2020, 194)

According to Sum, Bangladesh “is determined to identify as secular” (2022, 302). This is not the impression given by the imprisonment and bail refusal of a school teacher “for allegedly hurting religious sentiment”. In March 2022, Hriday Chandra Mondal was held in police custody, and twice refused bail, after students complained about him and posted an audio recording of him distinguishing between religion and science on social media. According to the recording, Mondal told his students that “religion is a matter of faith” while “science looks at evidence”. The case was taken up by Amnesty International who report to have

heard the recording, and quote the following excerpt on their website in their call for Mondal's immediate release:

There is no evidence in religion. Religion in the end says God will take care of everything. Religion offers memorized words whereas science shows evidence. (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/bangladesh-schoolteacher-detained-for-discussing-the-difference-between-science-and-religion-must-be-immediately-released/>)

Reactions to the allegations against Mondal were swift:

two days after the recording was made, the school's headteacher told the media that students and other people from the community were demonstrating inside and outside the school, calling for the teacher's punishment. The mob also attacked his house with bricks and sticks, and hurled abuses.

(<https://www.dhakatribune.com/nation/2022/04/13/munshiganj-teacher-hriday-mondal-finally-returns-to-his-school-after-22-days>).

Mondal served 19 days in jail and was acquitted in August 2022. He reports that him and his family continue to receive threats and intimidation, and that he rarely leaves his home around which he now has security cameras installed.

(<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2022/08/17/hriday-mondal-acquitted-of-charges-of-defaming-religion>)

This case points to a mismatch between the officially presented relationship between religion and state and the lived experience of citizens. It also raises some questions:

- Might Mondal's comments have strayed too close to the territory of religious instruction which "relates to a religion other than [his students'] own"? It seems as though his disgruntled students and others may have thought so – presuming they are familiar with this constitutional commitment. However, the authorities cleared Mondal of all charges.
- *If* the state is indeed "determined to identify as secular" (Sum 2022, 302), to what extent is this commitment aligned with that of the populace? Do Mondal's accusers represent more than a noisy minority of citizens? Whilst the case is not isolated, the online news articles I have been able to access in English (mainly in Bangladesh's Dhaka Tribune and Daily Star) are supportive of the teacher's right to freedom of religious expression – this suggests their readerships would be similarly supportive. However, it may be this readership is less representative of the general population than Mondal's accusers – they are two of only 40 English dailies amongst over 1,000 daily newspapers published in Bangladesh, and at least the Tribune is read by young city dwellers. In any case, Mondal's identification as a Hindu is unlikely unrelated to the treatment he has endured in a country in which "violence against religious minorities, especially, Hindu priests, Christians, Buddhists and Ahmadiyahs has increased significantly over the last few years (Chaney and Sahoo 2020, 199)

These are important questions and there is much more to say, but to do so here would be to take us beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead let us hone our focus on the place of religion in schools. School education in the geographic area which is now Bangladesh has experienced seismic shifts. In advance of British colonialism, as part of India, it made education available only to children from the higher castes. There was no state sponsored mass schooling and the majority of children were excluded from formal education (Mousumi and Kusukabe 2021). Mass education in Bengal became a priority for the British colonisers in the mid-1800s – not long after it had become a priority in England. Until the debate was settled (again in the mid-1800s), there was a lack of agreement between Orientalists and Anglicists as to the appropriate nature and purpose of education under British colonisers:

The Orientalists were in favour of nurturing Indian history, languages, religions, and traditions and felt that Indians should be ruled in accordance with their own traditions and culture. The Orientalists supported classical Indian learning. In contrast, the Anglicists challenged this policy as they believed that the English culture was superior to the Indian, and it was their duty to civilize the Indians by introducing Christianity and other English values and traditions. (Mousumi and Kusukabe 2021, 445)

With the end of British rule came the Partition, which broke India into two independent countries of India and Pakistan. What was later to be established as Bangladesh constituted East Pakistan. As with the country as a whole, Islam was the majority religion with Hinduism being the largest minority. At the 'First Education Conference' in 1947, in Karachi, it was decided that "Madrasah education would be brought into the fold of formal school education" (Rahman et al 2010, 118). Rahman et al., present an account of the changing place of religion in education post the 1971 independence of Bangladesh which is worth quoting at length:

Two military regimes i.e. Maj. Gen. Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and Lt. Gen. H.M. Ershad (1982-1990) changed Bangladeshi identity politics from a secular and ethnic "Bengali" identity to State-based and pseudo-Islamic 'Bangladeshi' identity to build political legitimacy and take Bangladesh out of Indian shadow. Education was used as a vehicle for promoting 'Bangladeshi' nationalism. The two regimes made constitutional changes to erase secularism by 'absolute trust and faith in Allah' and Islam as the 'State religion' in 1979 and 1988 respectively. Therefore, during General Ershad's rule and afterwards there has been unplanned mushrooming of Madrasahs/religious schools in Bangladesh. Religious education was used as a tool for attracting votes of religious people and to beat the secular opposition in electoral politics. The Ershad regime made Islamic studies compulsory up to the secondary level... The regime patronised Madrasah education from primary to higher secondary level with government recognition. (Rahman et al., 2010, 120)



Madrasah education was first established under colonial rule in 1867. In 2022, we can distinguish between mainstream, Islamic and English Medium Schools. Primary and secondary mainstream schools are funded by the state, and some financial support is available for Madrasahs. However, as Alam et al., point out, “the major source of Islamic educational financing is from the people at large; small donations, subscriptions, and large philanthropic foundations sustain Islamic education” (Alam et al., 2013). The state funds Religious Education teachers in mainstream schools where Alam et al., suggest students are segregated for Religious Education:

... students belonging to different religious traditions (e.g., Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian) are given the chance to choose their religion-related course of study. In each case of religion study, the course content includes the core principles of the religion and the practical/ ritual aspects of the same. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (N.C.T.B.), on behalf of the state, develops and produces the curriculum, course content, and textbooks for each category of religion (not by denomination); and then the course is offered at the school.  
(Alam et al., 2013, 52)

Presuming students do opt for these Religious Education courses (Alam et al., do not comment on this), what they learn about their own traditions is controlled by the state. Niaz et al., have more to say on the matter of textbooks in Bangladesh in chapter 6 of this handbook.

### The case of Israel

Another relatively young country, Israel was declared as a state on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1948. In the same vein as the Constitution of Bangladesh, the *Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel* proclaims Israel as both a democratic and religious state. Respectively, it commits Israel to:

... ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of conscience, language, education and culture.

... [be]open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles.

... [be] a Jewish State...

In 1992 Israel’s *Basic Laws* established the legal definition of Israel as a “Jewish and democratic state”. A footnote to the Pew Research Center report, which categories Israel as having an official religion (Judaism) reminds us that: “‘Jewish’ could be interpreted in this context as referring to religion, ethnicity or both...”. The note continues: “Israel is coded as having an official religion in part because the Israeli government gives legal authority to the

chief rabbinate and provides special benefits to Judaism, such as support for religious study” (Pew Research Center 2017). Of the 43 countries/territories identified as having an official religion, Israel is the only one identified as Jewish.

The identification of Israel as democratic and religious raises a question articulated by Mazie: “Can religion play a role in the higher law of a liberal state?” (2006, 8). Mazie apparently poses this question following his rejection of his own typology of religion-state relationships for Israel, on the grounds that Israel is too complex to place. We shall leave aside questions arising from Mazie’s apparent presentation of a straw man taxonomy, and what reads as his oversimplification of religion-state relationships in other countries, to focus on the complexities of Israel. Mazie explains:

While it is sometimes hailed as the only democracy in the Middle East, Israel is not a model of liberal separationism (it conceives of itself [as] a Jewish state; allows Orthodox rabbis a monopoly on matters of Jews’ personal status, including marriage and divorce; and harbors an exclusivist immigration policy that favours Jews). But on the other hand, Israel is far from a Jewish theocracy (equal civil and political rights are guaranteed to non-jews; public law is formulated by a democratically elected parliament; and a secular judiciary protective of individual rights interprets that law). Moreover, Israel has inherited from its pre-state, pre-British Mandate days in the Ottoman Empire a system by which various religious communities conduct their own affairs. The Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Druze religious communities in Israel thus maintain separate religious court systems and receive state funding for cultural, educational and religious projects.”

(Mazie 2006, 8)

If there were scope to pursue it in this chapter, I would critically consider Mazie’s apparent assumption that separation is necessary for democracy. For now, it is worth pointing to England as a democratic country with an official state religion.

We have seen the straightforward categorisation of Israel by the Pew Research Center (2017), and the country seems to map easily on to Cliteur and Ellian’s state Church [sic]. Perhaps these work so well as they say so little – were Mazie’s taxonomy to work it might tell us more. In the above quote, Mazie draws upon a range of official accounts to present what he sees as the paradoxical state-religion relationship in Israel. Let us now look to see how far this relationship is reflected in schools, and whether the place of religion in schools sheds any light on state-religion in Israel.

About a decade ago, I was privileged to have the opportunity to visit Arab teacher education institutions in Israel and meet with Arab teacher educators living and working in Israel. My thoughts have returned to this visit, whilst writing this chapter. Leaving aside the memorable quizzing on the nature of my visit by airport security on my arrival, my thoughts have returned to one incident in particular that halted the flow of an otherwise uneventful informal lunchtime conversation. That was the visible shock of one of our hosts at my response to her question of what religion I was. I had thought my response of “I’m not religious” would be innocuous enough but it was obvious it did not easily compute. My

interlocutor seemed incredulous as she asked, “what, you don’t believe in God at all?”, and the difficulty at processing passed (accompanied by some discomfort) to me. My lack of religiosity and agnosticism is pedestrian in England so I was unprepared for this incredulity which, at the time, was unfathomable to me. I now see it as one of the chinks which have contributed to my “breach of naivete” (Taylor 2007). I now understand it as wholly coherent with our hosts’ country context in which almost everyone subscribes to a religion. In a survey of 5,000 Israelis conducted in 2014-2015, just 1% of respondents identified as having ‘no religion’ (Pew Research Centre 2016). We should acknowledge that about half of the 81% of respondents identifying as Jewish describe themselves as secular, and that about a fifth do not believe in God. However, the context is markedly different from England where in the last published census of England and Wales (2011), 25% of those responding to the question ‘What is your religion?’ selected ‘No religion’. Perhaps a greater indication of distinctions between attitudes to religion in Israel and England, is the willingness of more than a few of respondents to the census of England and Wales selecting ‘Other’ to specify their religion as, for example, ‘Jedi’ (176,632) or ‘heavy metal’ (1,893) (The Office for National Statistics 2012).

Israel is a multi-religious country, in which the majority of the population (81%) are Jewish (Katz 2018). The single largest Jewish group is secular Judaism, followed by Jewish traditional and then large minorities of Orthodox (10% of the Israeli population) and Ultra-Orthodox (8%). According to Katz (2018), 14% of the population identify as Muslim, 2% as Christian, 2% as Druze and 1% as no religion. In response to the multi-religious nature of society, the Ministry of Education allows each tradition to establish its own curriculum for the compulsory Religious and Heritage Education. Katz (2018) describes the mandatory nature of the subject as “provocative” – though he does not clarify who it provokes. Presumably it does not provoke political and educational leaders who Katz presents as sharing an instrumental understanding of the purpose of Religious and Heritage Education:

There is a general consensus among political as well as educational leaders that religious and heritage education as well as citizenship education are the main vehicles and platforms for the enhancement of social cohesion in Israel. In addition, there is agreement that religious and heritage education together with citizenship education need to emphasize the notion that Israel is a Jewish and democratic state, and that education must substantially contribute to the narrowing of differences and schisms between the different societal groups in order to facilitate coherence in society as well as the development of intrinsic values that vitally permeate a normative Jewish and democratic state.  
(Katz 2018, 3)

Israel priorities state education in allocating it a sizeable budget “second only to that of the Ministry of Defence” (Katz 2018, 4). State education is well resourced and teacher education is of a high standard. State education is free and compulsory. It is divided into the Jewish and Arab sectors. The Jewish sector includes religious and secular schools. In state religious Jewish schools, confessional education is incorporated into Religious and Heritage Education, which is “designed to intensify Jewish religious belief, tradition, and morality” (Katz 2018, 5).

The state Arab Education sector encompasses Muslim, Christian and Druze sub-sectors. In keeping with many countries, students are segregated for Religious and Heritage Education, in which they study both their own tradition and “common values such as democracy, equality, social harmony, humanism, and universalism that are perceived to contribute to the enhancement of social cohesion” (Katz 2018, 4). Katz points to the discrepancy between the stated government policy of equity in funding to Jewish and Arab sectors:

Although Arab education is financed by the Ministry of Education and the local Arab municipal authorities in line with the same criteria that dictate the budget allotted to Jewish education, benign neglect by successive Israeli governments has produced inequality in allocation of resources between Jewish and Arab schools.  
(Katz 2018, 7)

### On the usefulness of selected state-religion taxonomies

This section considers the usefulness of state-religion taxonomies of Cliteur and Ellian (2020), Mazie (2006) and the Pew Research Center (2017). For the purposes of this chapter, a taxonomy’s usefulness is dependent upon the extent to which the following questions can be answered positively:

- Can the taxonomy be applied to a diverse range of countries relatively easily, that is, without requiring caveats to the extent it becomes meaningless?
- Could the taxonomy serve as a reliable guide to anticipation (Uhrmacher 1993)? That is, if a layperson were to visit a country for the first time, would the categorisation of that country according to the taxonomy support their orientation?
- Could the taxonomy serve as a reliable guide to anticipation for a visit to the schools of a particular state?

The least that can be said in favour of them is they offer us a range of ways of understanding beyond the either-or of separation or integration (Mazie 2006). Though, despite Mazie’s generalisation that “many liberals” only see these two possibilities, it is unlikely many people see it in such simplistic terms.

The taxonomies are restated and then each of the above questions are addressed in turn.

Cliteur and Ellian (2020) identify five models for state-religion relationships:

- (i) the atheist state (which I have argued they use synonymously with communist state)
- (ii) the theocratic state
- (iii) the state with an official state Church [sic]
- (iv) the multiculturalist state
- (v) the agnostic or secular state (which they do not use entirely synonymously)

Mazie similarly offers five models:

- (1) Separation of church [sic] and state (unaffiliated/highly tolerant)
  - (2) Institutionalised religious pluralism (loosely affiliated/tolerant)
  - (3) Anti-religious (unaffiliated/intolerant)
  - (4) Theocratic (strongly affiliated/intolerant)
  - (5) Established religion (affiliated/tolerant)
- (Mazie 2006, 6)

The Pew Research Center categorise state-religion relations into four types:

- **States with an official religion** confer official status on a particular religion in their constitution or basic law...
- **States with a preferred or favored religion** have government policies or actions that clearly favor one (or in some cases, more than one) religion over others...
- **States with no official or preferred religion** seek to avoid giving tangible benefits to one religious group over others...
- **States with a hostile relationship toward religion** exert a very high level of control over religious institutions in their countries or actively take a combative position toward religion in general.

(Pew Research Center 2017, 5)

The three taxonomies considered in this chapter were selected as potentially useful because they *can* be applied to a range of countries, whereas (usually normative) taxonomies such as Ahmeds (2017) exclude some state-religion models from the outset. Each taxonomy can at least be *made* to work. Only that offered by the Pew Research Center (2017) can be straightforwardly applied without amendments or caveats. Cliteur and Ellian (2020), and Mazie (2006) both require 'Church' to be replaced with 'religion' if they are to be applicable worldwide.

The Pew Research Center's taxonomy was found to be the most useful, at least when considering the countries featured in this chapter. This should not be surprising, given the empirical underpinning of the taxonomy, in which data from 199 countries and territories were analysed. However, the data are limited in that they are largely confined to constitutions, laws and *stated* policies and practices/actions. The process of considering how far state-religion relations are reflected in schools has shone a light on the importance of looking at how state-religion relations play out in real life, beyond official representations (rhetoric). As I hope this chapter demonstrates, there are data available which would allow the construction of something nearer to a taxonomy underpinned by a more holistic understanding of state-religion relations.

There is another sense in which the usefulness of the Pew Research Center's taxonomy is unsurprising and that is in the purpose of and approach to establishing their taxonomy. The center does not take a normative position; it is not attempting to make a case for a particular state-religion relationship or to work out which kinds of relationships are "best". Rather, the Pew Research Center derive their taxonomy from their empirical analysis. Moreover, they allocate a category to each of the 199 countries analysed. The advantage of this for readers is the ease and speed with which the taxonomy and its specific allocations of

categories can be critically assessed. There is no need to attempt to apply the taxonomy in advance of critiquing it as the work of application has been done. As such, the Pew Research Center presents a concrete taxonomy in comparison with the more abstract offerings of Mazie (2006) and Cliteur and Ellian (2020).

Even in advance of considering the countries in focus in this chapter, the briefest of considerations of states which currently identify as secular (France, Norway, the USA and Japan, for example), is enough to alert us to the pitfalls of assuming the homogeneity of any of the categories, and to the limits of the taxonomy itself. The Constitution of USA states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...". In 1802, Thomas Jefferson added: "thus building a wall of separation between Church and State". Cliteur and Ellian (2020) would have us categorise the USA as secular, but the closer we look the less satisfactory this categorisation becomes. Since the 1950s, God has featured in the Pledge of Allegiance and is prominent on USA currency. Although God is not mentioned in the Constitution, "God or the divine is mentioned at least once in each of the 50 state constitutions and nearly 200 times overall" (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/17/god-or-the-divine-is-referenced-in-every-state-constitution/>). Although superseded by Supreme Court rulings, seven states bar atheists (as well as ministers and those taking part in duels) from holding office. These bars are unconstitutional but can still hinder atheists from holding office. As recently as 2009, when running for counsel in North Carolina, Democrat Cecil Bothwell, "had to fight critics who claimed he was ineligible on account of his atheism". (<https://theconversation.com/why-it-matters-that-7-states-still-have-bans-on-atheists-holding-office-161069>)

The recent overturning of Roe v. Wade (the federal right to an abortion), by the Supreme Court, presents anyone wanting to argue that there exists "a wall of separation between Church and State" with a challenge. The tightness with which religion and state are woven together is evidenced in Attorney General Landry's formal response which, as I am writing this chapter, is prominently displayed on the Office of Attorney General of Louisiana website. The statement begins: "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice in it and be glad. Today, ... I rejoice with my departed Mom and the unborn children with her in Heaven!" (<http://www.ag.state.la.us/Article/13044>). Landry is not the only public figure on a state wage bill to have referenced religion in their public reactions (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jun/24/rightwing-republicans-conservatives-reaction-abortion-ruling>).

As I have attempted to argue, state-religion relationships are not the only factors which impact school and religion, and the relationships between them. Just as we can distinguish between the state-religion relationships of countries, we can make other distinctions. We have seen that Vietnam and Bangladesh are widely considered to be emerging economies, whereas Israel and England are developed economies.

Do school and religion reflect state and religion?

When looking at religion in schools globally what is being observed can often be described as the relationship between religion and state in microcosm. But not always in obvious ways, and not usually in the ways we might read from official documentation, such as constitutions and education acts. In England, the state stipulates a requirement for schools to hold a daily act of collective worship, which is broadly Christian in nature. What we might expect to see in schools which reflect macro state-religion relations are daily acts of Christian worship. What we actually see is that most common schools (schools not designated as having a religious character) begin the day with a range of group activities which would be better described as a combination of values assemblies, and social, moral and cultural development. Most schools knowingly and intentionally fail to meet this requirement for collective worship (despite it being a focus of government inspections of schools) with no consequence. This tells us that despite its official position the state does not *really* require schools to provide a daily act of collective worship. If it did there would be consequences for schools which failed to do so, just as there are consequences for that which the state genuinely requires from schools – where a school is deemed inadequate and intervention is unlikely to help, the Secretary of State for Education can and does have schools closed. As for other countries, we might ask how seriously the prohibition of evangelisation is taken in relation to those Vietnamese schools where nuns teach children (potentially including non-Catholic children) to say grace. In Bangladesh, the case of Hindu teacher Hriday Chandra Mondal calls into question the state's official commitment to equality in and freedom of religion. As for Israel, we have seen the discrepancy between official positions on equitable school funding, and poorly resourced schools in the Arab sector.

School and religion do reflect state and religion, but they do so in a different way from that which I envisaged as I set out on this chapter. Just as the extent to which one understands the relationship between school and religion depends upon the extent to which one understands the relationship between state and religion, so the reverse is so – indeed much more so.

### Closing words

In writing this chapter, I had set out to see how far state-religion relationships are reflected in the place of religion in schools – my focus was uni-directional, looking for the reflection of state-religion at school level. I was not looking for the bi-directional but found that looking at the place of religion in schools can tell us *more* about the relationship(s) between religion and state, than looking at stated/official policies and positions. It can tell us about the enacted relationships. More than this, as I hope I have shown, it can tell us about the interrelationships between society, state and religion. As it turns out, schools might be of the best places to find out about religion, state and society (and their interrelationships) in a country *sans rhetoric*.

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