IRENE

INNOVATIVE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION NETWORK: EDUCATING TO THE RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

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UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

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IRENE

INNOVATIVE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION NETWORK: EDUCATING TO THE RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Thessaloniki, 2022

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INTRODUCTION

I. The IRENE Project

The IRENE Project research is part of the two-year program IRENE Innovative Religious Education Network: educating to the religious diversity, Network for the Renewal of Religious Education: Teaching Religious Diversity, which is part of Erasmus+, funded by the European Commission and includes scientists from Romania, Bulgaria, Italy, Greece, Estonia, and Finland.

The IRENE program analyzes how religious education and religious literacy, and in particular, education in diversity and religious pluralism, are implemented and cultivated in the participating Member States. In addition, it proposes teaching methods and teaching materials as well as a common training program to help all those who deal with religious diversity.

In particular, the program has the following objectives:

• To improve the teaching methods of religion teachers, professional theologians and pastors who deal with diversity and multiculturalism.

• To facilitate the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and innovative methods around religious education.

• To increase the digital, social, and learning skills as well as the cognitive competence of the participants regarding multiculturalism.

• To promote interfaith practices dealing with religious diversity and social exclusion at the local level.

• To train teachers/professionals of religious education in order to take a more active role in society.

• To create a sustainable network of expanded collaborations with strategic goals between the members of the Program.

All the above is part of a wider EU educational policy, they are based on a strong legal framework, and they promote the European way of life. Many global and European organizations recognize the need to enhance knowledge about religions and

beliefs and focus on educating young people. Young people can contribute to the fight against intolerance and discrimination if they are trained on a theoretical and practical level and in subjects related to basic human rights. At the same time, the development of national educational policies and strategies should include measures to promote a better understanding of different cultures, ethnicities, religions, or beliefs (see Decision No. 13/06 on combining intolerance and discrimination and promoting mutual respect and understanding).

The source of inspiration for the European Union is its "religious and humanist inheritance, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law" (see Preamble to the Treaty on European Union).

It is well known that the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) launched the dialogue between the EU and the Churches, religious communities, and beliefs. Article 10 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states that the aim of the Union is to combat all forms of discrimination based on "sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation". In addition, article 17 declares that "the Union respects and does not prejudice the status of Member States under national law of churches and religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organizations" and "recognizing their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organizations'".

II. E-book Description

The e-book contains thirteen articles (2 per each partner and 3 from Estonia) and will be used as a training guide. It is developed both in English and in the partners' languages. One of the two articles, presented by the partners, covers topics such as: religious diversity and multiculturalism, cross-cultural communication, inter-religious dialogue, religious identity in the context of the united Europe, methods in teaching religion, "public theology", etc. The other article is generally based on the outcomes from a previous comparative study (IO1)[1], implemented at a local level, and describes mainly the best practices and teaching methods used at a national level.

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[1] The comparative study covered existing denominations/religions and educational establishments engaged with religious education in the partners cities/communities and analyzed their practices in the field of cross-cultural communication and methods of teaching, along with their existing competence such as leadership, social, digital, pedagogical, historical, cultural, theological. Based on the collected

Some of the articles are dedicated to the concept of the so-called "public theology", that is related to the social dimension of the Christian faith. It is an innovative element and one of the most useful and interest themes of the theological reflection in recent decades. The need was felt to articulate doctrines and principles of faith so that they could respond to social issues, political life, and the reality of the today's world. "Public theology" is a specific proposal that moves exactly on this direction. The term refers to the work of some theologians who are also attentive to social and political life. The idea of a "public theology" expresses the desire to be able to direct theological reflection on socio-political life for the plural society, without limiting it to the members of the Christian community. Behind this wording lies a deep intuition, an interesting and original line of reflection for the society and the culture in which we live today. At the same time, the range of possible approaches justifies the variety of uses of the "public theology" label and proves that the expression is not unique. For this reason, the European added value is of great importance when comparing both in theory and in practice the different ways of understanding "public theology" in different countries and societies. Another innovative element is the idea of the religious identity, as being/or not a constructive element of the EU identity. Practical examples are also offered in this context.

The target groups of this e-book are professionals in theology, teachers of Religion, students in cultural studies, theology etc., pastoral workers, clergy, active members of religious communities, parishes, congregations, and all those interested in handling multicultural challenges in their everyday work.

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information, a narrative report was developed, providing information about the teaching methods, knowledge, and practices of the target groups, involved in the research, also comparing the dynamics of the learning processes of the countries, involved in the project and summarizing the collected data by the researchers' teaching methods and competences of the respondents. Thus, the study has provided better knowledge of what methods are currently used at the local level by the target groups in order to deal with religious diversity and to conduct cross-cultural communication and education, what are the existing competences, and the training needs of the respondents and what innovative teaching methods are used by the target groups, to teach religion at the local level. The collected data was compared and summarized in a narrative report that will be used as a foundation to elaborate the pilot training course and the training materials for the e-platform. The comparative study analyzed both the state of the religious education and the teaching methods used by educators and teachers of religion in the countries, involved in the project, along with the training needs of the respondents in the field of inter-religious and intercultural adult education.

III. Aims

This e-book aims to broaden the access to new ideas and concepts, related to the way that the above-mentioned target groups respond to social issues in the present days. It is an attempt to propose educational pathways to those who face multiculturalism in their everyday work and who play a central role in cross-cultural communication and inter-religious dialogue, in building social stability on local level. These new forms of non-formal education are for the first time presented to the target groups in such a collective way, aiming to assist their professional development. This approach aims to assist them in increasing their knowledge and to turn them into strong leaders in their everyday work, enhancing their multicultural skills to better cope with people with different ethnic, cultural, and religious background. This way they will develop their social competences, multicultural and leadership skills, and will serve as a tool to train the trainers, to foster cross-cultural communication and create conditions for improved social dialogue, encourage tolerance and respect for human rights.

This e-book will be largely disseminated through the University networks of the partners involved in the project, including bachelor and master's programs, academic networks, etc. It will be published on the e-platform and on the partners' websites and will be presented during international courses, seminars, and conferences as well as, to all those dealing with religious diversity, and facing multicultural and inter-religious challenges, the Catholic, Orthodox, and Lutheran churches, and other religious communities.

IV. Book Contents

As we have already noticed, every country-partner of the IRENE Project contributes to this e-book with two articles and Estonia with three. The contents of the book are as follows (we mention the name and academic title of the author, the title of the article and its main purpose):

1. Bulgaria

1.1.

Author: Diana Petrova Tyurkedzhieva, PhD Candidate

European Studies Department, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Title: "Religious Education for Equity, Tolerance, Dialogue and European Identity Formation".

Aim: The article presents the religious map of Bulgaria, referring to the ruling Orthodox Church as a key and primary component of the national identity of most citizens. In addition, it examines how local situations differ in reflection from the perspectives of different research approaches and analyses equality education as a method of transforming religious values, condition that builds tolerance and mutual understanding.

1.2.

Author: Andrian Aleksandrov, Faculty of Theology, Sofia University

Title: "Learning from Diversity and Education in Pluralism: Challenges and Perspectives".

Aim: The article explains why values such as tolerance, understanding of rights to freedom of expression and belief and education in dialogue are particularly important aspects of religious education in Bulgaria, where for two decades there has been a weakening of the local identity, a fact that encourages the coexistence of various new religions and ethnicities. It recognizes the importance of understanding and respecting local and global cultural diversity as a relatively new approach to local teaching traditions in Bulgaria, and finally it systematically presents the pedagogical outcomes and educational needs for the teaching of diversity and of pluralism.

2. Estonia

2.1. Author: PhD Liina Kilemit, The Institute of Theology of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

Title: "Religious diversity and multiculturalism in Estonia".

Aim: The article gives a brief overview the religious and cultural diversity in Estonia. It describes the distribution of the Estonian population between different ethnic and religious groups and examines how attitudes towards religion differ between the major ethnic groups in the country's population. Despite the relatively high degree of ethnic and religious diversity in Estonian society, relations between religious organizations

can be considered peaceful and rather cooperative. That is why the example of Estonia is of great interest to other European countries as well.

2.2.

Author: Triin Käpp, PhD

Title: «Christian Schools in Estonia»

Aim: This article consists of three parts: first, a description of Estonian society from the perspective of a value paradigm; second, an overview of Christian schools and their role in Estonia and third, an explanation of the concept of spiritual education, which is used as a synonym to 'Christian values education' in the Estonian context.

2.3.

Author: Silja Härm

Title: «Religious Education in Estonian General Education Schools»

Abstract: This article discusses religious education in general education schools, financed by Estonian municipalities and the central government. It presents a brief overview of its development in the past 30 years, the national subject syllabi, and problems associated with religiously unbiased teaching. The discussion also covers potential prospects of religious education in Estonia.

3.Finland

3.1. Author: Ismo Pellikka, Timo Tossvainen, Antti Juvonen

University of Eastern Finland, Department of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education
Title: "The Significance of Religious Education in Finnish Upper and Lower Secondary Schools".
Aim: The article examines the differences between girls and boys in Finland, in their liking, interest in and perception of the importance and usefulness of studying religion. The study is part of a large international multi-disciplinary research project on

motivation. The data was collected using an internet-based questionnaire based on Eccles and Wigfield's expectancy-value theory. According to the results of the study, religion is somewhat more important for girls than for boys. Girls' perception of their goodness as students of religion also varies more between grades than between them and boys. The size of the effect of the observed differences ranged from small to medium.

3.2.

Author: Risto Aikonen, School of Applied Education Science and Teacher Education University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu Campus

Title: "Teaching of Minorities' Own Religion – an Orthodox Perspective".

Aim: The article briefly analyses the current religions in Finland, which mainly form the basis of religious education in the school environment, and the legal basis for the teaching of different religions and beliefs in schools and educational contexts in general, and its implementation to the county. It also examines the development of religious education curricula within the Finnish school system, in particular how the curriculum of the Orthodox religion has changed along with other curriculum developments. Also, the paper focuses on introducing the implementation of religious education in Finland and on some results on the opinions of parents, guardians, and teachers on the current religious education curriculum. Recent research findings on the Finnish model of religious education are presented to demonstrate the importance of minority religions' own religious education.

4. Greece

4.1. Author: Dr. Athanasios Stogiannidis, Faculty of Theology AUTh

Title: "Religious diversity as political, educational, and theological condition. Orthodox Religious Education in Dialogue with Dietrich Benner's Allgemeine Pädagogik".
Aim: The article focuses on the importance of dialogue with religious diversity as a component of both the public space and the pedagogical process that takes place within the framework of Religious Education. It analyzes the concept of public space as a mode of existence constituted by the encounter of heterogeneities. Furthermore, the article tries to relate the basic aim of Religious Course to the contemporary challenge

for participation in the public function of religion. Finally, it approaches the concept of religious diversity from the perspective of Orthodox theological thought and life.

4.2.
Author: C. N. Tsironis, Faculty of Theology, AUTh
Title: "Religious diversity and cultural pluralism in Greece: Mapping of the situation and educational prospects".
Aim: The article presents and studies the religious diversity and cultural pluralism in Greece, deepening on the outcomes and conclusions of the comparative study (IO1), of the IRENE project. The Church of Greece (The Greek Orthodox Church) is the established/majority church in Greece while older and newer religious communities live in the country along with an unspecified number of people that don't have any affiliation to a religious community. The Greek state ensures access to education for all children regardless of their ethnic origin, or their cultural and religious affiliation. The article focuses on the mapping of the cultural and religious diversity in the Greek education and on the relevant challenges in a modern, democratic, and inclusive school.

5. Italy

5.1. Author: **Brunetto Salvarani**, Facoltà Teologica dell'Emilia Romagna
Title: "Educating for Inter-Faith Dialogue".
Aim: The article explains how education can play a key role in the current process of multiculturalism in Western society. Studying specific texts of the Latin Church from the first centuries until today, it proposes four possible models of dialogue: the dialogue of daily life, the dialogue of deeds / works, the dialogue of religious exchanges and the dialogue of spirituality and the sacraments. From these models derive specific methodological principles for a fruitful education in interfaith dialogue, such as no renunciation of the self-identity; the maturation of a new attitude towards other religions; teamwork in a specific field, so as to deal with problems and unfair discrimination, as part of the plan for a global ethic.

5.2.

Author: Enzo Pace, *Department of Political Science*, Law and International Studies, University of Padua

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Title: "Religious Diversity and Pluralism in Italy".

Aim: The article analyzes the concept of hyper-diversity, which proves to be a useful tool for better understanding of what is happening in the secularized Europe. It also explains the difference between diversity and pluralism, since where there is diversity, there is not necessarily positive political action. In addition, it raises the key question of how the diversity of religious differences is governed, to conclude that, in contrast to the national policies of each European country, the policies of active religious pluralism work more effectively locally / globally, in large and medium-sized cities of Europe.

6. Romania

6.1.

Author: Prof. Călina Gelu, Departure of Theology, University of Craiova

Title: "Some considerations about public theology. Origins, trends, and basic ideas".

Aim: The article refers to and analyzes the meaning and usefulness of public theology in the context of modern multicultural society. The roots of public theology can be traced back to St. Augustine, who paved the way for an open debate on the Christian theology of public life, while different versions of public theology were developed by the leaders of the Reformation. The article focuses mainly on contemporary expressions and demands of public theology, such as the moral reconstruction of modern society, social justice, the defense and promotion of human freedom, solidarity, social reconciliation. The role of public theology in understanding and addressing the problems that arise in the context of globalization is special.

6.2.

Author: Prof. Călina Gelu, Departure of Theology, University of Craiova

Title: "Brief considerations on methods and techniques of teaching religion".

Aim: As stated in the title, the article proposes methods and techniques of teaching religion. These techniques and methodological tools are mainly based on the educational needs and on the social and cultural conditions of Romania. However, they can also be useful in other European learning environments, such as building collaborative relationships, experiential learning, the use of new technologies, the

development of digital skills, the virtual learning platform. In addition, the article emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinarity and the variety of methods of researching religion.

Religious Education for Equity, Tolerance, Dialogue and European Identity Formation

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Abstract: Despite Bulgaria's religious diversity, most of the Bulgarians associate their religious identity primary with their national, ethnic, and cultural affiliation. Orthodoxy is viewed as a key and yet first component of national identity by the vast majority of those who identify as Orthodox Christians. After the fall of the totalitarian regime, Bulgaria underwent reforms by enacting new inclusive policies, instituting religious education in public schools, and transforming the country's religious and cultural landscape toward diversity – yet not highly pluralistic in European and global terms. Religious education is of great importance for secular education, given its relationship with the social environment, religious tolerance, recognition of the rights and freedoms, and respect for the religious identity of every citizen. This article examines how local religious situation vary from the perspectives of several different research approaches and emphasises on the role the religious education could play for building tolerance, mutual understanding, and a greater European identity.

Keywords: Religion; Religious Education; Tolerance; Religious Identity; European Identity; National Identity; Pluralism.

Introduction

The political direction for Bulgaria has been firmly defined after 1989 when economic and political reforms in the former communist countries began, and the policy reorientation towards a pluralistic democracy and market economy has gained widespread support. In 1995 Bulgaria began the process of EU integration through elite-driven application in 1995. It was then postponed until 1997 due to the requirement for the country to develop transitional policies. In 2000s the country undertook a slew of reforms to prepare for EU membership, including the consolidation of democratic systems, the establishment of the rule of law, the recognition of human rights, the commitment to personal freedom of expression, and the development of a functioning free-market economy.

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Some of the major steps Bulgaria has taken after the fall of the communist regime on its path towards the democracy was to adopt its new Constitution in 1991, to ratify both the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in 1992, and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1999.

Bulgaria joined the European Union during the fifth phase of its enlargement on 1st of January 2007. Years later it took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union (2018) driven by the motto: "Unity Makes Strength". During the Presidency the country's priorities were focused on regional stability, security, EU integration, the future of Europe and young people, and the digital economy.

Religious landscape in Bulgaria

Bulgaria's traditional religion is Orthodox Christianity. More than 71% of the population or 4 219 270 people identify as Christians, according to the most recent census data from 2021. With 638 708 adherents, the Muslim community – primarily comprised of Bulgarian Turks – is the second-largest religious minority in Bulgaria. The number of Jews according to the census is 1,736. The share of the population that belongs to other denominations is 6,451, while 1,036,944 people do not belong to any denomination, could not identify or were unwilling to answer. Information on 616 681 persons is missing from the registers used in the census.[1] The question on belonging to different denominations does not appear in the 2021 national census.[2] The answer to this question can be derived mainly from the data of the census conducted in 2011, according to which the number of people belonging to different Christian/Muslim denominations is as follows: Eastern Orthodox population – 4,374,135 people; Protestants – 64,476 people, Catholics – 48,945 people, Muslims-Sunni – 546,004 people, Muslims-Shia – 27,407 people, Armenians Apostolic – 1,715 people[3].

The number of officially registered religious institutions in Bulgaria as of June 2022 is 210, according to the data available at the Directorate of Religious Affairs[4]. Due to the lack of national statistics beyond the official data obtained by 2011 census, it is difficult to determine the exact number of the members of the different religious denominations in Bulgaria at present, although we can draw on from the existing data

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[1] Население по вероизповедание, статистически райони и области към 7.09.2021. НСИ, 2022. https://www.nsi.bg/bg [accessed on 21.01.2023].

[2] After the fall of communism, a new way of collecting data related to the religious affiliation of believers was introduced. This way of surveying was deliberately abolished in the previous censuses during the communist regime.

[3] See more at: https://www.nsi.bg/Census/StrReligion.htm [accessed on 21.01.2023].

[4] Дирекция по вероизповеданията към Министерски съвет. Виж повече на: http://veroizpovedania.government.bg/docs [accessed on 21.01.2023].

of other studies to partially answer the question of the real religious picture in Bulgaria. For example, according to the European Values Study conducted in 2017, on the question "Which religious denomination do you belong to?"(Q13A) the distribution of Bulgarian citizens who declare belonging to Orthodoxy is 79.5% (902 out of 1560 respondents), Catholics are 1.3% (15 out of 1560 respondents), Muslims 18.3% (207 out of 1560 respondents)[1]. According to the data received by a survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre on religious attitude in Central and Eastern Europe in 2017, a large majority of Bulgarians self-identify as Orthodox Christians (75%), with respondents stating that being Orthodox is an important part of the Bulgarian identity. The lack of pre-1991 surveys also make it difficult to determine the extent to which the population's religious affiliation has grown since that period. Data from the same survey shows that the percentage of Muslims is higher than that of Christians in terms of the importance of religion in their lives[2]. The analysis of a representative survey conducted by the Alpha Research Agency shows 89.1% of the participants self-identified as Orthodox Christians and 10.9% as "I am not a believer or atheist" (out of 1,033 interviews conducted for the purpose of the survey)[3].

Officially recognized religions in the country are entitled to public support in the form of minimal subsidy allocations from the state budget, which annual amounts are discussed by relevant parliamentary committees and then approved and voted on as part of the state budget.

Religious Education in Bulgaria – Brief Overview

The issue of religious education was treated in a radical way throughout the communist era. During this time the education was "science-based" and was interpreted as atheistic and anti-religious. The fall of communist regime in 1989 gave rise to a process of radical transformation in all spheres of social life. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) was confronted with the challenge of its new social role and how to carry out its mission in the face of expanding globalisation and political, social, cultural, and religious plurality in this new setting. The political changes fuelled hopes among some Bulgarians that religious education will be reintroduced in school. During this time the concept of religious education became subject of intense debate in academic and political circles. Initially, this resulted in a bipolar division in opinions on religious education: on the one hand, there was a radical rejection of the need for religious education in public schools; on the other hand, there was an extreme affirmation on the

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[1] Europan Value Study. Fifth wave, 2017-2018. https://europeanvaluesstudybg.wordpress.com/ [accessed on 21.01.2023].

[2] Pew Research Centre. Religious landscape and Central and Eastern Europe, 2017.

[3] Мнозинство и малцинства. Нагласи към различните. Доклад – анализ от национално представително проучване, Алфа Рисърч, 2019-2020. https://alpharesearch.bg/ [accessed on 23.01.2023].

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importance of the religious teaching. The concern was about how the religious content could be integrated in the learning process, whether as part of the curriculum or as an extracurricular activity, without violating the fundamental rights of individuals who do not wish to study it.

The religious education was initially not introduced due to the school's secular status. The situation steadily improved after 1996. Religious education was offered in schools for the first time as an elective subject called "Religion" by Minister of Education Order No 06-000-159/28.08.1997. The subject has been taught by theologians in numerous schools around the country since the 1997-1998 academic year.[1] In 2003 Changes to the Public Education Act's Implementing Regulations were made. "In secular schools, religion can be studied in classes organized for compulsory and elective courses ", according to a new paragraph (Para.3) introduced to Article 4 of the Regulations[2] including a proposal by the Ministry of Education in 2003 for teaching Religion-Christianity and Religion-Islam[3].

The question of religious education later faded into the background, occasionally being brought up for discussion at various committee meetings and in parliament[4], but with little impact. Despite the positive attitude and stances voiced by both government and BOC, compulsory religious education remains only advisable today.

For the first time in 2018 more detailed syllabuses (I-XII grades) for the subjects „Religion" (Christianity-Orthodoxy), „Religion" (Islam) and „Religion" (non-denominational education) were developed and introduced by the Ministry of Education[5]. The new syllabuses are based on the principle of freedom of conscience, which also implies the right of each person to choose the way he or she forms his or her worldview and builds the moral foundations of his or her personality. Thus, opportunities were created for students to learn about their own religion and to acquire knowledge about the history and nature of world religions. The subject "Religion" in all its three forms of teaching aims to build values and virtues as well as to impact on the religious dialogue and mutual respect in a positive way. The subject is of great importance for secular education, given its relationship with the social environment,

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[1] Denev, I., Groß, E., Eds. International Symposium on Religious Education in Bulgaria: Religious Education within the Context of the Common European Home. Sofia, 2004, pp. 20-22.

[2] Правилник за прилагане на Закона за народната просвета https://www.lex.bg/laws/ldoc/-12809727 [accessed on 12.12.2021]

[3] Инструкция № 2 от 23.06.2003 г. за провеждане на обучението по учебен предмет „Религия" издадена от министъра на образованието и науката.

[4] See more at: http://parlament.obshtestvo.bg/sessions/203 [accessed on: 12.12.2021].

[5] Заповед № РД09-1474/24.07.2018 на министъра на образованието и науката. https://web.mon.bg/bg/98 [accessed on: 21.01.2023].

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religious tolerance, recognition of the rights and freedoms of the individual, equality of religions, and building respect for the religious identity of every citizen[1].

According to data revealed by experts from the Ministry of Education, religious education is taught in 147 schools across the country, with only 12,000 students enrolled so far[2] out of a total of 565,000 students nationwide in the 2020/2021 school year[3]. Despite the positive attitude and stances (expressed by both the government and the BOC) this may also be due to the fact that the subject is still optional for the schools – this phrase directly relates to the unpopularity and widespread disregard for religious education, which has also resulted in high unemployment rates among theological graduates. Regardless of the changes in the Church Statute[4] made by the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in 2018 by introducing new cultural-educational concepts and strategies, and other reforms following the fall of the communist regime, various sociological surveys confirm the observation that "the religious culture of the Bulgarian people is not yet high"[5].

Church-State Relations

Despite the separation of the Church and the State being ratified during the transition from monarchical to republican governance in 1945, religious life in Bulgaria during the communist regime was regulated by two government bodies – the Committee for the Affairs of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Religious Cults at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Committee for Religious Cults and Religions at the Council of Ministers, which were replaced (after 1989) by the Directorate of Religions at the Council of Ministers.

The advance of Communism put an end to all autonomous religious organizations' activities. The charitable work of religions was seen as a risk factor for promoting foreign interests and influence, therefore all the assets, expertise and responsibilities of the faiths were transferred to the new government and later shaped the new social and atheistic ideology.

The fall of the socialist regime put the BOC in a difficult situation. Generations of Bulgarians have gone without perceiving it as a living and functioning institution

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[1] See more at: Учебни програми по религия. I-XII клас. Приложение № 1. https://web.mon.bg/bg/98 [accessed on 21.01.2023].

[2] Интервю с Коста Костов, главен експерт в Дирекция „Съдържание на предучилищното и училищното образование в министерство на образованието и науката. See more at: https://bnr.bg/horizont/post/101303019 [accessed on 23.01.2023].

[3] Образованието в Република България през учебната 2020/2021 г. Преброяване 2021. НСИ. www.nsi.bg [accessed on 21.01.2023].

[4] Статут на БПЦ. https://bg-patriarshia.bg/statute [accessed on 21.01.2023].

[5] Донкова, Ж. Вероизповеданията в Република България пред прага на Европейския съюз, 2006. https://www.svet.bg/вероизповеданията-в-българия/ [accessed on 12.12.2021].

with a public purpose. Deprived from religious literacy[1] Bulgarian society did not feel the need for religious education until recently. The aggressive atheism of the communist ideology, in Karamelska's words, turned the Church into "a decorative institution with no significant influence on the social behaviour of the citizens, while its functions were reduced to the reproducing of an existential effortless 'household' or 'folk' Christianity[2]. These are, in her view, the main reasons for the destabilization of the faith and for the inadequacy of the ecclesiastical institution towards the new forms of publicity[3]. On the other hand, the long-standing division between the State and the Church (which is ultimately permissible in the Bulgarian Constitution) has significantly delayed the reintegration of the spiritual dimension into the public life.

During the transition period BOC was heavy politicized, which further caused divides among both believers and non-believers[4]. The new Bulgarian government established a Board of Religious Affairs in 1991. The Board began reforming the country's religious institutions in the country. In 1992 it declared the election of Bulgarian Patriarch Maxim as illegal since he was appointed in an uncanonical way by the communist government. This caused a division among the bishops, resulting in the formation of an Alternative synod[5]. The official Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church declared the new Synod schismatic. In 1998 above-jurisdictional *Pan-Orthodox Church Council* was held in Sofia to terminate the canonical precedent and to address the spiritual consequences as depreciation of the Church's image, profanation of faith, and asocialization. The Board initiated reforms of the country's religious institutions. Meanwhile the registered religions at that time exceeded 100[6], as the law stipulated that all religions must be administered by a state committee or directorate[7]. Many religious

[1] Симеонова, Г. Относно добротворството в минало време и възможното му възкресение днес. https://liternet.bg/publish26/gatia-simeonova/sveta-marina.htm [accessed on 21.01.2023].

[2] Карамелска, Т. Православни ценности и социално участие. В: Фотев, Г. Европейски ценности в днешното българско общество. София, 2018. https://europeanvaluesstudybg.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/172-196.pdf, с. 175 [accessed on 21.01.2023]

[3] Ibid.

[4] Aleksandrov, A. Religious education in Bulgaria: Past and Present. – In: R. Aikonen, A. V. Aleksandrov (Eds.). Proceedings of Orthodox Christian Religious Education Association [OCREA]: Methods of teaching in religious education: Learning by heart, or by experience? Sofia, 2015, pp. 86–96.

[5] By the time of the change of political power, and the regaining and redesigning of sacred spaces, an Alternative Orthodox Synod had been registered to replace the canonically legitimate socialist one (so that the local church would remain without hierarchs and synod), and as a result a Church network of about 200 parishes and monasteries had functioned legally. Similar processes occurred at the time and later in other denominations, but due to archival loss, they have yet to be sufficiently and independently investigated.

[6] Донкова, Ж. Ibid., 2006. https://dveri.bg/a9y4p [accessed on 12.06.2021]

[7] Беров, Х. Държава и вероизповедания – нормативна уредба на религията и религиозните общности в България. София, 2009.

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groups originating from the same denomination or religion were able to register under the new Religious Denomination Act, however the Alternative Synod and Old-Calendar Zealot parishes remained unregistered[1]. This was due to the significant social-cultural impact of the alternative church structures, which were widespread by the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Furthermore, following the implementation of the Religious Denomination Act the Alternative Synod started to be persecuted, and on the night of July 20-21, 2004 (known as the Bulgarian Crystal night), priests of the Alternative Synod were forcibly evicted from approximately 250 churches and other properties for which the Holy Synod claimed they were illegally occupying, resulting in a legal case before the *European Court of Human Rights* in 2009, but without significant social consequences.

BOC has also played an active role in preventing the ratification of the *Istanbul Convention,* while calling for an end to local LGBT pride parades in recent years. Furthermore, during the refugee crisis, BOC demonstrated its capacity by calling for a halt to the entry of migrants as a threat to Bulgarian national identity and state sovereignty. Nonetheless, these acts not only did not totally ruin BOC's institutional image as a glocal confessional unity, but on the contrary, they were largely supported by the society, which defined its function as an important factor in a patriotic perspective.

The positive image of the BOC, which was established as the saviour of the Bulgarian people throughout the five-century Ottoman tyranny, could explain the above phenomena[2]. Despite numerous challenges, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church continues to enjoy traditionally a high level of public credibility[3]. The humility and patience demonstrated in its commitment to all institutions of public benefit, without at the same time compromising the nature of its core mission, orientation towards the faithful, and in not accepting sources of funding incompatible with Orthodoxy, is the essential underlying factor here.

Religious education in Bulgaria - education to equity and identity formation
During the Soviet period the religious education was excluded from the school curriculum and the religion remained a private family matter. Nevertheless, individuals of all ethnicities and religious backgrounds coexisted peacefully in Bulgaria, remaining traditionally resistant to religious propaganda. This is why religious education in Bulgaria is frequently viewed as identity formation rather than confessional practice,

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Kalkandjieva, Daniela. Religion and Forced Displacement in Bulgaria, 2020. https://fpc.org.uk/religion-and-forced-displacement-in-bulgaria/ [accessed on 23.10.2021].

[3] The Bulgarian Orthodox Church is the institution with the highest credentials rating among the population, https://www.diakonia.bg/българската-православна-църква-е-инс/ [accessed on 23 August 2019]

while the knowledge of the statistically dominating *Eastern Orthodox Christian* faith is generally perceived by local populace as part of a nationalist and ethnic patriotic upbringing, comparable to what youngsters were exposed to during previous times.

The transition processes defined the religious education as one of the most important aspects of the restoration of religious rights as part of Bulgaria's preparation for EU integration. The rise of multiculturalism not only provided the majority with greater possibilities to exercise religious freedom, but it also empowered previously marginalized culturally ethnic religious minorities. Nonetheless, as it has been already mentioned in this article, religious education is not fully integrated in the civic education, even though Bulgaria has been a member of the EU since 2007. One of the reasons could be that it is often perceived only as an important tool for building religious identity, and for balancing identities or avoiding competing/conflicting identities. Furthermore, some researchers view the Orthodox Church primarily as a social tool for populist purposes, pursuing individual social identity aspirations, while what may be seen on the surface as communal expression are religious ceremonies rather than genuine social influence and faith-based mission[1]. Regrettably, critical insiders' opinions aren't always trusted to build positive image of the Church.

The call for the establishment of a democratic social order and deideologisation of education, as well as to slightly overcome the memories of the repressive cultural policy of the communist regime, resulted in the exclusion of some religious traditions as a national cultural heritage. As a result of this and other circumstances, also a new approach to religious education has been developed.

Nowadays, besides the religious education that is taught in public schools, many Church parishes and monasteries organize activities for children and rarely for adults. There are also two theological seminaries in the cities of Sofia and Plovdiv. Some public schools include in their curricula extensive courses in spiritual and material ecclesial heritage. Various kindergartens provide a variety of day-care activities for children who are interested in religious education, while some parishes organize kindergartens and day-care activities, while at the same time developing social projects to integrate children with special needs and from minority backgrounds. Muslim residential schools and an Islamic Institute have been also established.

Some faith communities and public Christian organizations have taken on the responsibility to educate and nurture youth in traditional values and identity, also by introducing how other denominations are generally understood and practiced in

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[1] Карамелска, Православни ценности и социално участие. В: Фотев, Г. Европейски ценности в днешното българско общество. София, 2018, p. 195. https://europeanvaluesstudybg.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/172-196.pdf [accessed on 21.01.2023].

Bulgaria, and in a spirit of friendship and tolerance. Lifelong learning and international mobilities also contribute to social-cultural transformation as well as to the recognition and respect of the rights of religious groups. Minor religious communities also demonstrate a strong desire for state-subsidised religious education in the confessional sense.

There is no doubt that the contemporary education may be used as an effective tool to combat prejudice, hate speech, alienation, exclusion, and marginalization, as well as to enforce social unity and cohesion. We believe that this goal is completely applicable to the new local pedagogical and andragogical approaches of pedagogy, as well as for the development of children's spirituality by enforcing social competences. The BOC, as well as active members of other religious communities, could play an important role in assisting the introduction of innovative religious education and teaching practices in the Bulgarian universities, schools, kindergartens, community centres, churches, monasteries, yet not fully applied at national level. Of course, we must acknowledge the delay in respect to the establishment of several national policies concerning religious education and the so called "Church quietness"[1].

Educational policymaking cannot imply acculturation, disregard for the world's positive achievements, or disproportionate Church's social commitment. Moreover, it is possible to adapt the experience of Romania and Greece, as Balkan Orthodox EU Member States, whose religious education can be viewed as quite effective in terms of inclusive policies, social peace and cultural enrichment of European identity[2]. We also assume that we cannot change the pattern of our lives or the quality of our politics until we notice and value the others around us as collaborators and partners. As a result, there is no better educational goal than the one set by UNESCO – that the states should provide minimum standards of education and ensure the religious and moral training of their children in accordance with their own beliefs[3]. In this regard, the teaching of the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church offers a variety of options. Bulgarian Synodal textbooks[4], which were recently released (with state funding) are also favoured and valuable sources that meet high standards and are used as alternative teaching materials by some religious communities as well.

Moreover, we cannot change the pattern of our lives or the quality of our politics until we start to notice and value others around us as collaborators and partners.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 175–177.

[2] Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief. https://www.osce.org/odihr/25454 [accessed on 21.10.2021].

[3] See more at: https://www.coe.int/bg/web/compass/education [accessed on 21.01.2023].

[4] https://bg-patriarshia.bg/ [accessed on 21.01.2023].

We often overlook how little we know and comprehend each other's cultures and heritages when it comes to religious education in churches and schools. Experts' efforts to mitigate tensions over other cultures and to encourage European citizens to see rich diversity of identities as one of the most important characteristics of unity, which is primarily cultural, could help people forget stereotypes and ideas of dominance, boundaries, ghettoization, polarization, and so on. In such a complex glocal context, the Bulgarian practice is to consider the role of the Church in the religious education, to adjust its methods to various situations and cases of diversity, and to balance the recreation of its traditions (lifestyles, rites, customs, rituals, festivities, charities, and liturgical practices) as a living heritage, based on the societal demands.

Nevertheless, nowadays it seems that our social environment is gradually changing in a positive direction, and a local tolerance culture is emerging. This has been already demonstrated not only by statistics, but also by the real-life experiences of believers and ordinary people who have become less hostile to migrants, more neutral to the entire LGBT spectrum of issues, or truly compassionate to those in need, despite the church's inability to adapt to their needs.

Religious identity in the context of European identity

The most recent European Values Study (EVS) in Bulgaria (2017-2018) on the religious affiliation shows a significant upward trend in the orientation towards religion. 22.1% of Orthodox respondents answered that religion is very important in their personal life, 45.4% said it is quite important. 7.8% of Orthodox respondents answered that religion is not important in their lives. Of the Muslim respondents, 39.5% said religion is very important, 44.4% said it is somewhat important, and only 2.9% said religion is not important [1]. Among Catholics, religion is important for 60% of the responders, 26.7% say it is somewhat important, and 6.7% say religion is not important in their personal lives. 60% (5 of 1,560) of Protestants consider religion as very important and 40% consider it somewhat important[2].

Only 2.4% (37 of 1,539 respondents) attend religious services more than once a week recently (Q15), 18.8% (150 of 1,539) once a month, and 70.5% (113 of 1,539) of respondents once a year. The answers to the question *"Regardless of whether or not you attend religious services, would you describe yourself as a religious person?"* are encouraging – 65.4% of respondents (960 out of 1560) self-identified as religious, and 3.2% described themselves as convinced atheists[3] (convinced atheists are 4 %

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[1] European Value Study. Fifth wave, 2017-2018. https://europeanvaluesstudybg.wordpress.com/ [accessed on 30.08.2021].

[2] See more at: Фотев, Г. Европейските ценности. Новата констелация. София, 2019 г.

[3] European Value Study. Fifth wave, 2017-2018. https://europeanvaluesstudybg.wordpress.com/ [accessed on 30.08.2021].

according to the data released by the fourth wave of the survey in 2008 and 5.6% according to the same data from the third wave of the study in 1999[1]). This indicates a positive trend in the attitudes and consciousness of Bulgarians towards abandoning the atheism unprecedentedly imposed during the communist regime and deepening religious affiliation regardless of religious denomination.

Another intriguing conclusion of some Bulgarian analysts is the different way individual identities are being perceived. Ganeva assumes that social identities (national, ethnical, and religious) are not equally important for Bulgaria's majority population, minorities, and emigrants of various national origins[2]. Bulgarians' religious affiliation is normally placed after their national and ethnic identities. For minority groups, ethnic identity is frequently prioritized over national identity, whereas the majority views national identity as the most important[3]. Kabakchieva assumes that Bulgarians are unified community with a strong sense of national identity[4], regardless of whether their identity is ethnic or civic. She also states that the Muslim community identification is more political, while Orthodox Christian community identification is more ethnic, and that "this difference is already a problem by itself, because it shows that generally shared national identification is differently understood by the two largest denominations in Bulgaria"[5].

However, due to the absence of an ethnical indicator and a representative sample, it is difficult to say to what extent people understand the question of their Bulgarian origin as an ethnical, national, or a civic concept, as well as how Bulgarians understand the concept of religion after the period of communism, when atheism was widely proclaimed.

Denominations in Western Europe have the potential to play an important role in the formation of national and European identity. Kabakchieva and other European researchers assume that European identity is based on Christian faith as a primary cultural code, as well as on the shared cultural values, which leads to the formation of a common mindset. On the other hand, the ongoing efforts of the European Union leaders to institutionalise the concept of European citizenship, as well as the fact that all EU Member States have the same rights regardless of where they live, reinforces the idea of the European Union as a political community that minimises national identity[6].

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[1] Карамелска, Т. Ibid., p. 178.

[2] Ганева, З. Социални идентичности и психично благополучие. София, 2010 г. http://www.elbook.eu/images/book10.pdf [accessed on 30.08.2021].

[3] Ibid.

[4] Кабакчиева, П. Ibid., pp. 257–278. https://europeanvaluesstudybg.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/257-278.pdf [accessed on 30.07.2021).

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., pp. 260-261.

The debate over European cultural identity also reflects on the discussion over the rights of the immigrants and tolerance for foreigners. Kabakchieva assumes that European cultural identity, i.e., identity based on shared roots and history, is far more restricted and intolerant to foreigners[1]. Although EU institutions play an important role in the construction of European identity, guaranteeing the protection of human rights and liberties as one of the main principles of European citizenship, this does not mean that these principles apply equally to migrants and foreigners[2].

For Bulgarians, too, some researchers argue that they have created a myth about their tolerance that they themselves believe in, but ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, and political intolerance still dominate their attitudes, as well as the everyday political and media discourse in the country, especially when it comes to the values of Western cultures and societies[3]. Nevertheless, tolerance towards other religions, ethnicities or migrants has increased over the years, although discrimination and segregation of Roma people remains high. The results of a quantitative study conducted by Alpha Research (2019-2020) in Bulgaria show high levels of tolerance towards different religious and ethnic communities, except for Roma – hatred towards them is 21.6% in a total of 1033 effective interviews conducted. Hatred towards other groups is significantly lower.[4] Furthermore, the Bulgarian identity's integration into the EU has created fundamental problems about believers' social involvement and resistance to the establishment of new inclusive policies. One of the consequences from such resistance could be that Roma minorities in Bulgaria have not yet attained significant social status as subcultures, including rights to specific expression of their religions and lifestyles outside the traditional neighborhood[5], and that patriotic people's psychology[6] is seriously challenged after three decades of social transformation.

The conclusion we can draw as a result of this analysis is that the majority of the Bulgarians are not very interested in religion. The affiliation of the Bulgarians is firmly linked to their cultural or political belonging, while the religion itself is perceived more as civic or people's religion in terms of spiritual expression and lifestyle. The religions have recently begun to be seen by various social circles as a form of national identity, based both on the historical and religious heritage, and on the recreated

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[1] Ibid., pp. 257-261.

[2] Ibid., pp.257–261.

[3] Томова, И. 2009. Различните – между стигмата и признаването. Във: Фотев, Г. Европейските ценности в днешното българско общество. София, 2009, pp. 119 –153.

[4] Мнозинство и малцинства. Нагласи към различните. Доклад – анализ от национално представително проучване, 2019-2020. https://alpharesearch.bg/ [посетен на 23.01.2023].

[5] See also: Фотев, Г. Съседството на религиозните общности в България. София, 2000 г.

[6] See also: Петкова, Д. Религиозни идентичности в постмодерния свят. Интеркултурни и комуникационни аспекти. София, 2020.

traditional festivities, life practices and ceremonies. Nevertheless, personal recognition of Orthodox traditions and affiliation to the Orthodox Christian identity has increased in recent years, despite the significant number of people declaring their belonging to other denominations with abstract identities, without being religious[1], i.e., without believing or unregular church-goers – processes that we could also observe in other Orthodox or international contexts too.

By alternating between the post-socialist perspective on the soviet-influenced Church heritage of atheist communist regimes in some countries in South-Eastern Europe and the acknowledgement of the positive aspects of the cultural tradition and its adequate transmission, the Bulgarians are expected to develop a new religious identity within the context of a widely recognized European identity that will not be further rejected.

Conclusion

Pluralism is a universal value, not just a reaction towards religions as usually perceived by the believers due to potential risk of conversion, or simply because it confuses people about different convictions and worldviews.

Without a doubt, today's religious education may be used to combat discrimination, hate speech, alienation, exclusion, and marginalization, as well as to reinforce social integration and cohesion. Both BOC, which has a long history of public celebrity, and active members of other religious communities in Bulgaria could play a crucial role in the creation of inclusive policies, fostering tolerance and respect for the rights of minorities and other marginalized groups. In this regard, the teaching of religion in public schools offers a variety of options and the religious education could be used in a variety of settings. The religious education is of great importance for secular education, given its relationship with the social environment, religious tolerance, recognition of the rights and freedoms of the individual, equality of religions, and building respect for the religious identity of every citizen.[2]

Religious education in Bulgaria could adapt its teaching methods to different situations and cases of diversity, balancing the recreated traditions as a living heritage based on the actual needs of the community and the society. By fostering a culture of

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[1] Except for Protestant denominations (half of which had been statistically represented as exemplary ethnic Roma believers and citizens), which for theologians may hint at effective training, pastoral care, and social mission, as well as demonstrate unity in public and collective opinion of religious community members.

[2] Виж повече в: Учебни програми по религия. I-XII клас. Приложение № 1. https://web.mon.bg/bg/98 [посетен на 21.01.2023].

human rights and minority protection, it can become a powerful tool to balance inherited traditional nationalism and patriotism.

With regards to the European identification, the denominations could play an important role in the construction of both national and European identity in Europe. Bulgarians are also expected to develop a new identity within the context of a widely recognized European identity that could not be rejected. At the same time, tensions over other cultures must be overcome to help EU citizens to consider rich diversity of identities as one of the main characteristics of unity, which is predominantly cultural. This will help abandoning the stereotypes and ideas of domination, boundaries, ghettoization, polarisations, etc.

The European Union may turn into a unifying factor through the integration of the majority of the Balkan Eastern Orthodox population and could be also enriched by potential membership of states such as Serbia and the Republic of Northern Macedonia. While Croatia joined in 2013, the potential presence of Albania, Kosovo, and Turkey in the future will likely Europeanize Islam and add to the diversity even more than immigrant cohabitation.

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With the support of the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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Learning from Diversity and Education in Pluralism: Challenges and Perspectives

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Abstract: Tolerance and understanding of the rights to freedom of expression and beliefs are all important aspects of religious education, especially in the global context of diversity and pluralism. Lifelong learning comes in support of above aspects, although such educational perspectives slightly differ in the local understanding of the confessional religious teaching. The outcomes of the comparative study conducted as part of the international project IRENE reveal that understanding and respecting *local and global cultural diversity* is quite a novel approach to local Bulgarian teaching traditions. Though the national identity is often viewed and interpreted via the prism of the dominant Orthodox Christian faith, the Bulgarian society has recently shown signs of transformation into greater community with stronger social presence, as confirmed by insiders. This paper summarizes the andragogical results and educational needs for teaching in diversity and pluralism, derived from the interviews conducted with Bulgarian teachers in religion and professionals in theology with extensive experience in conventional and advanced religious education.

Keywords: religious diversity, religious education, religions and beliefs, education in diversity, tolerance, human rights.

Introduction:

This article is developed under *Innovative Religious Education Network: educating to the religious diversity (IRENE) project* funded with the support of the ERASMUS+ programme of the European Union. The project was tailored to teachers in religion and professionals in religious pedagogy and dialogue education. One of the main project's objectives was to improve the methods of teaching religion that reflect on diversity, multiculturalism, and fight against social inclusion at local level.

The 2010 White Paper on intercultural dialogue „Living together as equals in diversity" confirms that our common future is dependent on our ability to protect human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, and to encourage mutual understanding and respect (Prpic, 2018). The concept of EU citizens' unity also generates a positive attitude toward the protection of human and children's rights and recognizes the role of

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teachers, parents, media, and young people in the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue and education. Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights indicates that *„everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice, and observance".* Article 14 of the Charter also guarantees parents the right to ensure that their children are educated and taught in line with their religious, philosophical, and pedagogical convictions in accordance with national laws (Prpic, 2018).

However, over the last two decades, the current international human rights policies adopted by the Bulgarian legislation have had little impact on local policies or on the improvement of the religious education system. Although some international guidelines have been applied to both confessional (teaching/learning *for* religion) and comparative (teaching/learning *about* religion) teaching practices, experts still argue on whether regular confessional classes should focus more on non-theological training as a compromise with more options.

The purpose of this article is to provide better understanding of the religious education in Bulgaria and the role it could play in building tolerance, respect for human rights and diversity. It also examines the training needs of those who are professionally involved in teaching religion in Bulgaria to better cope with diversity in the classroom. The findings of the Comparative study conducted as part of the IRENE project in Bulgaria, Estonia, Romania, Greece, Finland, and Italy, as well as their correlation with Toledo's guiding principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools, are essential for this article. The main goal of the Comparative study was to analyze and compare the situation of religious education and the teaching methods in the above metioned countries, and to outline their training needs regarding the interreligious and intercultural education. The analysis is based on the outcomes of ten semi-structured interviews conducted with religious education teachers and professionals in theology over a three-month period in 2021. The research findings gave us a better understanding of the different approaches used at the local level to deal with religious diversity and cross-cultural communication and education. They also include information of the respondents' existing competencies and training needs, and outline practices in cross-cultural communication and teaching methodologies.

Religious context and identity

The Bulgarian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and conscience. Religious groups in the country can worship without registering, although registered groups enjoy public benefits. Eastern Orthodox Christianity is the country's traditional

religion, which is represented by more than 80 % of the people (https://www.nsi.bg, 2001), followed by 10 % of the population being ethnic Turks, and declaring themselves as Muslims (https://www.nsi.bg, 2001). There are members of other religious confessions too (Protestants, Roman Catholics, Christians of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of the Church of Jesus Christ, Sri Chinmoy etc.) although their number is relatively small in comparison with the two main religious groups. Ethnic Roma people who confess both Islam and Christianity accounts for about 4.4 % of the population. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) is exempt from registration under the law. Religious organizations can perform religious services, keep financial records, hold property, and provide medical, social, and educational services if they are registered. Unregistered religious groups are allowed to practice religion, but they do not enjoy the same rights as registered religious groups, such as access to government financing and the ability to own property, open bank accounts, and so on. The Constitution prohibits religious discrimination and mandates that the state shall assist in the promotion of tolerance and respect among believers of different confessions (Report on International Religious Freedom: Bulgaria, 2020).

Despite the existing social and cultural diversity, Bulgarian national identity is often understood and interpreted through the lens of the dominant religion, which is, as it was mentioned earlier, the Orthodox Christianity, and all other denominations are forced to compete with the religion of the majority due to its historical state of dominance in the country. Some scholars believe that such attitudes pose serious challenges for a society that has only limited experience with diversity and democracy (Kalkandjieva, 2015). Moreover, Kalkandjieva assumes that Bulgarians have trouble distinguishing between secularity, secularism, and atheism. Simultaneously, *they tend to label critical attitudes towards religion and religious institutions as communist remnants"*. Changes in religious affiliation are also met with skepticism in Bulgarian society, which might be seen as apostatic or incompatible with Bulgarian identity in some situations (Kalkandjieva, 2015). Media have often played a significant role in the formation of such attitudes. Even after the fall of communism, until 1996 for instance, mass media remained particularly hostile towards Turkish and Roma's minorities. Furthermore, the Bulgarian Turks are viewed with distrust due to the past (e.g., the perceived threat of previous historical territorial claims), while the Roma minority had been trapped in a vicious circle of extreme poverty, which was both the source and the outcome of their current situation (Bulgaria: A model for multi-cultural society?, 2002).

Since 1989 Bulgaria has initiated various political reforms to protect the rights of the minorities and other religions in the country, such as the adoption of the Copenhagen Criteria on respect and protection of minorities rights in 1996. Furthermore, the Bulgarian's peaceful transition in the years following 1989 was

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frequently associated with the concept of the so-called "Bulgarian ethnic model"[1], which has triggered many different scientific and political circles to associate it with Bulgarian traditions of ethnic and religious tolerance. This assumption has led some observers to refer to the Bulgarian ethnic model as "an ideology" that feeds on the widespread auto-stereotype of the absence of racism in Bulgaria (Rechel, 2007).

However, existing discrimination against some other confessions and minority groups, as some scholars believe, is not a political problem that can be rectified solely through law. It requires social transformation, cultural and generational shifts, improvements in education, and effective leadership to change public opinions. This ethno-psychological fact is particularly significant in the development of different approaches regarding religious education in Bulgaria.

Religious Education in Bulgaria: brief overview

Since the early 1990s, religious education in Bulgaria has progressed through several stages, gravitating between History of Religions, Ethics, Orthodox Christianity, and Islam. It was initially introduced in Bulgarian public schools in 1997, a few years after the communist party fell, as a facultative subject created primarily for Orthodox pupils in grades two through four and was then expanded to the first eight grades a year later. Islam courses were introduced in 1999. The Religious Denominations Act of 2002 provided a legal basis for religious schools to be established. (Report on International Religious Freedom – Bulgaria, 2013). Students in all twelve grades have had access to facultative Orthodoxy and Islam courses since 2003. (Kalkandjieva, 2015).

In 2007 the Bulgarian government suggested a non-confessional, neutral religious education system. It resulted in an official response from the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which recommended a curriculum for confessional religious education that would encompass both the country's strong Christian majority and the country's largest Muslim minority (latter one well represented and subsidized by some political parties to organize optional religious classes). However, neither of the two proposals received funding, even though multiple textbook sets were published several years later.

Still dissatisfied with the situation, both the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Grand Mufti's Office made attempts to persuade the Ministry of Science and Education to introduce the subject of religion as mandatory for all students. Initiatives such as a national march organized by the Holy Synod in 2010 in

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[1] Rechel distinguishes three connotations linked with the concept of the "Bulgarian ethnic model: "the first relates to the country's peaceful transition in the years after 1989, which set apart from developments in the former Yugoslavia; the second refers to the successful political participation of the Turkish minority which has played a stabilizing role in post-communist Bulgaria; and the third is its association with traditions of ethnic and religious tolerance (Rechel, 2007).

support of religious education in schools joined such efforts. Clerics and residents from all the country's Orthodox dioceses participated in the march (Kalkandjieva, 2015).

Today, public schools at all levels offer an optional religious education course that covers Christianity and Islam from grades 1 to 12, with non-confessional teaching available for the remaining students. The course covers the historical, philosophical, and cultural aspects of religion, as well as the moral values of various religious groups. All officially registered religious groups can request their views to be included in the course's curriculum. Even so, religious education continues to attract a small percentage of students: just 1% of the student body enrolls in them. (Report on International Religious Freedom – Bulgaria, 2013).

Teaching diversity and tolerance

The Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools (Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief, 2007) distinguish the positive value of teaching religion that emphasizes respect for everyone's right to freedom of religion and belief, and second, that teaching about religions and beliefs can reduce harmful misunderstandings and stereotype. The *Principles* that were published in the year of the Bulgaria's accession in the European Union explore in detail the important role of the teacher and especially in regard to the teaching about religions and beliefs and that the curriculum should be based on a teacher's knowledge, attitudes, and competences (Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief, 2007). The document suggests that teacher preparation should be based on democratic and human rights principles, and that all future religious educators should be committed to freedom of religion or belief, sensitivity to human rights issues, and education for mutual tolerance and understanding. It also emphasizes the significance of implementing pre-service and in-service teacher education and stresses the importance of including comprehensive and well-supported teacher's education programmes to ensure successful teacher's innovative education and long-term sustainability. The *Principles* differentiate between religious education's positive value, which promotes respect for everyone's right to freedom of religion and belief, and that teaching about religions and beliefs helps minimize harmful stereotypes and misunderstandings.

Because of the assertion that children's and human's rights (general and religious) must be respected and correctly combined in all circumstances, it is vital for OSCE member-states to consider the Toledo Principles in their public schools. In the first key principle we read: *"Teaching about religions and beliefs must be provided in ways that are fair, accurate and based on sound scholarship. Students should learn about religions and beliefs in an environment respectful of human rights, fundamental*

freedoms, and civic values" (Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief, 2007, 16). The Greek textbooks, which are thoroughly acknowledged and altered so that their contents are non-discriminatory and friendly to a wide range of young and adult residents, are a good example of this Principle to be respected. Many textbooks are also available online and some of them accessible to disabled students in Greece, but also in Romania.

One of the primary outcomes of the Comparative study carried out in Bulgaria under IRENE project provides that the Orthodox believers hardly understand people belonging to other confessions. This finding is in contradiction with the Toledo ninth key principle stating that*: "Quality curricula in the area of teaching about religions and beliefs can only contribute effectively to the educational aims of the Toledo Guiding Principles if teachers are professionally trained to use the curricula and receive ongoing training to further develop their knowledge and competencies regarding this subject matter. Any basic teacher preparation should be framed and developed according to democratic and human rights principles and include insight into cultural and religious diversity in society"* (Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief, 2007, 16). It is difficult to imagine how in such context one could teach religious tolerance without having knowledge of other traditions and religions, or even unwilling to meet or indirectly learn about other subcultures and educational systems.

Religious rights and freedoms are frequently addressed by the religious communities in Bulgaria both positively and negatively, which has led to different connotations in theological perspective. From the standpoint of human rights and freedoms, understanding and respecting *local and global cultural diversity* is quite a novel approach to local Bulgarian traditions of good neighborliness. Therefore, the respect for other's religious rights as a critical component of a multicultural dialogue is an important competency that teachers in religion must master to keep up with current educational practices. It is hard to expect them to effectively teach others if they do not have a thorough understanding of the diversity in a glocal context, as well as through the scope of their own education (Спирова, 2005; Маринова-Легкоступ, 2016).

Data from the IRENE's study results is encouraging in this regard as it shows that school subculture variety does matter in some circumstances. The Bulgarian teachers tend to consider in a positive way their students' religious and non-religious beliefs while selecting teaching materials and preparing for the class to avoid using inaccurate or biased material, especially if it promotes negative stereotypes.

Another interesting finding of IRENE's study is about the relation between teachers in religion and their adult students. In some cases, when teachers teach adult students, it appears difficult to establish a relationship of equity. In these situations,

teachers-to-students or student-to-student dialogue can easily devolve from moral to traumatic and discriminative. One can look for an explanation in the church's unspoken etiquette rules, which are not articulated because faith is supposed to contain them. Observations reveal that some religious persons are naturally tempted to act superiorly and hierarchically due to the specific roles they play in the parish or in the monastic community or due to their own convictions, that they have better competences and superior knowledge than others.

Following the classic pedagogical philosophy of learning from the very learners and via good contacts established with the students, training involves the ability to not only respect, but also to offer voice to others, including for learners of any age. Rather than focusing on differences, we should concentrate on commonalities in different cultures, ethnicities, and worldviews, and to understand better how individuals across the world exercise their freedom of belief and religion.

Teachers' skills and qualifications

In Bulgaria, the required skills and expertise required to teach about religions or beliefs differ, depending on whether it is confessional teaching offered by a church parish or religious community, or comparative religious teaching in public schools. A degree (bachelor's, master's, doctoral, or university specialization) obtained by an accredited university is the basic prerequisite for a teacher to work in a public school in the country. IRENE's study results show that most of the teachers in religion (predominantly Orthodox Christians) are sincere believers (comparable to other Orthodox contexts too) but, nevertheless they prefer to teach about religion in public schools phenomenologically, without taking their faith into consideration. On the other hand, the findings from the study show that there is a shortage of qualified staff to teach religion in public schools because graduates from the theological Faculties in Bulgaria do not quite enjoy full employment rights. As a result, the subject is frequently taught by theologically qualified pedagogues or humanitarian specialists who are regular teachers in other subjects, and for this reason it is more likely that they teach religion in any manner, which in certain cases may contradicts with the Toledo's third key principle, stating that *"teaching about religions and beliefs is a major responsibility of schools, but the manner in which this teaching takes place should not undermine or ignore the role of families and religious or belief organizations in transmitting values to successive generations* (Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief, 2007, 16).

One of the educational goals of IRENE project was to develop *balanced and detailed informational, communicational, and technical skills, also through creating of virtual space to communicate online and to exchange innovative practices in religion*

and dialogue teaching. As our study shows, a major difficulty faced by the teachers is the lack of expertise in areas where their pupils are significantly more advanced, such as digital media, information technology, teenage subcultural lifestyles, church ethos, and so on.

It has become clear from the findings of the Comparative study that most of the teachers in religion would like to improve their digital competencies, partly because they did not distinguish well between the informational, communicational, and technological skills required in their daily life, teaching practices, or confession. For example, some of the interviewees admit they aren't confident enough in their abilities to find appropriate educational materials online and highlighted the need that new technology and media should be incorporated into their pedagogical or andragogical communication. Nonetheless, while a few responders have demonstrated excellent digital communication skills (particularly those who teach also in other disciplines) and have successfully relocated their parish courses and schooling online since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, others simply refused to communicate online, demonstrating a low level of social engagement in the new digital society.

Finally, those who demonstrated addiction to virtual communication insisted on catching the moment to establish an online religious education system to overcome practical barriers that have prevented the development of this digital field for decades.

Another important skill for a teacher in religions or believes is the social competence. Why should social competencies be prioritized? Because it is one of the most important components of the educational mediation between educators and students. The demands of the surroundings of schools, colleges, and church subcultures are so high that anyone teaching or learning religion in any way would hardly refer to ethical codes, behaviors, values, or virtues, being socially illiterate.

The acquisition of operating skills in protecting human and religious rights, intercultural, interconfessional and interreligious communication skills, respecting other religions and gaining understanding in the church notion of human dignity are among the top competences identified by IRENE's survey respondents. Why the development of such skills is so important in teaching religion? First, because they are more neutral in the realm of education and do not directly involve confessional choice. Second, teachers are those who must speak the subcultural and age languages of children and youth; they are taught and called to observe, know, assess, diagnose, alter, and manage the specific development features of learners to the best of their abilities. Finally, because teachers are personally accountable for establishing operational requirements and collaborating with their coworkers, students, and parents. Gaining such skills requires the development of a system that transforms knowledge into social skills (Гюрова, 2002, 304–305), social information into attitudes, and teachers'

evaluation (Гюрова, 2002, 534–540) into pedagogical and andragogical communication skills, interrelation capacities, and cooperative social participation.

Another challenge faced by IRENE's study responders is their limited knowledge towards migrants and their religious, cultural traditions, values, and ethno-mentality. If we look back to the soviet era, when all existing denominations were socially segregated into private sphere, we can better understand the concerns of our interviewees. Knowledge of other religions, confessional and cultural replication were similarly limited, resulting in today's misinterpretation of religious heritage as only material, recreation, or tourist attraction. This is also why local discussions about the human rights and new traditions sometimes overlook their religious and theological foundations. In such situations, religious feelings, identities, lifestyles, and worldviews are negatively affected. Of course, the next logical step would be to emphasize the importance of developing knowledge and attitudes toward international religious and cultural traditions, values, ethno-mentality and so on by prioritizing the revitalization of fundamental confessional values although this may push aside the equally important pedagogical and andragogical goal of intercultural inquiry, information, and orientation in comparative and relative religions. Nonetheless, this step could turn into a useful instrument to help teachers to develop high social competency, an ability to sympathize with people of all faiths and backgrounds, and to genuinely inspire such cultural views. This entails not only the development of tolerance and sustaining traditional good neighborliness, but also the recognition of variety, cohabitation, and pluralism as existing societal virtues.

Thanks to the EU's Erasmus+ programme, which allowed many teachers and students to travel and learn about various cultures and religions across Europe, intercultural perspectives have become well represented and practiced in the field of education. Furthermore, Bulgarian classrooms have become more and more diverse over the last decade, and for this reason all the participants in our study were eager to learn more about others' cultural backgrounds and develop their intercultural communication skills. If one could witness these experiences, such openness would enable stronger civic identity and contextualization, including stronger religious identity, opposed to the natural or imposed acculturation. Indeed, some teachers face difficulties to develop tolerant attitudes and cultural awareness of diversity in different worldviews, lifestyles, expressions, and practices, partly due to the lack of adequate education, notably at the international level. Very often after being introduced to international human rights literature, they face difficulties in understanding it, because they need examples to enable them to compare their comprehension with certain specific cases from personal experience and to test their knowledge into practice. Therefore, such tolerance and cultural awareness can be also developed by encouraging

teachers to participate in various educational mobilities and initiatives abroad, allowing them to interact with people from various cultural and religious backgrounds, or by enrolling in international programmes in diversity and dialogue education.

As a result of the *Comparative study of IRENE project*, we have concluded that the teachers' interest in lifelong learning is very high. Most of our responders were eager to participate in any free seminar, and mobility, even for a longer period, and to attend more demanding trainings. All the interviewees supported the idea to join a virtual space where they can share database, good teaching practices, and teaching materials etc.

Our project team is closer to the yet polite and optimistic conclusion that some of the Bulgarian teachers in religion is likely to be unaware of their cultural and educational demands, particularly in the areas of human rights and social competence. Theologians need first and foremost encouragement to reach their full potential and raise awareness of the importance of new skills' development. And one of the strategies to achieve that critical local goal is to ensure that they have equitable employment rights so that they could obtain a real field of practice in which to learn and exchange expertise, comparable to the international context of the same social realities.

Outcomes and Perspectives

In any country, area, church, or parish where teachers refuse to learn, adapt, and implement pedagogical and andragogical approaches that are in line with the contemporary socio-cultural demands, innovations to religious education in diversity pose a significant challenge. Education in religious pluralism is not an easy task for adults who are called upon to educate children, youths, other adults, and even the elderly in human rights. They must first become aware of their rights and freedoms, and then truly enjoy them until they feel capable of instilling universal human values in their students. Innovations need proactive teachers who are willing to involve optimally functional models of educational technologies also in the field of religion that could be of benefit for the local communities. That would mean at first to involve researchers reflecting on significant local practices and gathering sufficient data to produce systematic interdisciplinary didactic and methodological outcomes, testing them back into innovative practices and in a comprehensive manner, and finally presenting educational systems to pedagogues and andragogues who are truly willing to implement them.

Following such teacher-training technologies and working on the development of actual models and practices, through this paper we outlined the specific educational objectives of our responders that could result in the elaboration of educational materials with high quality and, collection of good practices, designed to contribute to the local

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improvement of teaching diversity and pluralism directly and transversally within the Bulgarian Christian Orthodox context.

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Religious diversity and multiculturalism in Estonia

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1. Introduction

This article gives a brief overview of religious and cultural diversity in Estonia. To this end it describes the distribution of Estonia's population between different ethnic and religious groups and discusses how attitudes towards religion differ between our major ethnic groups. Some of the challenges and opportunities related to religious and cultural diversity are also briefly mentioned. It should be noted that, despite the relatively high degree of ethnic and religious diversity in our society, relations between religious organizations here, for example, can be regarded as peaceful and rather cooperative. Thus, the Estonian experience may also be of interest to representatives of other countries reading this collection. It is also hoped that this comprehensive article will help to better understand our second article in this book on the study of religious education.

The data sources used in the article are mainly the census data of the Estonian Statistical Office and the socio-religious monitoring survey "On Life, Religion and Religious Life" of the Estonian Council of Churches. Population surveys are carried out every five years in the framework of the latter monitoring. They have a large sample size and thus provide extensive information on the religious and ideological views of the local population. The Estonian Council of Churches as an organization will be discussed in more detail later in the article. For the time being, it should be mentioned briefly that it is an independent and voluntary association of Christian churches and congregations, whose aim is to contribute to the spiritual development of society on the basis of Christian principles[1]. It represents the Christian churches in their relations with the State and contributes to ecumenical cooperation between the different confessions.

2. Ethnic distribution of the Estonian population

According to the last census in 2011, Estonians accounted for 69,72% of the permanent Estonian population[2]. This means that nearly 30% of the population is made up of

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[1] Estonian Council of Churches website. http://www.ekn.ee/english.php, 02.08.2021.
[2] Wikipedia. https://et.wikipedia.Org/wiki/Eesti_rahvastik#Rahvuslik_koostis, 02.08.2021.

representatives of other ethnic groups, the most numerous of which are the Slavic ethnic groups: Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians. Of these, the largest group is made up of Russians, who make up 25,2% of the Estonian population.[1] Other ethnic groups apart from the Slavs include Finns (0,59%), Tatars (0,15%), Jews (0,15%), Latvians (0,14%), Lithuanians (0,13%) and Poles (0,13%)[2].

The ethnic composition of Estonia changed considerably during the 20th century. Before World War II, our country was almost mono-ethnic: 88% of the population were Estonians[3]. As a result of the war, escapes, deportations and immigration during the Soviet occupation, the proportion of Estonians decreased significantly and the proportion of Slavs immigrants from the east increased. The composition of minorities also changed: while before World War II the main minorities were Russians, Germans and Swedes, after the war the Germans and Swedes had left and were replaced by Slavic (mainly Russian) immigrants from the former Soviet Union[4]. Many former industrial areas and larger towns still have a high proportion of Russians, and in some towns in north-east Estonia Estonians are in a large minority.

The openness of the 21st century to Europe, and indeed the rest of the world, is likely to further diversify the ethnic composition of the Estonian population. There are currently around 200 nationalities living in Estonia. Admittedly, some of them are represented by just a few people[5]. The main minorities have remained the same. These are mainly Slavs, with a growing proportion of Ukrainians[6]. However, there is a growing number of people of Asian and African origin, for example, who have come here for work or study. In the future, an increase in the proportion of the population of foreign origin is likely, which will challenge our country to cope with religious and cultural diversity in the broadest sense. This also applies to churches and the teaching of religion.

3. Religious distribution of the Estonian population

Estonians have historically been mainly Lutheran. Of the minorities here, however, the Slavs are mainly Orthodox; the Germans, Finns and Latvians are mainly Lutheran; the

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Estonian Statistical Office website, https://vana.stat.ee/60202, 04.08.2021.

[4] Tiit, Ene-Margit. Which nationalities live in Estonia? https://www.stat.ee/et/uudised/millised-rahvused-elavad-eestis, 02.08.2021.

[5] Ibid.

[6] *Ibid.*

Poles and Lithuanians are Catholic; the Tatars are Muslim; and the Jews are Jewish. Estonians living in certain areas of Estonia, such as Setomaa in the south-eastern corner of Estonia, the coastal areas of Pärnu County and the island of Kihnu, have been Orthodox. Today, the picture has become more religiously diverse, with the majority of the population professing no religion. International comparative studies such as the "European Values Study" have shown that the Estonian population, and Estonians in particular, have one of the highest rates of drift away from traditional Christianity in Europe[1].

In the 2000 and 2011 censuses of the Estonian Statistical Office, it was again possible to ask questions about people's religious self-determination after a break of 66 years[2]. This would have been unthinkable in the Soviet-era censuses, as anything to do with religion was excluded or stigmatized from the public sphere. Although asking only two questions about people's religion in a census is inevitably somewhat narrow compared to sociological surveys of religion, the advantage of censuses is that they are a large-scale data set, which allows information to be obtained on smaller religious and ethnic groups not included in the survey sample. This is a major advantage of censuses.

The censuses asked two questions - whether the respondent believed in a particular religion[3], and a second question to specify the religion[4]. What was the breakdown of the population by religion in 2000 and 2011, and what was the change over 10 years? In 2000 29,2% of the Estonian population considered themselves to be of a religion. Among the remainder, there were those who were indifferent to religion (34,1%), atheists (6,1%), those who refused to answer the religion question (8%) and those who could not answer (14,6%) or who simply did not answer this optional question (8%).[5]

The most widespread religion in 2000 was Lutheranism, professed by 13,6% of the population. Orthodoxy came second with 12,8% of the population. These were by far the largest denominations. They were followed by Baptism, Roman Catholicism,

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[1] For more details see e.g. Jaanus, Eva - Liisa; Unt, Marge (2012). Religiousness of Estonians in the European context. *Step down among the people. Articles and discussions on the Spirituality of the Estonian Population* (ed. E. Jõks), 213-229.

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[3] It was also possible to choose not to answer the religion question.

[4] To specify religion, the first option was to use multiple-choice answers, the second option was to use a classifier and the third option was to write the text (the name of the religion) in a free field. – The instructions for the 2011 Census of Population and Housing of the Estonian Statistical Office. https://www.stat.ee/sites/default/files/2020-12/2011._aasta_rahva_ja_eluruumide_loendus._metoodika.Web_.pdf. 07.09.2021.

[5] Ibid.

Pentecostalism, Old Believers, Adventism, Methodism and numerous small Christian denominations, whose members often do not even wish to identify themselves denominationally, but simply call themselves "Christians". The largest of the non-Christian communities were the Jehovah's Witnesses.[1]

In the 2011 Census, the proportion of people in the population who had a religion was almost the same: 29,3% of the population (35,1% of those who were willing and able to answer) said they had a religion. However, the ranking of beliefs had changed. Orthodoxy had risen to the top of the list (16,1%), while the proportion of Lutherans had fallen (9,9%). The number of Orthodox had increased among Estonians and non-Estonians[2]. The number of most Christian communities in Estonia is unfortunately on a downward trend. There are, however, some exceptions, such as Orthodoxy, already mentioned. There is also a positive trend in the number of Christian free and individual churches. Of the other world religions, Islam is represented in Estonia by one congregation. However, the congregation here is small, there are few practicing Muslims[3], and they do not feature in the census statistics. Communities practicing religions of Far Eastern origin are also marginal in terms of statistical weight.

The problem with the census question, however, is that it measures a person's identity rather than affiliation or actual religious behavior. Since for Estonian Russians Orthodoxy is associated with their national identity (the link of Estonian identity with Lutheranism is not expressed in such a direct way), it is likely that many respondents who are actually not very religiously active or church-affiliated will call Orthodoxy "their own".[4] The same phenomenon is possible with regard to Armenians here and their church[5]. In the case of Estonians, on the other hand, the link between national identity and religion may to a certain extent become apparent when the Pagan movement "maausk" is referred to as "theirs": not all the orthodox recorded in the census may be actively involved in this community.

Thus, certain churches and religious movements are clearly delimited by ethnicity because of historical traditions: religious Russians (and other Slavic peoples) are most

[1] Estonian Statistical Office database. https://andmed.stat.ee/et/stat, 05.08.2021.

[2] Tiit, Ene-Margit. Attitudes of the Estonian population towards religion. Estonian Church. http://www.eestikirik.ee/uploads/2013/09/Eesti-elanike-suhtumine-usku.pdf , 26.04.2018

[16] Wikipedia. https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam Eestis. 04.08.2021.

[4] Kilemit, Liina (2013). "What do the latest census data reveal about the faith of Estonians?". Online magazine "Church and Theology". https://kjt.ee/2013/05/mida-naitavad-viimase-rahvaloenduse-andmed-eestimaalaste-usust/. 05.08.2021.

[5] Estonian Statistical Office database. https://andmed.stat.ee/et/stat. 05.08.2021.

likely to embrace Orthodoxy. Estonians mostly Lutheranism. As already mentioned, "maausk" is also mainly embraced by Estonians, as the movement presents itself as a restoration of the traditional ancient Estonian religion. The Armenian and Jewish congregations are also ethnically defined. However, the other major churches and congregations in Estonia are multi- ethnic and are not linked to any particular national identity. Thus, for example, the link between religion and ethnicity does not apply to so-called newer Christian communities such as Adventists, Methodists and Baptists. Those who have joined these denominations are more personally connected to these denominations at the level of individual behavior and attitudes, and for them the census results reflect the reality better. These churches have a significant number of people of Russian nationality, so that the work of the congregations is sometimes carried out in parallel in several languages. The relatively large number of Jehovah's Witness congregations also have a significant number of Russian-speaking members. The Roman Catholic Church is, of course, a global church, and its membership in Estonia is also multi- ethnic.

Speaking of Orthodoxy in Estonia, it should be noted that there are two Orthodox churches in Estonia - the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Estonian Apostolic-Orthodox Church. The former is under the canonical jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, while the latter is an autonomous church under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. The space and focus of this article do not allow us to dwell on the reasons for the formation of the two churches, but it should be mentioned that the two churches differ in terms of their ethnic composition: the congregations of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate are predominantly Russian-speaking, while those of the Estonian Apostolic-Orthodox Church are predominantly Estonian-speaking.

4. Religious beliefs of the Estonian population in the light of sociological studies of religion.

In order to dwell on the ethnic groups here and their religious and ideological attitudes, we need to turn to the results of a fairly recent sociological survey on religion conducted by the Estonian Council of Churches in 2020[1].

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[1] The survey "On Life, Faith and Religion 2020" was carried out by the research company Eesti Uuringukeskus OÜ. The survey was conducted from 25.11.2020 to 31.12.2020. The online survey was combined with a postal survey (N=1000). The questionnaire and the concept of the survey were prepared

It has already been mentioned that, according to census data, nearly a third of the Estonian population believes in some religion. Analyzing the results of the sociological survey of religions, however, reveals a more accurate picture of people's religious identities. In the questionnaire they were offered a number of identities from which they could choose the one that suited them best. In the absence of a preferred identity from the list, they were able to add one themselves. The results were as follows: 28% of Estonians consider themselves spiritual but not religious, 24% non-religious, 22% indifferent to religion, 39% religious, 9% religious or spiritual seekers, 9% atheists and 7% none of the above. Although the number of respondents who explicitly said they were religious was low for this question, 63% of respondents said they felt close to Christianity in the next question. According to 2020 data, 22% of the Estonian population belong to a church or religious movement and 57% have been baptized. At the same time, only 16% attend church services at least 3-4 times a year.[1]

Previous research has shown that, for a number of historical and cultural reasons, the number of people who literally call themselves "believers" is small and may not fully reflect the number of people who actually associate themselves with Christianity at least to some extent and perhaps belong to a church. According to surveys carried out by the Estonian Council of Churches in different years, around 23-25% of respondents identified themselves as Christians. It is therefore difficult to say unequivocally how many people in Estonia today can be considered to be directly or indirectly associated with Christian churches.

31% of respondents feel some affinity with the aforementioned neo-paganism[2]. Since a nature-friendly and environmentally friendly attitude is sometimes attributed to secularism, adherence to this religion probably also intersects with certain ecological views and does not necessarily imply participation in the respective religious community. Eastern religions are also of interest to our people. As many as 24% of respondents feel close to them[3].

But how do the religious and ideological attitudes of the largest ethnic groups here – Estonians and Russians - differ? The results of the "Life, Faith and Religion" surveys

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by the Estonian Council of Churches. The author of this article participated in the preparation of this survey as part of a team of experts.

[1] Estonian Council of Churches survey "About Life, Faith, Religious Life 2020".
http://www.ekn.ee/doc/uudised/EUU2020_esmased_tulemused.pdf. 08.09.2021.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

conducted over the years show that Russians here are generally more Christian than Estonians: they associate themselves more with the Christian church (especially the Orthodox Church), are more baptized, attend church more often and have more Christian religious beliefs than Estonians. They are also more conservative on certain moral and value issues. Notably, the Estonian Council of Churches has also asked questions about these aspects in its surveys. There is also a known interest in people's attitudes towards e.g. euthanasia, abortion, cloning, homosexuality or extramarital affairs. Estonians, on the other hand, are more open to new spirituality and Eastern religions, less involved with Christianity and more liberal on the aforementioned life phenomena and moral issues.[1]

As you can conclude from the above data, the influence of Christian churches and congregations in Estonian society is not very strong today. Despite the fact that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the anti-church policy organised by the occupying power, a "religious boom" briefly emerged in the late 1980s and late 1990s, when large numbers of people joined churches at one time[2] it remained temporary and church and congregation membership began to decline again in the following decades. Understandably, the de-Christianization of our society has been influenced above all by more than half a century of repressive anti-church policies by the Soviet occupation authorities, which resulted in the hostile church losing its social outlets and the opportunity to preach the gospel. On the other hand, fear of repression led frightened people to distance themselves from the church and not dare to socialize their children in the Christian faith. Whole generations grew up with almost no knowledge of Christianity or with prejudices and misconceptions. Thus, we can say that the Christian tradition in Estonia was broken at the level of both society and families, and this is one of the main factors influencing the level off secularization today[3]. But not only. The signs of modernization began to take hold here at the same time as in other European countries, even before the Second World War. Moreover, while it was mentioned earlier that the greater religiousness of the Russians here is supported by the link between Orthodoxy and the national identity of the Russians, such a link is not so explicit in the

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[1] Estonian Council of Churches surveys "About Life, Faith, Religious Life" 2010, 2015.

[2] With the end of atheist pressure, churches were able to operate freely again, and people's interest in and desire for churches was high. Many who had previously been afraid to do so were baptized and confirmed. Among Estonians, mass church membership occurred somewhat earlier than among Russians. However, the "religious boom" was short-lived. On the one hand, the Christian churches were unable to adapt so quickly to the changed situation and, on the other hand, what was said in the church. was apparently distant and incomprehensible to the generations who had been alienated from Christianity for decades and did not sufficiently appeal to them.

[3] See e.g., Remmel, A., Altnurme, R. (2018). Religion, State and Atheism. *Estonian History of Church and Religion* (ed. R. Altnurme), 210-224.

case of Estonians. Or if it is, it is expressed in a somewhat different way. The reason for this is the fact that in the second half of the 19th century, when Estonians began to develop a national self-awareness and national political and cultural thinking, the clergy was dominated by Baltic Germans, who constituted the elite of society at that time. The emerging Estonian nationalism and the elite-controlled church remained on opposite sides of the social spectrum, which unfortunately led to the Christian church's marginal place in the emerging Estonian self-understanding and national narrative.[1] Unfortunately, this still affects our self-understanding today.

5. Challenges and opportunities of religious diversity and multi culturalism in Estonia today

The interaction between different ethnic and religious groups in today's Estonia can safely be described as peaceful and rather cooperative. Let me mention here some of the mechanisms that underpin this.

According to §40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, everyone has freedom of conscience, religion and thought. Membership of churches and religious associations is free. There is no national church. Everyone has the freedom, alone or in association with others, to perform religious services in public or in private, as long as this does not harm public order, health or morals.[2] The Constitution thus provides the legal basis for a situation where everyone is free to believe according to their conscience, to proclaim their faith and puts all religions, regardless of their origin and background, on an equal footing, unless of course they are a threat to society or individuals.

The Christian churches operating in Estonia, as well as some associations of congregations, are members of the Estonian Council of Churches, which maintains theological dialogue between member churches, promotes ecumenical communication, and is a common communication partner of Christian churches with the state. The Council of Churches also provides a common platform for the churches in their outreach work. For example, it covers areas such as media, education, sociology of religion, chaplaincy, ecumenism, life values and ethics, youth work, community work and international relations[3]. Given Estonia's small size, it makes sense to organize large-scale sociological studies of religion covering, for example, the whole of society on a

[1] Karo, V. K. (2007). National narratives and religion. *Multi-religious Estonia II: a selection of studies of religion: special edition of Christianity.* (toim L. Altnurme), 13–46 and Vihuri, V. (2012). Estonian and Christianity through the eyes of clergy. *Step down among the people. Articles and reflections on the spirituality of the Estonian population.* (toim E. Jõks), 24–48.

[27] Constitution of the Republic of Estonia §40, https://pohiseadus.ee/sisu/3511. 05.08.2021.

[28] Estonian Council of Churches website, http://www.ekn.ee/sisu.php?lehe_id=5. 08.09.2021.

joint basis, as this is likely to be beyond the capacity of smaller religious communities. An organization such as the Council of Churches would understandably foster mutual understanding and cooperation between different religious and ethnic groups (e.g. both Orthodox churches).

Due to the large proportion of minorities, their integration into Estonian society has been a major focus of attention throughout the country's independence. Language learning is considered to be very important, as it is the knowledge of the Estonian language that is the "key" to integration into the local society. It enables people to be involved in what is happening in society and offers the most diverse opportunities for participation. It is also important to note that knowledge of the language enables, among other things, participation in the local information space, which gives an understanding of the aspirations and values of our country and people. It is at times of crisis in society that integration deficiencies are felt most acutely. This was the case during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, when information about the restriction and vaccination measures reached Russian-speaking people, who, because of their lack of language skills, prefer to follow only Russian media channels and were therefore excluded from the operational flow of information essential to the crisis.

It was mentioned earlier that our largest churches - the Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate - are largely mono-ethnic by historical tradition. The situation is different, however, for the so-called newer Christian churches and congregations (in particular, e.g. evangelical or charismatic individual congregations and associations of congregations). While in the rest of society there is often talk of a certain risk of ethnic segregation (Russian-language schools, cultural institutions, work collectives, a certain geographical and spatial isolation which creates a situation in which people of different nationalities do not meet each other very often), the religious organization's mentioned above provide a platform for different nationalities to act together. Christians moving here from other parts of the world are also often inclined to join these congregations.

Political scientist Alar Kilp argues in his 2007 article "Faith as a promoter of integration" that religious organizations, both churches and sects, have the potential to act as integrators and creators of social capital if they are sufficiently open. In Estonia, for example, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals and Free Churches, which include both Estonians and non-Estonians, have been remarkably successful in this respect. These congregations consider religious conversion to be more important than communal

affiliation and include people of different nationalities. However, the larger churches, especially of course the Lutheran and Orthodox churches, which are more closely linked to national traditions, tend to remain on different sides of society. The Baptist Union unites both Russian- and Estonian-language congregations, but relations between them are said to be weak. The average respondent, however, sees potential for unification in the larger churches.[1] From the point of view of this article, this is an important observation, which certainly deserves further discussion and attention.

The sociologists Roots, Lilleoja, Beilmann observed on the basis of the data of the 2015 Integration Monitoring Survey that the trust of people of other ethnicities in almost all Estonian social institutions is lower than that of Estonians, with the exception of local governments, which are trusted to the same extent as Estonians, and the church, which is trusted much more[2]. Although it is likely that by "church" people of other nationalities were referring primarily to the Orthodox Church, the survey results are also noteworthy in the light of the general level of secularization in Estonian society. The church is an authority whose opinion is listened to for this group of society, and this knowledge may prove important in moments of crisis in society when it is necessary to address people outside the Estonian- speaking information space. The author of this article also believes that this research deserves more attention and discussion in the future.

In the 2015 sociological survey of religions, the Estonian Council of Churches was interested in the extent to which the Estonian population supports the participation and role of Christian churches in certain social issues. It was found that, in general, the majority of respondents are equally positive about the social role of the church today[3]. However, some non-Estonians expressed the fear that involving only one church, the Lutheran Church, would lead to a greater national polarization of society and further divisions within society. Thus, in those cases where Russians did not support the involvement of the church in the affairs of society, it was still a question of integration rather than an anti-church attitude. They simply want to be more involved. Secondly, in the case of non-Estonians, it is striking that the (Orthodox) church is expected to maintain a certain distance, to keep out of society, to concentrate on its own mission and goals, and even in this case, the attitude against church involvement is not a

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[1] Kilp, Alar (2007) "Faith as a promoter of integration" - Eesti Päevaleht. 28.09.18.

[2] Ave Roots, Laur Lilleoja, Mai Beilmann (2016) "Networked society as a missiology Opportunity. Descriptive part" - *Where are you going, Mariana? Quo vadis Terra Mariana*. Ed. E. Jõks. Estonian Council of Churches. 321-336.

[3] Unfortunately, this role is still rather modest.

rejection of the church.[1]

6. To sum up

This article gave a brief overview of Estonia's ethnic and religious divisions, their background, and discussed very briefly the challenges of religious diversity and multiculturalism in Estonia today.

Estonian society is for historical reasons quite secularized and the role of Christian churches in society is not great. However, the credibility of churches as social institutions is considerable. This gives churches a platform to have a say in the affairs of society. Sociological surveys of religion show that although the vast majority of the Estonian population do not consider themselves to be religious, the attitude towards the church and its activities in society is generally positive.

Our largest churches, such as the Lutheran and Orthodox churches, are traditionally national churches, meaning that they are predominantly of one nationality. In contrast, newer Christian denominations, federations of congregations and smaller individual congregations are often quite multi-ethnic, providing an excellent platform for interaction between different ethnic groups, which contributes to a more cohesive society.

The relative authority and trustworthiness of churches in society, and the cultural and ethnic diversity of some denominations, represent potential as binders and reconcilers of society, which should be harnessed more for the benefit of society as a whole.

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[1] Kilemit, Liina (2018) "Estonians and non-Estonians expectations of the social role of churches in Estonia - two different visions?". Online magazine "Church and Theology". https://kjt.ee/2018/09/eestlaste-ja-mitte-eestlaste-ootused-kirikute-sotsiaalsele-rollile-eestis-kas-kaks-erinevat-nagemust/. 05.08.2021.

Christian Schools in Estonia

Triin Käpp, PhD

This article consists of three parts: first, a description of Estonian society from the perspective of a value paradigm; second, an overview of Christian schools and their role in Estonia and; third, an explanation of the concept of spiritual education, which is used as a synonym to 'Christian values education' in the Estonian context. The article is based on my doctoral thesis, "Christian Values Education in Christian Schools and the Role of the Christian Schools in Estonian Society in the 21st Century".

Estonian society and values

It can be said about the Estonian state that it is a democratic society that can be characterised through several value characteristics. The World Values Survey places Estonia among secular-rational countries[1], while the local survey "Self. World. Media" confirms that Estonians prioritise physical well-being and a safe environment[2]. Both surveys lead to the conclusion that, while the role of self-expression as an important value is slowly increasing in Estonian society, the scale is still heavily weighted towards survival values.

However, democracy is not something that lends itself to an unambiguous definition. To gain a better understanding of the stance of the Estonian state towards democracy, I examined the Constitution which, while being a foundational document of statehood, is also a compromise between different and occasionally conflicting values. For instance, in his presentation "Values in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia"[3], Hent Kalmo has observed the difficulty of reducing the Constitution to individual values. If at all, it can only be done in the preamble, which states that the Estonian state is founded on liberty, justice and the rule of law, but it becomes evident in a broader perspective that the Constitution is a document promoting a number of different values,

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[1] World Values Survey „Findings and insights", http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp Accessed on 14 May 2019.

[2] Peeter Vihalemm ja Anu Masso, „'Mina. Maailm. Meedia' metoodikast", *Eesti ühiskond kiirenevas ajas. Uuringu „Mina. Maailm. Meedia." 2002–2014 tulemused.* (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 2017), 96–97.

[3] On 28 November 2014 at the joint conference "Rahva tahe – seadustega kujundatav või väljendatav?" of the University of Tartu Centre for Ethics and the Office of the Chancellor of Justice. The presentation can be viewed on-demand at https://www.uttv.ee/naita?id=21168.

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and often also a compromise that can defend multiple conflicting values. As an example, Kalmo uses the debates about the Registered Partnership Act, which seems to protect the seemingly conflicting values of the so-called 'traditional' family and the inviolability of everyone's family life, irrespective of its form (referring to §§ 26 and 27 of the Constitution)[1].

It is a clear illustration of the value paradox that is inherent in democracy, i.e., a genuine possibility to support a wide range of different values. This is also reflected in the field of education. Schools and society are very closely connected and an understanding of the values of a society can be used to form assumptions about the values promoted at schools, or it can provide grounds for individual schools to choose the values that facilitate movement in a desired direction. As the question of whether schools exert a greater influence on society or are more likely to be influenced by society can never be fully answered, it is best seen as a process of continual interaction.

In order to understand democracy in the 21st century in particular, I would like to highlight two further important aspects: (1) power relations between majorities and minorities, and (2) a-culture.

The question of majorities and minorities can be examined at the level of groups or individuals, with both having links to the school context. In education, there are many discussions about providing equal content in a situation where students have different individual needs, which always leads to the question about ensuring a fair approach that would cater for the development needs of each and every student. The Estonian school network is based on the principle of providing all residents of the country with equal access to education. Most schools are managed by local municipalities, but there are also some state schools (state upper secondary schools) that belong to the administrative area of the Ministry of Education. Private schools can supplement education with certain ideological or pedagogical aspects (e.g., Christian worldview, Waldorf education) and offer subjects that cannot be taught at a public school (e.g., denominational religious education)[2]. As a result, the format of a private school is the only way to establish a Christian/denominational school in Estonia. There were 58 private schools with different orientations in Estonia in the school year 2021/22, which accounted for 11% of all Estonian schools (517 general education schools)[3].

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[1] Hent Kalmo, „Väärtustest Eesti Vabariigi põhiseaduses" (joint conference "Rahva tahe – seadustega kujundatav või väljendatav?" of the University of Tartu Centre for Ethics and the Office of the Chancellor of Justice, Tallinn, 28 November 2014), https://www.eetika.ee/et/28-november-2014.

[2] §1(7,8) of the national curriculum for basic schools; §11(5) of the Private Schools Act.

[3] Statistics website of the Ministry of Education and Research, www.haridussilm.ee, accessed on 21 October 2020.

In the context of Christian schools, it is important to note that, according to the population and housing census of 2011, self-reported Christians constitute 28% of the population[1] and 19% of the people would describe themselves as religious according to the "Life, Religion and Religious Life 2020" survey[2]. In statistical terms, they obviously constitute a minority.

The term 'a-culture' was coined by Jo Cairnsilt in reference to the 21st century multicultural democratic societies where diverse cultures coexist, but there is no single intrinsic culture governing the state – it cannot be said that all groups of people share the exact same values and rely on similar basic principles. There is no 'common consciousness'[3]. Sanjay Seth takes a step further, speculating whether it would make more sense to describe a liberal society as a collection of individuals who choose their own culture in that society, but notes that such a solution would disregard the role of culture in forming an individual as a whole and, therefore, is probably inaccurate[4].

The complexity of the situation has been summarised by Andrew Wright who writes that, "Given the plurality of choices and options before us, it is increasingly difficult to make sense of a diverse and complex world. This has led, perhaps inevitably, to the collapse of a single shared high culture and its fragmentation into a diverse range of popular cultures"[5]. Without going into an assessment of high culture vs. popular culture, it is important to note that the absence of a set cultural belief leads to fragmentation of society.

Both issues are important in the context of Christian education, as Christians and Christian schools constitute a minority in Estonia and, in an a-cultural society, it is particularly relevant to ask who is responsible for establishing the values of a specific interest group. As the content of school education lays the foundation for entire society and the value spheres of school and society cannot be too different in their essence, it is important to examine the decisions made by schools in this respect, and the opportunities they have.

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[1] Statistikaamet „Rahva ja eluruumide loendus 2011", https://www.stat.ee/rel2011. Accessed on 20 September 2017.
[2] http://www.ekn.ee/doc/uudised/EUU2020_esmased_tulemused.pdf
[3] Cairns, Jo; Faith Schools and Society; Continuud International Publishing Group; New York, USA, 2009, 34
[4] Sanjay Seth, „Liberalism and the Politics of (Multi)Culture: Or, Plurality Is Not Difference", *Postcolonial Studies* 4, nr 1 (aprill 2001), 70–71, https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790120046889.
[5] Andrew Wright, *Religion, education, and post-modernity* (London ; New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004), 3.

If we accept the argument that one of the greatest educational crises of the present is related to the fact that the school is no longer linked to a particular community and its system of values[1], we can come to a conclusion that a-culture is simultaneously a problem and an opportunity. It is a problem, because our values can be quite different from each other, and we need to learn how to live side by side with people who have different values. Conversely, a-culture can create a sense of uprootedness or lack of grip due to the absence of a shared social framework about things that need to be valued the most. However, with regard to the majority-minority question, it also creates an opportunity to give more liberty to minorities, enabling them to rely on their own worldview, which should indeed be encouraged in a liberal democracy. There is a strong link to the school network because, very generally, the school system tends to be shaped by the majority and the option of greater differentiation (more consideration for minorities) is currently provided by private education. In the context of Christian education, Christianity as a worldview can be seen as providing a kind of fulcrum and a more specific set of values, even though things are not black and white within Christianity, either, as I observed before.

The survey "Life, Religion, and Religious Life 2015" provides an important insight into the image of Christian schools and religious education in general in Estonian society. It must be admitted that Christian schools are still a rather novel phenomenon and need to become a more established part of the educational landscape. I hope that subsequent surveys will add more material for comparison to see whether there is an increase in awareness over the years. The fear of brainwashing is still present in society and, curiously, Christian schools are also seen as institutions imposing a stricter discipline. However, the prevalent observation is lack of information, which is reflected both, in the answers where respondents outright admit to their ignorance and in semi-mythical opinions about brainwashing and such. This, in turn, corresponds to Estonia's placement in the secular corner that appears from the World Values Survey. It would be very important to repeat the survey after a considerable number of classes have finished their studies (for many schools, 2022 is the year when their first students complete the curriculum), which would mean that a greater portion of society will have had some kind of experience with Christian schools. In addition, a repeat survey would

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[1] Hargreaves, *Changing teachers, changing times*, 58. „The decline of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is the prime purpose underpinning schooling and teaching in a context of greater religios, cultural and ethnic diversity penetrating questions about the moral purposes of education. One of the greatest educational crises of the postmodern age is the collapse of the common school: a school tied to the community and having a clear sense of the social and moral values it should instil."

indicate if and to what extent Estonia has shifted from survival towards self-expression on the world values scale, and how this has affected the value content of education.

This is the general picture of values in Estonia where Christian schools with their values form a part of the whole.

Christian schools in Estonia

There are in total 12 Christian private schools in Estonia, with the majority of them offering basic education, but increasingly moving towards becoming upper secondary schools. In the school year 2021/2022, these schools have a total of 2,571 students, including 265 children going to the kindergartens at the schools[1]. Denominational Christian education is only possible in private schools; religious education as an elective subject can be taught in general education, but it is available only in some schools. Consequently, only a minor part of Estonian society has access to Christian education, and it is important to ask: What is the role of the minority Christian schools, how do Christian schools prepare children for living and coping in an a-cultural or multicultural liberal society, and whether and how development of a child's identity is connected to raising them as a citizen in a liberal society[2]?

The question of necessity of Christian schools in the context of liberal democracy tends to produce two diverging opinions:

- Christian schools should not exist, because such separation is not consistent with liberal values.
- Christian schools are essential, as they are the only way to ensure that people with different worldviews have an opportunity to educate their children accordingly.

This difference of opinions is largely caused by the different ways liberal values are interpreted. As we have seen before, it is difficult to provide an unambiguous definition of liberalism. I describe liberal democracy primarily as a mode of governance that is obviously based on values but at the same time does not require a fundamental philosophical solution but rather, tends to lead to an a-cultural solution. In addition, as our Constitution declares that we have freedom of religion and freedom of thought in our state[3], we cannot expect everyone here to have a single, universally applicable worldview. Instead, liberal democracy should ensure the existence of several

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[1] http://www.kristlik.edu.ee/kool/ Accessed on 04.02.2022.

[2] Baker, *Swimming against the tide*, 11.

[3] **§**40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia.

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educational institutions with different worldviews and thus, the argument that Christian schools are not consistent with liberal values is contradicting itself.

For the first opinion, the issue is about separation – there is a fear that children in Christian schools are raised in a 'bubble', lacking contact with 'real life'. In this context, 'real life' is understood as a world where people come into contact with different cultures on a daily basis and live alongside them. If all children of Christian families are brought to study in Christian schools, it means that (a) they have no opportunity to study and live alongside children who have different worldviews and, (b) others have no opportunity to learn about the Christian worldview. Furthermore, in conversations I have encountered the fear that a Christian school cultivates monocultural children who will be in a vulnerable position as adults and can potentially have a destructive impact on society.

The main argument of the proponents of the second opinion is based on the freedom of consciousness, religion and thought that stems from human rights[1] and as indicated above, parents have the prerogative to make decisions about their children's education[2]. If a parent prefers their child to be raised in a value sphere that is similar both at home and at school, they need to have a real choice and access to schools that define themselves through worldviews. At present, this is ensured primarily through private schools in Estonia[3].

In my relevant study, I examined the issue more specifically from four perspectives and tried to assemble a broader picture. I asked, "What is the role of Christian schools in the 21st century Estonia

- o according to school leaders;
- o in relation to the results of the survey "Life, Religion, and Religious Life 2015";
- o in relation to values appreciated in Estonia;
- o in comparison with other countries?"

According to Christian school leaders, Christian schools are important in our society to provide Christian families with an option of aligning the values at home and at school

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[1] **§40** of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia.

[2] **§37** of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia**.**

[3] For example, the principles of the Union of Estonian Christian Private Schools, http://www.kristlik.edu.ee/new/mtu/. Accessed on 4 October 2017. In this context, it is also important to differentiate between worldview schools and the values formulated by the schools. Estonian schools are required to have a development plan, which sets out the values of the school; consequently, all schools have drafted a statement of their values, but private schools tend to identify themselves more directly as worldview-based schools.

where the child spends the largest part of the day, and of filling the gap in a situation where parents would like their child to receive religious education but cannot provide it on their own due to a lack of experience. In both cases, acquiring respective vocabulary and the courage and liberty to use that vocabulary plays an important role. However, the target group is not limited to children from Christian families; alignment of values is often seen from a broader perspective. The background here is a social gap, a period when Christian values were not spoken of, which has created a deficit of basic knowledge on religion.

The results of the survey "Life, Religion, and Religious Life 2015" reveal a cautious attitude towards Christian schools. Slightly less than half of the respondents were supportive or rather supportive of Christian schools, and nearly half of them were Christians. Every fifth respondent would have been prepared to send their child to a Christian school and 2/3 of those respondents were Christians.

Spiritual education, knowledge of God, information about Christianity, the Bible and religious customs, engagement with moral and ethical topics were identified as the main strengths of Christian schools. Conversely, those who preferred to avoid Christian schools did not want religious topics to be imposed on their children, did not live in a Christian family, or simply did not consider it necessary and had limited knowledge about the schools.

How does this fit with the general value appreciation in Estonia? The first answer is given by the aforementioned survey "Life, Religion, and Religious Life 2015" (EUU 2015) where respondents were hesitant about the necessity of Christian schools. Slightly less than half of the respondents thought that they are necessary, which makes sense if we consider our position on the Inglehart-Welzel world values map. Our clear placement in the secular-rationalist and survival sector indicates that religious choices are not a priority in our society, with only 18.8% of respondents saying that religiosity is an important trait to be cultivated in children. This background helps to understand the slight scepticism about Christian schools or the lack of awareness of their importance that is reflected in the results of EUU 2015. Sometimes, Christian schools are regarded through a lens of vicar Christianity – the attitude towards them is positive, but people still prefer to choose a different educational institution for their own children.

In an a-cultural or multicultural society, there are two options for education: either create differentiated schools for all cultural groups or try to support mingling of cultures. The first position emphasises alignment of values at home and at school, while the second prioritises the experience of functioning in a multicultural society. This issue

is currently not particularly high on the Estonian public agenda but, based on the experience of other countries, potential problems can be associated with both, segregation in Christian schools (with Christians assembling together and not encountering representatives of other worldviews) and absence of Christians from municipal schools (non-Christian children do not meet their Christian peers). This issue should be acknowledged but considering the marginal role of Christian schools at this moment, it need not be over-emphasised. It is also important to consider that, in addition to children from Christian families, Christian schools include students from a diverse range of family backgrounds. The other aspect of this question is development of a child's identity in the form of an integrated self-image, which is easier when the child acquires firm roots, supported by the alignment of values at home and at school. In an a-cultural society, this approach supports a more concrete 'rooting' of children. On the scale of poor and strong position of religious schools, developed by Johan de Jong and Ger Snik[1], Estonian Christian schools can be classified as moderate religious schools. The schools are based on a particular religious tradition, but also provide broader knowledge of other religions and different religious approaches, which supports students' future coping in a multicultural environment.

In conclusion, it can be said that Christian schools play a multi-faceted role in Estonia and different stakeholders can have diverging perspectives in this regard. In general, their existence increases the options available to parents in choosing an education path for their children. For many families, Christian schools fill a social gap, as they on their own would not be able to provide their children with religious education. Being a full and equal part of the Estonian school network according to the applicable Private Schools Act, Christian schools can also serve as a kind of lab, testing different approaches to the provision of education. According to EUU 2015, providing knowledge about religion was seen as the main strength of Christian schools but unfortunately, this question was no longer included in the new survey and there is no corresponding information for 2020. It could be argued, somewhat controversially, that Christian schools in the Estonian context can often be more multi-cultural than they are in other countries, because they emphasise questions of values education and identity and provide children in a safe environment with religious vocabulary, which they can then use to express and share their religious beliefs with their peers, whereas such opportunity is usually not available in municipal schools. In a society that can be

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[1] Jong, Johan De, ja Ger Snik. „Why Should States Fund Denominational Schools?" *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 36, nr 4 (2002): 573–87.

described through the keywords of 'liberal democracy' and 'a-culture', Christian education is one possible approach among others.

Spiritual education

In the context of Christian schools, the term 'spiritual education' is sometimes used instead of or alongside the concept of 'values education'. This term is not used only in the narrow Christian (school) context, but it has gained a wider use[1]. This expression cannot be found in the Estonian Thesaurus, which seems to indicate that it is a relatively recent term. At the same time, the ideas of educating and caring for one's spirit have been present for a long time, including in one of Estonian core texts, the novel "Spring" by Oskar Luts.

Christian schools use the term 'spiritual education' as an important concept related to values education, often as a synonym to Christian values education. While religious education plays an important role in spiritual education, it is not exclusively limited to this domain. For instance, the Development Plan of St. Peter's Lutheran School of Tartu states:

"Christian values education or spiritual education: St. Peter's School provides spiritual education that:

– is based on Christian ethics and human values and establishes the foundation for the development of socially responsible individuals who respect the principles of civil society;

– presents Christian culture, the Lutheran tradition, Estonian cultural heritage and the history of the historic St. Peter's school."[2]

The Development Plan of Kaarli School specifies:

"We strive towards spiritual growth – fulfilment of internal spiritual education."[3]

Therefore, based on the perspective of Christian schools, I would propose the following definition of spiritual education: Spiritual education means everything that is additional

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[1] For instance, on the website of Petrone Print https://petroneprint.ee/lasteraamatud/sari-mis-opetab-ajalugu-ja-annab-hingeharidust/ and in Virumaa Teataja https://virumaateataja.postimees.ee/2266931/kultuur-rektor-tostab-kilbile-hingeharidus.

[2] Tartu Luterliku Peetri Kooli arengukava 2016–2019 http://www.luterlik.edu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/TLPK-arengukava_2016-2019-1.pdf.

[3] Kaarli kooli arengukava 2016–2019, https://www.kaarlikool.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/KAARLI-KOOLI-ARENGUKAVA-2016-2019.pdf.

to knowledge at school, including engagement with students' beliefs and values, and answering their questions about being human and about acting in this God-created world.

The English term 'spiritual education' is used as the closest equivalent to the Estonian term 'hingeharidus'. However, it is important to note that the concept of spirituality can be understood differently in different cultures, and it should be approached with certain reservation. For instance, Canadian researcher Joyce E. Bellous writes about inclusive spiritual education as something that helps us establish connections with each other and with the world. According to her, the purpose of spiritual education is to equip people with tools of spiritual self-expression through word, emotions, symbols and action.[1]

Another issue pertains to the question whether spiritual education is necessarily linked to a religious denomination or can it be 'religiously neutral'. An important debate in this issue took place in the 1990ies in the United Kingdom, where spiritual education has been identified as an important goal of education[2]. In this context, I would like to illustrate the diverging approaches to spiritual education by summarising the trains of thought developed by some authors, namely Nigel Blake, David Carr, and Jeff Lewis.

David Carr is primarily interested in the meaning of the word 'spiritual', which does not lend itself to a clear solution, because it is indeed a highly complex concept. In particular, he emphasises its connection with the transcendent and argues that spiritual education should be limited to specific subjects, it cannot be something universal or holistic.[3] Thus, Carr would permit spiritual education at schools, but only as one of the subjects among others, not as something general.

Nigel Blake draws a rather strong dividing line between spiritual education and other kinds of education, arguing that spirituality and school education can never go hand in hand, because they are based on conflicting ideas and spirituality should always be linked to specific religious beliefs. It belongs to the teaching and traditions of churches and monasteries, which are not appropriate in the context of public schools.[4] On the one hand, these two positions can be regarded as similar: spiritual education must be kept separate; it is comparable to a differentiation between sacred and profane. On the other hand, they are very different in terms of their views about spiritual education

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[1] Joyce E. Bellous, „An Inclusive Spiritual Education", *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 24, nr 4 (2. oktoober 2019), 389–400, https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2019.1675603.

[2] Elise Nemliher, „Spirituaalsuse arengu toetamine koolis – Eesti ja Inglismaa õppekavade sisuanalüüs ja võrdlus" (Magistritöö, Tartu, Tartu Ülikool, 2017), 11–13.

[3] David Carr, „Towards a Distinctive Conception of Spiritual Education", *Oxford Review of Education* 21(1) (1995), 83–98.

[4] Nigel Blake, „Against Spiritual Education", *Oxford Review of Education* 22(4) (1996), 443–456.

IRENE Innovative Religious Education
NEtwork: educating to the religious diversity

having a place in schools or not. Similarly, Pike argues that all problems associated with Christian education can be reduced to the question of whether the world can be divided into private and public spheres, with religion being located exclusively in the private sphere.[1]

The third position is represented by Jeff Lewis, whose argument is based on the holistic dimension of spiritual education. According to him, spirituality should not be understood as a separate category, but rather as a characteristic or a phenomenon. He summarises his views with the idea that spiritual education should not be limited to the domain of religious education, morals or arts. Instead, it is something that encompasses every student as a whole and supports their academic and social progress and is therefore essential or even inevitable in the context of education.[2]

Lewis' idea is quite similar to the approach of Christian schools that is also based on a holistic view of the human being. In the case of the arguments by Carr and Blake, it is important to see both the need for clarity of thought as well as the risk of getting entangled in merely one aspect of the concept. The Estonian term 'hingeharidus' has not yet undergone such a specific discussion to facilitate questions about where, by whom and how can or should the spirit be educated or whether 'education' is even the most appropriate word in this context. In my opinion, society perceives it mainly as a concept that treats the human being as a whole and provides one possible answer to the question about other purposes of education beyond the provision of theoretical knowledge. At the start of the chapter, I wrote about the interconnection between education and upbringing; similarly, spiritual education broadens the perspective on education by supplementing provision of knowledge with another dimension – engagement with beliefs and values of students. The particular fit of this concept in the Estonian cultural sphere is an interesting research question in its own right, which would deserve a broad survey and would be well suited as a topic for the next round of "Life, Religion, and Religious Life".

It could be said in conclusion that a spiritual education approach has been closely linked to the targets of basic schools and upper secondary schools[3] in focusing on both education and upbringing of students – both reflect a holistic view of students. In my

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[1] Mark A. Pike, „The Challenge of Christian Schooling in a Secular Society", *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 13, nr 2 (september 2004): 149–66, https://doi.org/10.1080/10656210409484967.
[2] Jeff Lewis, „Spiritual Education as the Cultivation of Qualities of the Heart and Mind. A Reply to Blake and Carr", *Oxford Review of Education* 26(2) (2000), 362–383.
[3] §3 of the national curriculum for basic schools and §3 of the national curriculum for upper secondary schools.

opinion, Estonia has adopted a holistic concept of spiritual education based on the Pauline idea of caring equally for the human spirit, soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23).

How is spiritual education related to Christian values education? Are they synonymous or is Christian values education a broader concept, with spiritual education being only one possible methodology?

As I observed above, from the perspective of Christian schools, spiritual education means something that is additional to knowledge at school, including engagement with children's beliefs and values, and answering their questions about being human and about acting in this God-created world. In this context, it is important to see the similarities and differences between spiritual education and character-building. On the one hand, the approaches are rather similar – there are no methods that can be applied in a uniform manner and the goal is rather a holistic view of the human being. On the other hand, the names itself highlight the differences in emphasis – spiritual education and character-building. Compared to the concept of character, the concept of spirit has a more timeless character in both the Estonian language and the Christian perspective. Therefore, the concept of spiritual education is a better fit for Christian education, but it does not mean that it cannot include aspects of character-building. Spiritual education, as I have defined it in this study, is integrating in its essence and is likely to facilitate application or combination of all the different methods of values education. Consequently, it cannot be seen as the one and only approach to practicing values education; rather, it resembles the notion of integrational ethical education suggested by Berkowitz and Bier.

It also important to define the central value of spiritual education. If obedience is the central value in inculcation, self-awareness in values clarification, fairness in the cognitive approach, and care in character-building[1], then what is the central value of spiritual education? Based on my definition, a propose that there are two values: **integrity and balance**. Looking at the central values of different approaches in values education and studying them in the context of Christian ethics, the conclusion seems to confirm what I wrote above, namely that values clarification is the furthest from Christian values education, inculcation is mostly based on the Old Testament paradigm of the Ten Commandments, the underlying fairness of the cognitive approach can be viewed from the perspective of the Ten Commandments as well as Pauline theology, and care as the foundational element of character-building is most visible in the context

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[1] Schihalejev ja Jung, „Erinevad väärtuskasvatuslikud lähenemised", 20.

of the Sermon on the Mount. Integrity and balance as the characteristic features of spiritual education bring the aforementioned values together and supplement them with a transcendental dimension (spirit, soul and body). Therefore, I believe that spiritual education is a very suitable approach for Christian values education and they are often used as synonyms in the context of Estonian Christian schools, even though, in a broader perspective, Christian values education can also include other possible approaches.

Conclusion

Estonia is a liberal democracy where religion plays a relatively marginal role in society as a whole. However, the relative importance of Christian schools is gradually increasing and they are seen as necessary for society due to a low level of general religious literacy. The concept of spiritual education is frequently used and it means everything that is additional to knowledge at school, including engagement with students' beliefs and values, and answering their questions about being human and about acting in this God-created world.

Religious Education in Estonian General Education Schools

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There are multiple models of religious education in Europe, depending on the country. In all cases, their roots go back to the respective local history of religion and education. This article discusses religious education[1] in general education schools, financed by Estonian municipalities and the central government. It presents a brief overview of its development in the past 30 years, the national subject syllabi, and problems associated with religiously unbiased teaching. The discussion also covers potential prospects of religious education in Estonia.

Religious education from restoration of independence until 2010

Provision of education on religion was restarted shortly before restoration of Estonia's independence[2]. Many schools introduced a new optional subject of religious education, which was back then usually named as *usuõpetus*. Typically for the curricula of that period, they did not include descriptions of optional subjects. While schools had access to advisory subject syllabi of religious education, the content of the subject was mostly unregulated and variable between schools. The intention was to continue with religious education from the point where it had been interrupted with the occupation of 1940. While Estonian religious education of the 1930s was focused on Christianity, the subject syllabi of that period already included information on other religions.

In the early 2000s, Pille Valk created the concept of religious education for Estonian schools and a contextual model for development of a subject syllabus, which enabled answering questions about the nature, general principles, objectives, contents and organisation of religious education (Valk 2002: 47–52; Valk 2010: 531–532). The concept was developed in the light of the post-Communist context and laid the foundations for modernisation and harmonisation of religious education. The emphasis shifted from Christianity-influenced religious education to non-confessional religious studies.

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[1]   There is a distinction in Estonian terminology and legislation between 'confessional religious education' (*usuõpetus*; teaching primarily one religion) and 'non-confessional religious studies' (*usundiõpetus*; presenting different religions, based on a pluralist approach; the term is used since 2010 in the national curricula to refer to the subject that covers different religions). In addition, the umbrella term 'religious education' (*religiooniõpetus*; teaching one or several religions at school) is used to cover both confessional and non-confessional forms of study.

[2]   For a more extensive study of religious education in Estonia, see Schihalejev 2014.

Harmonisation of religious education practice was further supported by training of religious education teachers. The first teachers of religion in Estonia after restoration of independence were trained in the early 1990s in Finland. Then, programs for teachers of religion were opened at the theological faculty of the University of Tartu, re-established in 1991, and at private schools of theology. In the latter, the training of teachers remained a temporary occurrence (Schihalejev 2014: 92–94).

Nevertheless, for many years, there were intense debates in the media about the content and relevance of religious education. The different parties had rather diverse underlying concepts about the nature of religious education (Altnurme 2006: 87–88). Some were afraid that it would be confessional religious education and the issue of teachers' religious bias was mentioned as well. The predominant public opinion was that if the subject is taught by Christian clergy or Christian teachers, they will attempt to convert children to Christianity (Valk 1999). However, a study by Valk about the attitudes and expectations of students, teachers and school principals in relation to religious education, conducted in the early 2000s, indicated a widespread consensus among teachers about suitability of the model of non-confessional religious studies for Estonian schools (Valk 2003; 2018).

Subject syllabi of religious education in 2010/2011

The Estonian education standard is established with national curricula based on a tradition that goes back an entire century. A division between basic schools and upper secondary schools was introduced in 2010 and new national curricula were adopted, to be used by schools for developing their own curricula. For the first time, the national curricula also included a description of religious education as an optional subject. The respective subject syllabi are based on the model of contextual approach, created by Valk, and were developed from her subject syllabi. The subject syllabus of religious studies for basic schools specifies three courses: "Customs, Stories and Values" in the first stage, "Values and Choices" in the second stage, and "One World, Different Religions" in the third stage of study (National Curriculum for Basic Schools 2011). The syllabus for upper secondary schools includes two 35-hour courses: "Humanity and Religion" and "The Religious Landscape of Estonia" (National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools 2011). They can be supplemented with other, more comprehensive courses.

The general description of the subject in the syllabus for both basic schools and upper secondary schools specifies that the subject provides an introduction to different religions without advertising any particular religion. The goal is to improve understanding of the role of religion in society, culture and individual lives. The general principles of the subject syllabi specify that:

1) the underlying principle is recognition of freedom of religion and thought;
2) students are not expected to accept any particular worldview as a norm;
3) students are not guided towards acceptance of a particular religion;
4) the learning about different religions and worldviews is based on a "balanced scientific approach";
5) the subject cannot be viewed as advertising "any particular church, congregation or other religions association" (National Curriculum for Basic Schools 2011; National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools 2011).

The learning contents of the curricula for basic schools and upper secondary schools are expected to form an integrated whole. For instance, the focus of the basic school 3rd stage course "One World, Different Religions" is on learning about the major religions of the world. The course covers their origins, major figures, rituals and cultural output, as well as the main viewpoints of their teaching and ethical doctrine. At least five major religions are studied in greater detail (National Curriculum for Basic Schools 2011). This course provides basic knowledge about world religions and serves as an introduction for the courses described in the subject syllabi for upper secondary schools.

Based on a model of classifying the types of religious education as confessional and non-confessional (see, e.g., Cush 2011; Schreiner 2011), the described general principles, learning objectives and contents indicate that the subject syllabi in question represent non-confessional religious education. The non-confessional model of religious education is also evident from the legal organisation of the subject. Estonian legislation does not grant any religion the right to control religious education in public schools (Kiviorg 2013: 94). Legal organisation of religious studies is within the jurisdiction of the Estonian government through national curricula. There is a difference in religious education between state and municipal schools on the one hand and private schools on the other hand. From 2010, confessional religious education can be provided only in private schools[1] on a voluntary basis for students (Private Schools Act 2010).

Religious education in Estonia has one distinctive feature compared to the organisation of religious education in other European countries. The standard practice is that confessional religious education is provided as an optional subject by different religious communities, whereas non-confessional religious education are provided by the schools and the government as a mandatory subject (Schreiner 2007: 11–12). While the Estonian model is similarly based on non-confessional religious education provided by the government, it is an optional subject (cf. Schihalejev 2015: 98–101).

Teaching of religious education in the past decade

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[1] The specific courses of religious education can be offered under different titles in private schools as well as in municipal and state schools.

As religious studies are an optional subject, it has been difficult to obtain an overview of the number of schools where it has been provided over the years (Härm, Schihalejev 2019: 92). For instance, the title of the subject can differ from the one specified in legislation. The adoption of the new curricula in 2010, when the subject was named as 'religious studies' created clarity at the legislative level. However, as these curricula were implemented on a gradual basis, the titles of the subject have not been harmonised across schools. In addition, schools can offer their own optional courses, in which case a school can use, for various reasons, another title for the subject that deals with different religions[1]. It is also possible that a school offers religious studies as an optional subject, but there is a minimum number of students who need to be registered for the course in order for it to be taught in a particular school year. Some schools only offer certain elective subjects every second or third year[2].

Even though there is no comprehensive overview of the number of schools where religious studies are taught in any given school year, or the titles used for this subject, it is notable that religious studies are more likely to be offered in upper secondary schools than in basic schools. According to the Estonian Education Information System, religious studies were taught in 2018 under different titles in 15-16 schools at the first, second and third stages of study, but in 43 schools at the upper secondary stage. In addition, surveys conducted among teachers indicate that there have been more than ten schools every year that have provided religious studies, without it being reflected in the Estonian Education Information System (Härm, Schihalejev 2019: 92-95). The above observations alone should make it clear that there is a great variability between schools in the organisation of religious studies and in the emphasis of learning objectives. For this reason, Olga Schihalejev has described the Estonian case as a "natural laboratory" for studying the effects of the different models of religious education (Schihalejev 2013: 75). In particular, the diversity of religious education in Estonia is something that might attract international interest.

The 2010 National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools reserves a significant portion of the course load for optional subjects. However, there have been few studies on the optional subjects that are actually taught. Nevertheless, the available data indicate that there are some challenges[3]. Sometimes, teachers lack any support in the form of subject syllabi, textbooks or learning resources, for instance. In this respect, the situation with religious studies is relatively good compared to some of the other optional

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[1] The diversity of the titles of the subject can be a reflection of the diversity of learning objectives and contents.

[2] All these options are reflected in the Estonian Education Information System, which is the man source of information on the state, municipal and private schools that offer courses on religion.

[3] For more details, see Härm 2021: 80-104.

subjects. There are, finally, national curricula that present a shared understanding of the general principles of religious studies for schools and society at large. There are original textbooks or Estonian translations of learning resources for different stages of study. However, achieving the learning outcomes can pose a challenge in religious studies as an optional subject due to students' lower motivation compared to mandatory subjects.

In case of optional subjects, there can be a discrepancy between the professional autonomy of teachers and the available professional support. While teachers of religious studies as an optional subject have greater professional autonomy compared to teachers of core subjects, especially those where sate examinations are required, this comes with an expectation of a high level of professionalism. However, teachers can lack resources required for high professional standards simply because it is not a core subject. For instance, they may not have the time for attending refresher training or acquiring the required professional qualifications.

Teacher training for religious education and the ambiguous situation of teachers of religion

In Estonia, both basic school and upper secondary school teachers are required to have a master's degree or equivalent qualification, plus completed professional training as a teacher. However, teachers of optional subjects in upper secondary schools are only required to have higher education (Direktori, õppealajuhataja, õpetajate... 2013, § 3 (1) and (2)).

The specialist training in religious education can be completed in the master's program of Religious Studies and Theology at the University of Tartu where future teachers can receive training in religion and pedagogics, as well as the professional qualification of a teacher of religious studies. School of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Tarty also offers refresher training in religious education. For instance, working teachers have an opportunity to acquire the professional qualification of a teacher of religious studies in a retraining program. Most of the teachers of religious studies who are currently working at Estonian schools have completed their training in religion and/or religious education during the past 30 years at the University of Tartu or private schools of theology. However, some of them have no formal training in the specialty.

Freathy, Parker, Schweitzer and Simojoki have developed a threefold framework for researching professionalisation of religious education teachers (Freathy *et al*. 2016). Observation of Estonian teachers of religion in this framework reveals that they are in an ambiguous situation. The first level of this framework is the institutional structure of RE teacher training, including official curricula, which is available at the University of Tartu. However, the qualification requirements for teachers of optional courses have

been lowered in recent years – it is sufficient if they have higher education, irrespective of specialisation.

Ambiguities also appear at the second level of professional self-organisation and professional politics. Whereas previous subject syllabi were of an advisory nature, religious studies have been described as an optional subject in the curricula of 2010. It is particularly important because national curricula are the foundation of the education standard in Estonia. At the same time, religious studies being an optional subject has consequences for the entire organisational side and status of the subject. The professional association of RE teachers, which was once an active organisation, does no longer exist. However, there is a website for religious education (Usundiõpetus 2022). It reveals that there is a Pille Valk Scholarship, and people can join a mailing list of teachers of religious education as well as a Facebook community. Students can participate in subject competitions on religious studies (Usundiõpetuse olümpiaad 2022).

The third level of the professionalisation framework of RE teachers refers to professional knowledge. The most prominent ambiguity in this respect pertains to the fact that there are teachers whose professional knowledge is not based on academic training. However, different levels of academic training and refresher training play a key role for teachers in the acquisition and maintenance of professional skills.

Unbiased teaching of religious studies

The prevalent concept of religious studies in Estonian municipal and state upper secondary schools is based on the model of non-confessional religious studies, which present different religions and should be taught in an unbiased manner. Adherence to this principle is assumed even if the subject is taught under a different title. But what does religiously unbiased and impartial teaching mean for teachers? Interviews with teachers of religious studies[1] revealed the need to refrain from disparaging different religions and their representatives, and to create a tolerant atmosphere in the classroom. According to teachers, it was also important that teachers do not advertise their own views or opinions. Furthermore, the interviewed teachers highlighted students' beliefs about religion, emphasising the need to cultivate a tolerant attitude. The respondents stated that a religious bias can take both negative and positive forms.

Discussing religiously unbiased teaching, teachers also mentioned the topic of tolerance. While they noted that students tend to become more tolerant as they grow

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[1] The author of the article interviewed 22 teachers of religious studies at the upper secondary stage in 2015 and 2016 to analyse their professional choices in the framework of the national subject syllabus. Half of the interviewees had formal training in religious education. Inductive content analysis was used as the method for analysing the interviews. On the study, see Härm 2021.

older, they also found that schools have still a lot to do in this field (cf. Schihalejev *et al*. 2020: 376).

Most of the students attending the classes of religious studies come from secular backgrounds. They have had no past experiences with institutional religion, or their experiences have been negative. A particularly strong bias is noticeable in relation to distinctive religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses. The same class can also include a few religious students. According to teachers, intolerance occurs among both secular and religious youngsters. Consequently, on the background of discussing religion in as neutral manner as possible, it is important for teachers to know how to act in a situation where some students are biased towards or tend to make fun of different religions or their representatives. In addition, preventing students from disparaging their peers who have fundamentalist or clearly different beliefs can pose a challenge for teachers. At the same time, teachers are aware that they, too, can unintentionally offend such students.

A previous study has indicated that students who have taken religious studies tend to be more tolerant than others on religious issues (Schihalejev 2009). Similarly, the interviewees noted that students' tolerance tends to increase in the course of religious studies. This seems to indicate that teachers focus on cultivating tolerance, as emphasised in the national subject syllabi, throughout the educational processes.

In Estonia, the predominant concept of unbiased religious studies seems to be based on the idea that teachers should not guide students, openly or implicitly, towards accepting the religious beliefs and worldview of the teacher. According to the interviewees, the most prevalent fear is that the teacher of religious studies starts to advertise Christianity. In some respects, this fear can be justified, because the Estonian situation is unique in that non-confessional religious studies are often taught by clergy members from different Christian denominations. They have studied Christian theology, often at some (private) higher educational institution where the main focus is on training congregation workers. Thus, comparative religious studies can form only a small part of their training. Furthermore, only a part of the theologically trained teachers has also training in religious education.

On the one hand, biased teaching is associated with institutional religion and inviting students to join a particular religious community. For instance, it is relatively easy to see if a teacher prefers the dogmas of a particular denomination when discussing Christianity. Such a crude induction of students to religion was condemned by all teachers. On the other hand, bias can be more concealed and appear in ways that are harder to notice even in oneself. Some of the interviewees were aware of this possibility. For instance, a teacher can promote a particular form of Christian devotion or non-Christian religious practices, influencing students in this way. However, the interviews

also revealed that biased teaching can take the form of presenting a one-sided picture of a religion. For instance, teachers can spend more time on topics that are personally important for them or present their individual views on religion as something shared by everyone. This can leave students with the impression that no other views on religion exist or there are no other ways of discussing a particular religion. All these are potential deviations from unbiased teaching, which teachers may not be aware of as such.

It is difficult to assess, based on the interviews, how teachers manage to achieve unbiased teaching in practice. Nevertheless, the interviews indicated that, even though teachers consider it right to be unbiased and would like to be avoid bias when presenting the subject, they sometimes lack the required skills. Studies of novice teachers have shown that reflection on personal beliefs and on professional practice supports development of adequate skills and attitudes for unbiased teaching (Jackson, Everington 2017: 9). Therefore, unintentionally biased teaching could be prevented by developing self-reflection skills during training and in teacher education. Implied religious bias in teaching could be reduced, for instance, by demonstrating the diversity of the religious world in religious studies through study visits to sanctums of different religions and Christian denominations. Similarly, a diverse selection of textbooks, study resources and videos would help offset any potential bias. Teachers are looking for ways of preventing biased teaching, but they would benefit from relevant support. These issues should be covered at a practical level in teacher education, training and development of methodological resources.

Future prospects

The future shape of religious studies in Estonia will depend on the choices made in general education and the development trends of religious education in Europe. Broadly speaking, there are four possible avenues of development for religious studies in Estonia: religious studies remain an optional subject; they become a mandatory subject; they are removed from the curriculum; or there is a transition to the model of confessional religious education.

The first option was briefly presented above[1]. The second, mandatory religious studies, is improbable in the near future, because it is likely to be met with strong public opposition. However, it might be feasible in a longer term. It may be possible that the public opinion will become more favourable towards mandatory religious studies,

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[1]   On potential future developments associated with professionality of teachers, see Härm 2021: 176.

resulting in a political willingness to implement it. According to the survey "Life, Religion, and Religious Life" (2020) by the Estonian Council of Churches, 62% of Estonian respondents supported religious studies as a mandatory school subject presenting different world religions. According to the current requirements, converting it into a mandatory subject would mean that teachers would need to have respective professional qualifications. Such a development would raise the status of religious studies in the eyes of school leadership, students and parents. It would also guarantee training of professional teachers.

The third option, disappearance of religious studies, is unlikely because several issues associated with religion have become topical in society. However, it is possible that religious studies are integrated into another subject, such as civics. But in this case, the prerequisite would be providing training to civics teachers, because they lack the knowledge and skills of discussing religious topics.

The expansion of the model of confessional religious education from private schools to state and municipal schools would require a legislative amendment as a starting point. Implementing confessional religious education in those schools would be difficult, because only a small minority of young people has joined an official religion and the study groups at the upper secondary level would include a couple of students at best.

The schools that would like to offer religious studies but are unable to find suitable teachers (or cannot provide sufficient workload, etc.) could benefit from centrally developed and implemented online courses in religious studies[1]. Another conceivable option would be a mixture of contact lessons and online classes, for instance, combining online lessons with study visits.

It is likely that the future of religious studies in Estonia is strongly linked to preservation and development of teacher education and training in religious education. Irrespective of the model of religious education that will become dominant in the future, the quality of teaching at the school level depends on the knowledge and skills of RE teachers.

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[1]   For instance, an online course (Inimene ja religioon 2022) is offered by the Youth Academy of the University of Tartu.

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The Significance of Religious Education in Finnish Upper and Lower Secondary Schools

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Summary

This article examines the differences between girls and boys in their liking, interest in and perception of the importance and usefulness of studying religion. The study is part of a large international multi-disciplinary research project on motivation. A total of 1,654 respondents from primary school grades 5-9 and upper secondary school were involved. The data was collected using an internet-based questionnaire based on Eccles and Wigfield's expectancy-value theory. Based on our data, there is not much difference between girls and boys as students of religion; larger differences in different aspects of motivation are related to grade level than to gender. Religion is perceived as more interesting and useful in upper secondary school than in upper secondary school and is also more popular in upper secondary school. However, religion is somewhat more important for girls than for boys. Girls' perception of their goodness as students of religion also varies more between grades than boys. The effect size for the observed differences ranged from small to medium.

Keywords

Motivation to study, relevance of teaching, religion.

Introduction

Many studies have shown that motivation to study has a direct link to academic performance. Students' motivation to study a subject is based on perceptions of its interest, importance, usefulness and the willingness to make an effort to achieve their goals, and beliefs about success are also part of their motivational structure. (e.g. Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

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In this article, we examine the motivation of 5th-9th graders and upper secondary school students to study primarily Evangelical Lutheran religion.

The main problem in the study of the Evangelical Lutheran religion has therefore been identified as the fact that the relevance of teaching is not always achieved. (Kallioniemi 2007, 48.) The study of the Evangelical-Lutheran religion is relevant when it provides the learner with materials for the construction of his or her own identity and when it is linked to the development of his or her whole personality.

According to Hannele Niemi, the high quality of the academic content alone does not make studying religion meaningful. Learning is also influenced by how important and meaningful studying is considered, and whether studying can even create new perspectives for the learner to experience their own life as meaningful and meaningful. This, affective relevance, includes the learner's attachment to and positive attitude towards studying and learning (Niemi 1991, 13-15).

Given the scope of the topic, we will limit ourselves to the following research questions:

1. *What are the differences between girls and boys in terms of liking the study of religion, interest in the subject and perceiving it as important and useful*?

2. *Do girls and boys feel equally good at learning it?*

Our study is part of a large international research project that investigated the motivation of primary and secondary school students in most subjects taught in school (McPherson & O'Neill, 2010). The main focus of the project was on the study of motivation to study music in relation to other school subjects, but the data are also suitable for independent analysis of motivation to study other subjects. The results reported in this article are new.

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Theoretical framework

The form used to collect the survey data is based on Eccles and Wigfield's expectancy-value theory (e.g., Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), according to which motivation to study is formed by an individual's expectations of success and the values he or she places on his or her success.

According to the expectancy-value theory, personal task evaluations can be divided into four parts: 1) the importance of success in the task for oneself, i.e. importance, attainment value, 2) the intrinsic motivation value, i.e. interest value, 3) the value related to the achievement of future goals, i.e. usefulness, utility value,

Due to the structure of our data from the McPherson and O'Neill international study, our theoretical framework is therefore different from that used by Niemi (1991), but affective relevance can nevertheless be interpreted as covering the first three of the above values, namely achievement, interest and utility.

Research methodology and data

Our research data was originally collected for a larger international study, which conducted a subject-specific motivation survey of over 24 000 participants in 2007-2008. It was conducted in eight countries (Brazil, China, Hong Kong, Israel, Korea, Mexico, Finland, Israel, Mexico and the United States. The total number of Finnish respondents was 1654.

In practice, the data was collected using a questionnaire on the Internet. A link to the questionnaire was sent by e-mail to all schools in Finland whose e-mail address was available. Responses were received from 29 localities in all parts of Finland. The sample can therefore be considered as a stratified sample. Based on the total number of responses and the geographical distribution of the locations, the sample can be considered to be a fairly comprehensive reflection of Finnish schoolchildren's ideas.

In total, the questionnaire contained 36 questions for each subject. Respondents gave their opinion on these statements on a five-point Likert scale (1 = "I don't like at all", 2 = "I like quite a bit", 3 = "Neutral", 4 = "I like quite a lot", 5 = "I like very much"). In addition, confidence in success was asked on an 11-point percentage scale.

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All aspects of motivation were measured using several Likert-scale questions. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients describing the congruence of the answers related to the same motivation domain were above 0.8 in all cases we examined (the maximum, i.e. the figure describing complete congruence, is 1), so the internal consistency of the measure can be considered quite high.

Results

As previous studies suggest, religion is not among the most popular subjects. If all subjects were equally popular, on a scale of 1 to 9 (1 = most popular and 9 = least popular), the average for each subject should be exactly 5. In the present data, the average for religion is 6.51, which is the worst average of all the subjects included. The most popular subject is physical education (3.61).

Figure 1 shows the mean scores of girls' and boys' responses at different grade levels when asked about their preference for studying religion on a five-point scale. Noteworthy features of the graph are the sharp decline in religious observance at the transition to secondary school and the fact that for girls, observance starts to increase between the eighth and ninth grades, while for boys it is only at the end of primary school. In high school, girls' retention varies more than boys'. The magnitude of the significance ($\eta^2 = 0,059$ effect size) of the differences in grade point averages is now medium.

Figure 1: Preference for studying religion at different grade levels ("luokka-aste") (n=1648). X-axis = grade level; grades 5-9 lower secondary school, grades 1-3 upper secondary school. Y-axis = Preference for studying religion at different grade levels.

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Figure 2: Girls' and boys' interest in religion at school and outside school (n=1651). X-axis = grade level; grades 5-9 lower secondary school, grades 1-3 upper secondary school. Y-axis=Level of girls´ and boys´ interest in religion at school and outside school.

Figure 2 shows the level of interest in religion in and out of school. The results are again broken down by gender and grade level. It shows no significant difference in practice between girls and boys; for both groups, interest in the subject declines quite sharply at the point of transition to secondary school, but for girls it rises again about a year earlier than for boys. On the other hand, boys' interest is more stable than girls' at upper secondary school age.

If the mean of the two variables, liking and interest in the subject, are combined into a common summary variable, a highly statistically significant difference is found between primary school (2.59) and upper secondary school (3.04) (t(1650)=7.87; p<0.001); the effect size associated with the difference in means is now medium ($d = 0,42$).

Figure 3 summarises how important girls and boys perceive religion to be. The variable shown is a sum variable of three separate Likert scales.

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Figure 3: Perceived importance of religion at different grade levels (n=1652). X-axis = grade level; grades 5-9 lower secondary school, grades 1-3 upper secondary school. Y-axis=Perceived importance of religion at different grade levels.

In the boys' experience, religion is still important at the end of primary school, but not afterwards. The difference between the mean (3.14) and the mean (2.71) of the primary classes is highly statistically significant (t(709)=5.01; p<0.001). Girls' perceptions of the importance of the subject fluctuate slightly more, but in upper secondary school, and especially at the end, they see it as at least as important as in fifth grade.

Figure 4: Perception of the usefulness of religion at different grade levels (n=1641). X-axis = grade level; grades 5-9 lower secondary school, grades 1-3 upper secondary school. Y-axis=Perception of the usefulness on religion at different grade levels.

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Figure 4 summarises the responses to the four Likert-scale utility statements into a single summary variable. It shows that girls' and boys' perceptions of the usefulness of religion follow a very similar pattern to the previous graphs: at the onset of puberty, negative criticism of the subject increases and girls in the upper grades perceive the usefulness of the subject a year earlier.

Our second research question was related to students' perceptions of ability. Figure 5 summarises the sum of two Likert-scale variables describing this.

This variable also reflects the onset of puberty and the slightly higher fluctuation in girls' perceptions. However, the effect size for girls remains quite small ($\eta^2 = 0,028$). If girls and boys are considered without regard to grade level, the mean for girls (3.33) is statistically significantly higher than the mean for boys (3.21) (t(1647)=2.92; p<0.01). This difference is explained in particular by differences in the completion rates of primary and upper secondary school. However, there is no significant difference between primary school pupils and upper secondary school pupils in this respect.

Figure 5: Girls' and boys' perceptions of their own goodness as students of religion (n=1652). X-axis = grade level; grades 5-9 lower secondary school, grades 1-3 upper secondary school. Y-axis=Girls´ and boys´ perceptions of their own goodness as students of religion.

Gorls

Finally, we analysed the girls' and boys' answers to two questions on scales (1-5 and 0-100%) to measure how confident they were about their success in religious studies. The responses were very similar to those above.

Reflection

How do girls and boys differ as students of religion? Although we found some statistically significant differences, even highly significant ones, due to the large size of the data, in practice the differences between girls and boys are more moderate, as the effect size of the results was generally medium at most. In fact, this alone can be considered a significant result, as large real differences in motivation to study have been found between girls and boys in mathematics, for example (e.g. Kupari, 2007).

In this study, the more significant differences are related to the age of the students. High school students are more interested in religion and like it more than elementary school students (Figure 2).

The effect of confirmation school may be one explanation for the increase in religious observance after grade 8. According to a study by Kati Niemelä (2002), attending confessional school changes young people's attitudes towards Christianity in a more positive way. There is a clear positive effect of attending confessional school on attitudes towards Christianity. However, this change of attitude may not be very long-lasting. (Niemelä, 2002, 183-184).

As an explanation model for Figures 1, 2 and 4, more pragmatically oriented content can also be provided for upper secondary school. The objectives of high school religious education emphasise the development of thinking skills; students should be able to assess the cultural implications of religions and issues related to religions, and master the debating skills associated with these abilities. Part of the aim is to help students grow as human beings. In addition, pupils should master ways of acquiring religious knowledge and be able to critically evaluate religious knowledge. secondary education are more capable of processing such issues

It is obvious that the content of upper secondary school curricula corresponds better than that of upper secondary school both to the pupils' readiness to study at least religion and to their need to find relevant content for building their own identity (on this problematic see Niemi 1991, 84-86). The emphasis on morality, ethics and the relations between different belief systems and cultures in the content of religion appears to respond to pupils' need for independent and personal reflection.

Overall, our results raise the question: is there something to be done about the temporary drop in motivation to study experienced in the upper grades? Would it be possible to link religious education in schools more strongly to the everyday experiences of young people?

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Teaching of Minorities' Own Religion – an Orthodox Perspective

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Abstract

Religious education, its place in the school system of society, the teaching objectives and the content of the curricula oriented towards achieving them vary between European school systems. This variability is further enhanced by the model of religious education and the legal status of the different religions in each country. As a result, minority faiths face challenges in terms of how pupils are taught their own religion in school as part of their educational curriculum. On the other hand, it is also important that members of minority faiths are not forced to participate in the teaching of a religion other than their own. It is therefore important that the school's world view education curriculum takes account of religious and world view diversity in a way that respects diversity, considering UN´s the Rights of the Child. Similarly, religious education must consider equal freedom of religion in practice. Properly interpreted, it notices the right to be toughed about one´s own religion and not just the right not to be toughed religion topics in an educational setting. In Finland, religious education is provided in accordance with the pupil's religious denomination.

Keywords: religious diversity, minorities, orthodox religious education, teacher training, confessional education, comparative religious education, pedagogy, religions and beliefs, multiculturalism, education in diversity, tolerance, human rights, church communities.

Introduction

This article is a part of the ERASMUS+ funded project called *Innovative Religious Education Network: educating to the religious diversity (IRENE).* It briefly analyses the current religions in Finland, which mainly form the basis of religious education in the school environment. It also examines the legal basis for the teaching of different

religions and beliefs in schools and educational contexts in general, and its implementation. It also examines the development of religious education curricula within the Finnish school system, in particular how the curriculum of the Orthodox religion has changed along with other curriculum developments. A central part of teaching one's own religion is its pedagogical implementation, considering the pedagogical principles within the subject. Also, the paper focuses on introducing the implementation of religious education in Finland and some results on the opinions of parents, guardians and teachers on the current religious education curriculum. Recent research findings on the Finnish model of religious education are presented to demonstrate the importance of minority religions' own religious education. The outcomes state the diversity should include pluralism and the consideration of religious diversity also in school religious education to demonstrate in practice the value and meaning of equality in educational settings and life.

Religious landscape in Finland

Finland, as all Scandinavian countries, is a protestant country. For the moment most of the population of 5, 4 million people belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church (67.0 %). The amount is slightly decreasing. The Orthodox Church has about 60.000 members (1.0 % of the population) and the number is slightly decreasing due both because of an ageing population and low baptism rates. In fact, the Orthodox population is unofficially larger because immigrants from Russia do not register as members of Orthodox parishes.[1] The Roman Catholic Church has about 15,000 members. Protestant denominations such as example Baptists, Methodists, the Salvation Army and Adventists have a total number of members that remains under 1% of the Finland´s population. In addition, the number of Jews is about 2.000. In Finland, almost one in three people are registered in the population register or their religion is unknown.[2] As well, every 4th person of the population is not signed up to any religious organisation.[3]

It is significant that due to immigrants and refugees the number of Muslims is increasing. At the end of 2017, it was estimated that there were about 70.000-75.000 Muslims, who are mainly staying in Southern-Finland. (There are no official statistical

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[1] According the latest (21.3.2021) statistical information the Russian speakers are more than 80 000.

[2] Suomen virallinen tilasto 21.3.2021.

[3] http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto.html#vaestorakenne.

numbers of Muslims in Finland, because most of the Muslims are not signed up to an Islamic community). Nowadays it is very characteristic that for different reasons people are resigning themselves from the membership of the Lutheran church. That happens so that each year ca. 2 % are opting out of the membership of the that denomination.

The guidelines for religious education in Finland

In Finland the main way to get religious education (RE) is compulsory education in public schools. In general, there are not private schools, but there are 16 Christian schools providing basic education in different parts of Finland, and two of them also have a secondary school.[1] The churches maintain so called "Sunday schools", but the participation is on voluntary basis and nowadays they are not very popular. In vocational education there is no actual instruction in Religious Education.

Religious education is a compulsory subject in both comprehensive schools (7-16 years) and in senior/upper secondary schools (16-18/19 years).[2] It is organized according to the major denomination of the pupils in a municipal area. In practice, this means Evangelical Lutheran religion. However, as a subject, it is called "school's general religious education", not a Lutheran one. In the Finnish context most pupils take part in Lutheran RE. This is due to fact that school´s general RE is open for everyone with some exceptions. Thus, more than 90 % of the pupils at Finnish schools follow these lessons. This means that more than 20% of the Finnish young people follow this education not being as members of the Lutheran Church based on their parents' /guardians' request.

The status of Orthodox religious education (ORE) is different from that of other religious minorities. If there are at least three pupils belonging to the Orthodox Church in the area of the education provider, they must automatically be taught their own religion. Parents don´t have to request it. The rule therefore does not refer to a single school in the municipality, but to the municipality as a whole, i.e. the education provider. The provider may also be a private school, which is subject to the same rule. Parents or guardians of other minorities are advised to request RE instruction for their children if the condition of the minimum of three pupils is fulfilled. The condition for applying is that the person must belong to a religious denomination registered in

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[1] https://kristillinenkoulu.fi/koulut/ (retrieved 7.12.2021)

[2] Perusopetuslaki 1998/628 § 13.

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Finland.[1] The ORE also has students who are not members of the Finnish Orthodox Church but are joining to those groups because of their cultural background. The same happens also with Islamic RE. All the pupils in Islamic RE at schools are not members of the Islamic registered communities. The non-members are not included to the rule of three pupils. Taken together, these and the high number of Lutheran religious education pupils indicate that religious education is not necessarily linked to membership of a church or religious community.

Since 1985 there is organized a separate lesson for the pupils who are not members of any religious denomination. The lesson is called Life Stance Education (LSE) or World View Education (Ethics) to encourage pupils in creating their own worldview.[2] The lesson is not available for those who have their own religious education. This means, for example, that members of the Lutheran Church who have their own religious education cannot attend this lesson. Orthodox pupils who do not have their own religious education can choose it or the general religious education of the school, if their parents consider it an alternative.

The number of lessons in religious education and Life Stance education is calculated as the number of weekly lessons per year. For grades 1-9, the total number of weekly lessons per year is 10.[3] This is the minimum, but the municipality may choose to offer more. They are allocated to each grade as follows. Grades 1 and 2 have two lessons per week. Over the school year, this makes a total of 76 hours in theory. Grades 3 to 6 have five hours. The municipality can decide which grade has two lessons per week. Usually it is in grade 4. Grades 7-9 have one lesson per week. In theory, one hour per week means 38 hours per school year. Lessons for each religion are taught in religion-specific teaching groups by qualified teachers. In grades 1-6, religious education is taught by a primary school teacher alongside other subjects, and in grades 7-9 and upper secondary school by a subject teacher (theologian).

In vocational education RE or ethics are not included in the curricula. In pre-primary education (children at the age 6 years) there is no RE as an independent subject. As a part of the contents of the curriculum the instruction is dealing with different world views including religions and none. Children are supposed to become acquainted with their own and other worldviews and religions represented in the group of children or in

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[1] Perusopetuslaki 1998/628 § 13 (6.6.2003/454)

[2] https://et-opetus.fi/ (retrieved 7.12.2021)

[3] **Valtioneuvoston asetus** perusopetuslaissa tarkoitetun opetuksen valtakunnallisista tavoitteista ja perusopetuksen tuntijaosta 422/2012.

their surroundings. The customs and traditions connected to them will be introduced. Non-religion is discussed alongside world views. [1]

In early childhood education and care (children under 5 years) the worldview education primarily focuses on examining together the religions and other worldviews present in the group of children. The goal is to promote mutual respect and understanding of varying worldviews as well as to support the development of the children's cultural identities and worldviews. The children are familiarised with different worldviews and related traditions. Natural opportunities for examining worldviews is a part of this.[2]

Since 2003, according to the Law of Basic Education (section 13) *"the instruction of religion is arranged in conformity with the religious community of the pupils as instruction of the religion to which the pupil belongs in accordance with separate syllabi"*.[3] As a result, the National Board of Education has so far developed curricula for 10 religions, including Christian and other religions. In the first phase in 2014, they covered the Evangelical Lutheran, Orthodox and Roman Catholic religions. Non-Christian religions included Islam and Judaism. In 2020, the Board of Education approved curricula for Adventist, Bahá'í, Buddhist, Pentecostal and Krishna religions. The previous curriculum in 2004 had curricula for 13 religions.[4] Churches are not directly involved in curricula issues or in compiling the Religious Education curricula or textbooks. The group usually includes religious education teachers and other experts in religious education (representatives of religious denominations) from different school levels and is chaired by a representative of the Finnish National Board of Education. The state is neutral towards religions and churches.

Over the past decade, Finland has seen a more or less one-sided debate on the RE model, which in some terms denigrates the rights of minorities to their own religious education. Especially it has accelerated since 2019, when ministry of education proposed that the Life Stance Education should be opened to all as an alternative of RE. Another proposal has also been put forward to replace the current model of teaching religion and LSE with a common subject for all pupils, which would introduce them to the world's religions, regardless of their own beliefs.[5] As will be presented later in this paper with

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[1] Opetushallitus 2016, 34-35.
[2] Opetushallitus 2019, 45.
[3] Perusopetuslaki 1998/628 § 13 (6.6.2003/454)
[4] Opetushallitus 2004.
[5] Aikonen 2021a.

some research results concerning the debate on the model, the first proposal would be good as it leaves room for an own RE, but the second proposal is unacceptable.

The advocates for a one lesson of "worldviews" are arguing that children in the classroom should have more opportunities for dialogue with people from different religions, both Christian and non-Christian. At schools, the RE aims to educate pupils in accordance to their own religion to value and respect their own heritage. Nevertheless, own RE is not one-sided or closed to the reality of the field of religions and worldviews. The 2014 curriculum clearly defines among the tasks of RE as follows: *"Pupils get acquainted with the traditions related to religions and worldviews in Finland as well as religions and worldviews elsewhere in the world. The subject promotes an understanding of the relationship between religion and culture as well as multiliteracy related to religions and worldviews. The instruction provides versatile information about religions and helps the pupils understand religion-related discussions."*[1] This clearly states that in the comprehensive education there in no need for the one and same content-based religion lesson for all pupils. Needless to say, but LTE targets are not similar across religions and beliefs.

Curricula development for Orthodox religious education

At the end of the 1960´s and beginning of the1970´s two big educational renewals took place in Finland. Despite the renewals of the curriculum for comprehensive education in the 1980s the role and nature of the RE in schools faced quite few changes. Still the RE was confessional and church centred but the church were not directly involved in curricula issues or in compiling the Religious Education curricula or textbooks.

In Finland, the first religion curriculum for compulsory education was introduced in 1925, and the next one was published in 1952. They did not include curriculum for Orthodox RE. The first came out as a result of the reform of compulsory education in 1970.[2] The curricula for the Orthodox RE in primary and secondary schools (1970, 1977, 1985, 1994) have all had an almost identical teaching objective, with the aim of *"raising active parishioners"*.[3] Teaching has partly strived to indoctrinate the student into the religion being taught - to learn the religion.[4] As those previous curricula show, religious education was confessional in nature. The curriculum for comprehensive

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[1] Opetushallitus 2014, 140.
[2] Aikonen 2015.
[3] Aikonen 2015.
[4] Grimmitt 1987.

education in 1994 brought a radical change to the meaning and philosophy of curricula in RE. It was not that much normative as the previous ones and gave a lot of space to schools to make their own curricula for RE. Compared to the previous curricula there was first time ever both general and common objectives for different religions. These formed the basis for the development of religion-specific curricula with its own confessional contents and learning objectives.[1] This was the first step to change RE to examine religions outside of itself and on a general level even though teaching was based on a confession.

The 2004 curriculum introduced a major change in religious education in basic education and in general upper secondary education. Teaching could no longer be confessional. Education changed from "*confessional religious education*" into "*religious education in accordance to one's own religion*". First time ever there was given to all religions, Christian and none, the general and shared objectives and contents. The pupils are encouraged in personal reflection on ethical questions. RE instruction supports the pupils' self-knowledge, self-appreciation and to help them build and evaluate his/her identity and worldview. The objectives of Orthodox religious education stated that "the central aim is to strengthen and maintain the Orthodox identity of the pupil". [2] The aim was to support the pupil's own identity in religion - to learn about religion.[3]

The 2014 curriculum was revised in terms of structure and content. It included broad general objectives common to the five religions (Lutheran, Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish and Islamic)[4] and three common content areas. These form the basis for the development of religion-specific curricula.[5] The organization of education remains based on the teaching of the pupil's own religion and is not confessional. The subject's mission continues to state that *" The instruction provides the pupil with elements for building and evaluating his or her identity as well as personal view of life and worldview".* [6] The curricula for primary education in all grades should cover three key

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[1] Opetushallitus 1994, 89.

[2] Opetushallitus 2004, 209.

[3] Grimmitt 1987.

[4] Religions included in 2014 Curriculum. In 2020, the National Board of education approved curricula for Adventist religion, Bahá'í religion, Buddhist religion, Pentecostal religion and Krishna religion.

[5] Opetushallitus 2014, 21.

[6] Opetushallitus 2014, 134,246,404.

content areas. Those are the relationship with one's own religion (C1), the world of religions (C2) and the good life (C3). [1]

The teaching objectives at general level are no longer exclusively focused on religion to be taught but are broader and more varied in content than in the past. While the emphasis is partly on supporting pupils' growth - learning about religion, the 2014 curriculum also strongly emphasises the importance of religion and the broadening of religious understanding - learning about religion.[2]

The teaching of religions is based on the general tasks, objectives and contents (TOC) common to all religious education subjects. For each religion, a specific syllabus has been drawn up for the religion to be taught, based on the three content areas mentioned above. In the case of the Orthodox religion, the detailed curriculum descriptions follow the core content areas of the religion.[3] These are the doctrinal and other characteristics of the Orthodox Church, ecclesiastical life and the tradition of the celebration of the liturgical year, ecclesiastical art, holy people and their teachings, the contents of the Bible, ethics, the history of the Church and the world religions.[4]

Compared to previous objectives and content, the teaching will consider the culturally diverse Orthodoxy. In addition, a more detailed look at religions and their customs in Europe and on other continents, as well as an examination of the characteristics of Christian and non-Christian religions. Due to the changing nature of the curriculum, the content and quantity of some of the subjects taught in the home religion has been reduced. The focus has been shifted from the historical analysis of the Church to contemporary religiosity, considering the global and local development of one's own religion.[5]

On the Pedagogical Elements of the Orthodox Religious Education

Heterogenous teaching groups

In schools, the teaching of minority religions is usually perceived as taking place in small groups. This definition has applied to all religions until the entry into force of the new Basic Education Act on 1 January 2003. Since then, small group teaching in the

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[1] Opetushallitus 2014, 136,151,409.
[2] Grimmitt 1987.
[3] More specific introduction of these, see Aikonen 2019.
[4] Opetushallitus 2014, 136,151,409.
[5] Aikonen 2019.

traditional sense can no longer be used for the Orthodox religion. This is because the education provider (the municipality) can now combine basic education classes 1-9 in the same teaching group. For all minority religions the situation is the same, but the groups have not grown in the same proportion as in the case of Orthodox teaching.

Fortunately, teaching groups from grades 1 to 9 are not implemented as such, but groups can include pupils from both primary and secondary schools. Thus, almost without exception, the Orthodox religion is taught in integrated groups. The teacher often has two or even four curricula to teach in the same lesson in these joined teaching groups. The student population is in many respects heterogeneous. Pupils come from different grades and have different levels of learning ability. In addition, there are immigrants who attend classes on the basis of their cultural background. However, they have not previously studied Orthodox religion at all. There are also teaching groups of which 80% are made up of immigrants with poor language skills.

The teacher's pedagogical solutions in a heterogeneous small group focus on differentiation, harmonisation and periodisation, as well as long-term planning and didactic alternation between these. One practical solution is to have the elder pupils work quietly with each other and to work in a teacher-centred way with the younger pupils, changing these settings at some point during the lesson. Usually the lessons begin and end with common issues to all group. Providing opportunities for discussion is central to the development of religious thinking and issues related to religion in primary education.

The Pedagogical Orientation for Orthodox RE

The core nature of Finnish Religious Education is with both teach and learn about a religion and from a religion (cf. Hull 2002, Ziebertz and Reigel 2009). In the case of minority religions, there is also a slight tendency to teach/learn the religion in terms of a traditional and spiritual heritage the religion in question.[1]

In a lesson to practice a religion is not allowed. Orthodox pedagogy does not have a problem dealing with the question as to what kind of activities "are allowed or what are not" during a lesson. This is due to fact that in most cases the teaching content is related

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[1] Aikonen 2005, 223-224.

or has a connection to prayers and hymns that can be used to explain and illustrate the Orthodox doctrine and teaching contents. This pedagogical approach puts the contents into the context of the Church´s practices and tradition. That pedagogy can be called "confessional pedagogy".

This is how Orthodox Religious Education has been implemented in schools and basically *one's own religion* in practice, supports the Orthodox Religious Education pedagogy and its good practice. In instruction, the use of church hymns, prayers, the sign of a cross and icons, for example, must be pedagogically justified. If we apply the way of teaching in accordance with "one's own religion," a consequence will be the use of the religion´s own pedagogy. This also supports the holistic approach of Religious Education.

Holistic religious education in the school environment means integrating exegetics, ethics, dogmatics, church history and the liturgical life of the Church into the objectives and content of teaching. This means, for example, that the teaching does not deal specifically with the Holy Bible and its contents, without linking and relating the stories to ethical issues or the history of the Church. Teaching is not about teaching and reviewing teaching contents one after the other, but about interlinking them. Accordingly, in the teaching of liturgy, for example, we can extend the examination to the Bible, ethics, dogmatics, church history, church music, iconography, etc. In other words, teaching is carried out within a subject by integrating the various aspects of theology. It should be noted that this is not a didactic principle that a subject should be systematically discussed in its various dimensions. The principle should be applied in a spiral, so that there are fewer openings for dealing with younger pupils than with more mature ones.[1]

Holistic religious education also means that the main teaching content and themes are repeatedly introduced in depth in different grades, but always from a new perspective and using appropriate pedagogical applications. The teaching model is partly similar to the so-called spiral principle. It differs from the holistic model in that there is less integration within the subject matter and a more linear progression. The main themes to be taught according to this principle are the cycle of the church year with its celebrations and fasting, alongside the teaching of prayers, chants, and iconography. This principle is implemented, for example, in class prayer times and in the context of joint classroom teaching, with the whole group working together on topics such as the great feasts of the liturgical year. At the same time, these general themes are part of the

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[1] Aikonen 2005, 233-236.

so-called hidden curriculum of Orthodox religious education.[1]

Icons are the church's multifaceted teaching manual and the storytelling of the church year.[2] One obvious example is the use icons in a holistic way. As an example, the Orthodox Church celebrates the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary on 25 of March. In accordance with the pedagogy of the subject being taught and in accordance with the ecclesiastical tradition, the teacher starts by introducing the festive icon in question at the beginning of the lesson. Looking at the icon, we can observe how it describes this Biblical event. Through the text of the troparion we can explore the dogmatic content of the feast and also relate the content of the feast to the liturgical life of the Church as part of the liturgical year. On the basis of this analysis, three educational aspects already can be identified in this context when using the holistic pedagogical approach. The pedagogy of one's own religion aims not only to provide knowledge, but also authentic experience, action and emotional experience which takes place in this case by singing the troparion.

The holistic approach includes also the principle that there are not only "church" matters, but that education interacts with the society of its time. Religion interacts with society and considers the issues that arise from it in the content of religious education. [3] Lately one of these is nature and the environment.

The teaching materials, or textbooks, are designed for each year group, but are used on a rotating basis. This is because, as mentioned previously, there are pupils from several different grades in the teaching groups and the teacher cannot teach each grade's syllabus (textbook) separately. For example, in a combined group, the textbooks are used in an even year with an even year textbook (e.g. 2nd grade) and in an odd year with an odd year textbook (e.g. 1st grade). So, in a group with 1st and 2nd graders, the students do not read their grade level textbook separately, but the 1st grader starts with the 2nd grade textbook and reads the 1st grade textbook the following year. In this way, the books take turns.

[1] ibid.
[2] Aikonen 2017, 150-151.
[3] Koulumzin 1975, 29.

How do Orthodox Christians feel about the current model?

In February 2020 there was made research concerning the model of RE among the Orthodox parents, guardians and RE teachers (n=446). [1]

Respondents felt that denomination based separate religious education and its continuation was by far the most popular model. The results emphasized the importance of teaching one's own religion among Orthodox parents, guardians and teachers, i.e., the current model should not be changed. This was the view of 71% of respondents. This was also the view of Lutheran religion teachers in the survey conducted for them.[2]

Why do we want to stick with the current model? The qualitative data in the survey highlights in particular how the status of minority faith education is perceived in relation to the model options presented in the public debate. The results show that the answers to the open questions revealed that informants are concerned about the loss of one´s own religious education. More than half of the respondents stressed the educational as well as the informational importance of teaching one's own RE. The clearest justification for the current model of denomination based separate education for minority religions was that it supports pupils´ Orthodox identity and the transmission of knowledge about their own religion and culture.[3]

Respondents felt that the model of religious education should continue to be based on separate education, but that it could be supplemented or complemented by common lessons. Almost a quarter of them think that these could be LSE, world religions in secondary school or thematic lessons. The most popular ways of organizing joint teaching would be either to have students in religious education and all their teachers in joint thematic lessons, or to have religious teachers rotate through joint lessons. Joint teaching for all would be suitable for only 10% of respondents. Overall, the negative attitude towards LSE was not overwhelmingly negative. In open responses, the positive view was slightly more pronounced than the negative one. The most positive argument in the open responses, thematically, was that there should be a choice of a religious subject in primary and secondary school. Just over a third (35%) of respondents were of this opinion. In upper secondary school this could be acceptable to 28 % of respondents.[4]

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[1] Aikonen 2021a, 258.

[2] Enqvist & Lupunen 2020.

[3] Aikonen 2021a, 276-278.

[4] Aikonen 2021a, 263-264; 269-270.

This point of view is also supported by the results of another research on Orthodox RE. In this survey (n=372), implemented in 2020, parents, guardians and teachers were asked how significant they considered the learning contents introduced in the latest curriculum for the Orthodox religious education adopted in 2014. Respondents quite naturally identified one´s own religion (C1) as the most prestigious content. 74 % of respondents agreed with this. Further, an open-ended question asked the survey population what their opinion about the most important thing is within the own RE for pupils. More than half of the survey respondents answered this question. Among them, 20% agreed that the subject is important for the pupils´ identity. Ethical issues (C3) were the second most valued content group by 62 % of respondents. The third most valued content was world religions (C2), with 42% of respondents rating it as important. Different world views were less valued (27%). This was the view of just over one in four respondents.[1]

In conclusion, the results of the studies show that parents and guardians of children and young people in Orthodox religious education, as well as teachers, perceive the model of denomination based separate education as a particularly important normative legitimacy, a social value. Replacing the model in use with a common subject for all shows that the role of religious education and its potential and importance in value education have been misunderstood and misinterpreted. This would be a culturally and culturally counterproductive change in the development of social and world diversity. A dead end for pluralism?

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[1] Aikonen 2021b, 38-40.

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Religious diversity as political, educational and theological condition. Orthodox Religious Education in Dialogue with Dietrich Benner's Allgemeine Pädagogik.

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1. Abstract

In the present study, we will analyze the importance of dialogue with religious diversity as a component of both the public space and the pedagogical process that takes place within the framework of Religious Education. In this sense, this study moves rather in a theoretical dimension. The whole topic is treated on the basis of certain principles developed in the work of the German educator Dietrich Benner. In particular, it examines why Religious Education is integrated in the public education system of modern democratic societies. In addition, the concept of public space is analyzed as a mode of existence constituted by the encounter of heterogeneities. A distinction is made between the two aspects of the religious phenomenon, i.e. between the mystagogical experience and the public function of religion. Furthermore, we try to relate the basic aim of Religious Education to the contemporary challenge for participation in the public function of religion. Finally, we approach the concept of religious diversity from the perspective of Orthodox theological thought and life; this choice is considered necessary because in Greece the relevant legal framework dictates that Religious Education sets the development of the religious consciousness of Orthodox Christian students as its fundamental goal. A question therefore arises as to whether and to what extent Religious Education based on Orthodox tradition and life, can take into account the phenomenon of religious diversity and, more generally, meet the requirements of public life in modern democratic societies.

2. Why Religious Education is necessary in the school of modern democratic societies

According to Dietrich Benner's pedagogical thinking, the teaching-learning process unfolds in the school as a remote observation of the real world and, thus, as a "virtual" approach of it (Benner 2015b). In school, pupils explore the world as an object in order to encounter it and, through this encounter, to follow the way leading to their life destination. According to Benner, school curriculum in modern democratic societies also includes religion; this option is justified, because Religion stands for a constituent

element of the public sphere (Benner 2014c) and should therefore belong among the subjects provided by the school curriculum, as school prepares young people for their upcoming entry into the public sphere (Benner 2005). But why should this be necessary at a time when, as we know, many religious communities already show a practical interest and concern for the Religious Education of their young members? Are the religious communities unable to offer a suitable religious instruction to the younger generations by educational means, and do they, therefore, need the help of school education? Or do the religious communities, when providing Religious Education, sometimes convey contents and orientations that do not promote the harmonious functioning of the modern, non-hierarchical world as a field of public encounter and dialogue between different and diverse rationales. In Benner's thinking we find the following answer, which encompasses both of the above concerns: "The reasons why this is the case could be manifold and could lie in the fact that it is not possible to save and preserve a religion solely with the help of Religious Education provided by religious communities, or also in the fact that this educational task cannot lie in the hands of religious communities alone, because the development of religious fundamentalism must be avoided in order to promote the public function of religion" (Benner et al. 2007, 15). "Should religion still have a future, this is something that may depend first and foremost on whether and to what extent religion succeeds both in updating the critique it makes of the world in a non-fundamentalist sense and, furthermore, in relating to the critique that Education, Ethics and Politics make for religious communities and churches" (Benner 2014e).

The above argumentation clearly shows that Religious Education is an essential part of school curriculum, not only because religion is a functional component of the public sphere, but also because the future of religion as a component of the public sphere is being questioned and is at stake. This implicates, following the rationale of Benner, that religious communities are sometimes unable nowadays to effectively fulfil the educational task of religious instruction regarding their young members, and that this weakness emerges due to the fact that they do not interact successfully with all challenges developed in the modern world.

3. Religion as a structural element of the modern public space.

Dialogue in democratic societies, Benner argues, can only be effective, if the conditions on which public space is built, are fulfilled. The profound prerequisite for the constitution of public space, according to the German educator, is the acceptance of the principle called as "the non-hierarchical order of the totality of human action" (Benner 2015a); according to this, the whole society is structured by differentiated spheres of

action, each of which has its own logic, but also its own space, for which ~~its~~ each one is responsible and accountable. Nevertheless, they all form together the whole of human action, and, at the same time, separate from each other in order to promote the common progress of humanity. This means that each sphere of action approaches the real world not only from its own point of view but also taking into account approaches and views offered by the other one. When one of them claims to be hegemonic over all others and imposes its own particular rationale as the sole criterion for evaluating all the aspects of the world, an attitude of an absolute fundamentalism is manifested, which violates the principle of the non-hierarchical order.

The question that arises here is whether and how religious communities can enter into dialogue with the modern world, taking into account the public discourse rules based on the principle of the non-hierarchical order. Benner takes up this question after elaborating the specificity (proprium) of religion (Benner 2014e, 19). Benner's reflection in this regard is strongly influenced by the German theologian, philosopher and educator Friedrich Schleiermacher; he argues that religious experience is enclosed in the sense of the absolute dependency (schlechthinnige Abhängigkeit) (Benner 2014a, 82) from an infinite being (the Absolute) that all human beings experience. This infinite being (i.e. the Absolute) transcends, "encompasses" and gives meaning to everything that is seen as finite and not absolute. This experience is not an expression of an emotional or a "romantic" state, but represents a kind of self-consciousness, experience and knowledge at the same time: It is man's awareness that every inch of this world is absolutely dependent on a supreme, eternal and infinite power that gives meaning to all the finite and impermanent things, leading them towards a universality and a unity with each other (cf. Stogiannidis 2013). In Benner's thought this "sense" (Gefühl) shapes the most characteristic feature of religion as a constitutive parameter of life universality. This reflection, concerning the idea of the finitude of human nature (i.e. the fact that human beings as biological beings have an end), is a basic element that structures the particular intrinsic rationale of religious action in social becoming (Benner 2014e, 19). As Benner argues, the experience and understanding of finitude of the human nature is rendered in different terms in each case, such as "creatureliness", "mortality", the certainty of death, or even the relationship of the living people to those ones that passed away (Benner 2014e, 19).

4. The public function of religion

Following all the aforementioned observations, Religion is considered to be a way of life and a way of approaching and perceiving reality based on the awareness that man is a finite being. Here, however, Benner moves to a distinction that, although not

explicitly stated, is evident in his work. This distinction recognises two dimensions of religion, which do not point to any kind of "dissection" of religion; on the contrary, it illustrates two different aspects through which we can approach Religion: One has to do with the content of religious experience per se, whilst the other refers to the public function of religion in society. Both dimensions relate to the religious phenomenon itself, and both are inseparable; however, in the first case, there is an attempt to gain insight into the interior reality, where the religious experience appears as something mystagogical that can only be tasted by the "insiders". In the second case, the impression we extract comes from Religion external aspect, which manifests itself within the world (i.e. as something immanent) and emerges as a phenomenon shaped by the relationship between it and the other spheres of human action within the whole of the society. For the inner aspect of religion, Benner uses the terms "Arcanum des Religiösen" (= arcanum of Religion) (Benner 2014d, 126) and "Geheimnis des Glaubens" (= "mystery of the faith") (Benner 2014d, 125). For the external aspect of religion, the German educator again refers to Schleiermacher, whom he interprets, on the one hand using the philosophical terminology of another influential philosopher, Martin Heidegger, and on the other hand using hermeneutic approaches coming from the work of Hannah Arendt, another important figure in the field of philosophy. In this context in particular, - where Benner attempts to bring together and to combine harmoniously the philosophical conceptions of Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Arendt - Religion is conceived as an essential parameter for human life, i.e. as an indispensable factor strongly related to what we might call *conditio humana* (Benner 2014c; Arendt 2008).

In this sense, religion appears as a specific form of human being-in-the-world (In-der-Welt-Sein) (Benner 2014c, 46), i.e. as a sector of human action (not the only one, but one specific among other different ones) in which human existence manifests itself as a fact, in which man interrelates themselves with other human beings around and with the world as well. The term "being-in-the-world" intends to express implicitly but clearly that the unique possibility of the human being, through which their existence comes into being, is to exist *in the world*, i.e. to develop themselves as a unique subject in the world in relation to other also unique subjects. The term "being-in-the-world" is particularly familiar in Heidegger's philosophical reflection (Makris 2019) and effortlessly recalls the term "Dasein" (Makris 2014, 308) as approached hermeneutically in his well-known work "Sein und Zeit" (cf. Heidegger 2006). At the same time, the notion of "conditio humana" forms a core topic revealing Arendt's philosophical thought: the contemporary Polis, which is composed as a public space of a plurality of disparate elements, is the outstanding and unique ontological possibility of human existence.

The above conceptual explanation has been made so that we understand what Benner is trying to tell us when he argues that Religious Education must be part of the school curriculum. In his view, Religious Education in schools should teach the new generations what cannot be successfully taught in the societies of the modern world by the religious communities through a cross-generational coexistence. Thus, it is argued here that religious communities today sometimes show a certain inability to fulfil efficiently this religious educational task, which consists of providing the new generations with a deeper understanding of the public function of religion. Due to this weakness, there is a gap that school education should fill through Religious Education.

5. Participation in the public function of religion. What is this supposed to be?

What exactly does this participation in the public function of religion mean? In order to explore this issue, we should bear in mind that the German educator uses the term "räsonierende Öffentlichkeit" (= public sphere in which citizens debate with arguments) to illustrate the following: The successful and effective functioning of the public sphere is based on the citizens' competence to lead a discourse using arguments (Benner & Brüggen 2000, 244).

This notion might be influenced by the work of Jürgen Habermas, especially the way this German philosopher approaches the concept of the public sphere (Grümme 2018, 47-74). Benner is quite clear on this point, as he speaks of a field in which heterogeneities encounter each other; and this encounter field is only communicated when its members know how to argue with discursively grounded arguments. This approach is undoubtedly related to what Benner calls "Proprium des Religiösen" (the key feature of religious action) and "Öffentliche Funktion der Religion" ("public function of religion"). It is implicated and deduced that the *key feature of this function* is the way in which the proprium of religious action is communicated in the public sphere, i.e., the awareness that human beings are dependent on a transcendent reality that "embraces" them as a Universality (Benner 2014b). Accordingly, man is only aware of his own existence, when he perceives himself as a being dependent on the Absolute and at the same time on the world around him. Conceived in this way, religion proves to be a constitutive element of the public sphere. How could this statement be justified? In order to provide a short explication, we should take into account that the public sphere can only function as a mode of existence only when people as citizens become aware of their existence as being dependent on one another. In other words, it will be possible to consider religion as representing this everyday experience, through which man perceives that his existence and even his pursuit for his existential destination are conditioned by his fellow men i.e., the otherness of the other. What is

meant by this? Would it be possible that in this context religious experience is somehow equated with everyday experience?

On the above point, we might note the following: Man's participation in religious life naturally means that man has a religious experience. This (religious) experience, basically also found in other situations, also forms an awareness that human existence is dependent on God. In that sense, man experiences the fact that his existence is conditioned by a transcendence. In everyday experience, something quasi-similar happens: man is supposed to live together with his fellow man in a society. But this presupposes that man sometimes renounces his own expectations or demands so that the expectations or demands of the other can be truly realized. Only in this path, is coexistence of people in a society conceivable and possible. Through this, every human being experiences that his or her existence is dependent on his or her fellow human being. The awareness of such dependence shows that in everyday life the human person is transcended, so to speak, in order the Other can be developed as a unique subject. The idea of transcendence is, thus, found and profound in religious life as well as in everyday life.

Thus, teaching Religious Education is something more than teaching doctrines of a specific religious tradition (cf. Biesta and Hannam 2019, 181f). In this respect, it is obvious, that the basic aim of Religious Education should be following: Preparing tomorrow's citizens to participate in the public function of religion as an event of encounter and communication within the boundaries of the modern "Polis". In a joint publication with other researchers, Benner makes the following insightful comments: "By using the term 'competence to participate in the religious sphere' we mean a competence that relates to both the religious tradition and other religious traditions as well as to the public sphere; this ability enables students to develop their views on a personal, collective and public level in relation to religious issues or phenomena. This orientation of enabling participation in the field of religious action must not be misinterpreted and lead to the erroneous conclusion that the main task of Religious Education is to convert young people and gain their confidence for a particular denomination" (Benner et al. 2007, 143-144).

6. Participating in the public function of religion as a basic aim of Religious Education

The above considerations are more than clear by establishing, as a basic aim of Religious Education, the development of pupils' competence to form a reasoned view on questions of religious interest (and in particular regarding the awareness of man's dependence on a universality which transcends him). This kind of a reasoned view,

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which pupils can support with arguments, is based on an understanding of both the religious tradition which they are familiar ~~to~~ with and the religious tradition of the others, i.e., the other religious traditions within the social framework of current religious plurality. Formulating an argument on religious issues and in particular on the predominant feature of religious action (i.e., the awareness of man's dependence on the Absolute) is something that pupils should undertake not only for their personal spiritual cultivation, but it is at the same time an action through which they can participate in the public space. This position is of significant importance because it gives Religious Education a theological and existential character.

Following this sequence of ideas, we believe that preparation for participation in the public function of religion relates to seven fundamental competences that should be considered in Religious Education:

a. The competence to shape a personal and reasoned view regarding the fundamental feature of religion (i.e., the recognition that man is a finite being and that as an existence he is dependent on a transcendent/non-finite reality) as a structural component that helps the public sphere to function effectively.

b. The competence to formulate an opinion on issues relating to the field of religion in general (and relating to either familiar or different religious traditions).

c. The competence to understand the familiar religious tradition.

d. The competence to understand different religious traditions.

e. The competence to understand people's (different) views on religious issues in general.

f. The competence to enter into a dialogue with religious diversity in the public sphere.

g. The competence to communicate, represent and support in public discourse one's own point of view concerning religion.

7. Dialogue with diversity as a condition for orthodox spiritual life

All the above-mentioned observations converge on the idea that dialogue with diversity is not just a challenge or requirement of our time, but a condition, without which the educational process that takes place in schools, as well as the function of the public sphere nowadays, is unthinkable and unattainable. We can, however, extend our thinking a little further by trying to explore whether the dialogue on religious diversity is somehow related to the life of the Church. In that respect, we can make some observations *based on an orthodox-theological reflection*.

7.1. The Church constitutes as "political" way of life

The Church constitutes a "political" way of life, i.e., a way of manifesting the human political existence, since, as the etymology of the word itself indicates (ecclesia > = εκ + καλώ), it is an assembly and gathering, thus, modus of encounter and coexistence of people. This cohabitation does not build a superficial or incidental relationship between the members participating in it, but a union of life, communion and mutual participation, on the basis of which each member lives and embraces the lives of all others (cf. Mantzaridis 2015, 62). This, at least, is what Apostle Paul dictates when he describes the Church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12, 12; 1 Cor 12, 14-27). This charismatic unity is revealed in the Holy Eucharist, the centre of the Church life. John Damascene emphasizes that through participation in the Holy Eucharist all believers are united not only to Christ but also to one another, because they receive from the same body and blood (i.e., from the body and blood of Christ) (cf. Matsoukas 1992, 374). It could be argued on the basis of the above that the ecclesiastical way of life can be described as a "political" way of life, since man is called to be fulfilled as a person, meeting the other in Christ, and participating with him in a reality that takes the form of a "Polis" or "Body". Thus, the encounter with the other within the Church is a movement of "Exodus" from individuality and egocentrism. In this context, one realizes that in Christianity the relationship between God and man is not a matter of individual piety or individual action, but a way of life, which is developed by participation and engagement within a collectivity characterized as "Church" and "Body of Christ".

This relationship shaped between God and each human being is revealed and manifested as the relationship between God and the whole humanity (i.e. it has the form of a collectivity) within the life of Church. By extension, Christian life is unthinkable if we ignore the "political" nature of the Church. The meaning of life as well as the spiritual progress of man within the ecclesiastical "Polis" is a matter of a dynamic and constantly evolving collective partnership between God and human beings, a continuous becoming of a "mutual creation of meaning", i.e. an "inter-meaningfulness" (Loudovikos 2015), by which God and human beings co-operate and work together. (Loudovikos 2019).

7.2 Ecclesia as a sustained dialogue with diversity

The Church lives as a "Polis" while at the same time having a "political" mission of universal dimensions. Practically, this is implemented as a continuous summons addressing the whole humanity for participation in a universal unity of the whole creation, which is realized through the sanctifying presence of the Holy Trinity

(Matsoukas 1980, 223). It is, therefore, a life of an ecumenical unity with God. This shows that the Church exists for the sake of the world. Its purpose, in essence, is to constantly address the whole world and invite it to be transformed into such a "Polis", in which the otherness, uniqueness and freedom of man as an entity that cooperates with others (who are counted not as strangers but as brothers and sisters) is highlighted and promoted thanks to the selfless, "sacrificial" and sanctifying love of the Holy Trinity. This does not imply, of course, that the Church wishes to impose itself on the world, nor does it imply that it sets out to endow political power with divine qualities. The "political" existence of the Church is a way of being, not a form of power or imposition. Its mission is to encounter the world, to be in dialogue with it and invite it to participate in its life; for this reason, its collective identity is constantly *en route* (Nissiotis 1965, 29; cf. Tsompanidis 2014, 596). Herein is applied the following rationale: The more it "opens up" and embraces the world, the more its work is fulfilled, and the more its identity is revealed (Papathanasiou 2009). Or – using an alternative formulation – the process of building itself, i.e., the process of completing its work and mission, passes by the charismatic presence of Holy Trinity through the encounter with the other and is directed towards the eschatological kingdom of God. Should this encounter, this relationship with the other, and, ultimately, the dialogue with otherness be missing, the formation of its identity is not possible. Of course, this dialogue, is a signifier of its identity, and, thus, it does not constitute a superficial relationship, but a deep grounded relationship of life that is realized in the perspective of a partnership between God and human beings. It is deduced from this observation that the Church as a "Polis", and therefore the members who make up the Church, are in a constant state of movement and creation.

All the aforementioned findings make clear that the identity of the Church as a "Polis" and the identity of the human subject is an "open" affair and a continuous becoming (γίγνεσθαι), which evolves as an event of existential encounter between heterogeneities with reference to the transcendental (cf. Loudovikos 2020, 305). It is obvious even for the Church itself that this is an "open" question that is addressed not only at the level of Anthropology, but also at the level of Theology. Within the ecclesial "Polis" the constant and perpetual struggle of every human being to discover his or her identity is directly linked to the struggle to pursue God (cf. Loudovikos 2020, 305).

7.3 Ecclesia as a Polis within the global framework of Cosmo-Polis

The Church constitutes a "city", i.e. a way of politically existing in the world (cf. Papanikolaou 2017, 231). The "political" nature of the Church, of course, is understood in terms of its specific theological dimensions. Thus, the Church invites the whole

world to participate in its life in Christ. This invitation has an ecumenical and universal dimension, while being, at the same time, it is oriented towards an eschatological perspective. However, taking into account the political reality on a global level, we find that the Church is a "Polis" among other "Poleis"; it is a way of existing and cooperating with one another in the world, but it is not the only one. The public space, as we observe by studying Benner's pedagogical theory, is the meeting ground of many different domains of human action, each of which has its own rationale as well as a relative autonomy. It should be noted that each separate field of action constitutes a space of society in itself, within which man's action manifests itself as co-action, i.e., as a meeting of heterogeneities. This suggests that the totality of human action in society is composed of differentiated public, so to speak, subspaces of action; these subspaces together constitute the public space as the totality of social reality (Benner 2014b, 131). In this perspective, the Church - speaking in terms of political theory - is a part of the public space totality and constitutes a "political" way of life, i.e., a "Polis" that develops within - and not outside- an environment of miscellaneous diversity (cf. Stamoulis 2015, 231). Aristotle Papanikolaou moves in this direction by introducing into the theological debate the term "public ecclesiology" (Papanikolaou 2017, 231).

The correlation of Ecclesiology with the public sphere implicates that the Church as a "Polis" is called and challenged to co-exist in the public sphere with other "Poleis" i.e., with other spaces of human action, which have the right to be recognized as equal interlocutors, while at the same time they have a relative autonomy as well as a specific competence for action (cf. Kalaitzidis 2007, 153). This reality neither weakens nor diminishes the work and mission of the Church; on the contrary, it is a challenge, based on which it has the opportunity to intensify its efforts for carrying out its mission. Since, by its nature, it attempts an "exodus" and an "opening" to the world, it is understandable that meeting the world as a dialogue with diversity is on the agenda of its mission. The Church has to be in dialogue with the world, and this is manifested in fact as a struggle and concern a. for understanding the "language" of the world, its particular differentiated and various rationales, b. for understanding its diversity, c. for showing respect towards its spiritual quests, d. for recognition of its humanistic achievements, e. for honest communication and finding points of encounter, and f. for "translating" its own way of thinking and living into the societies of the modern world by using a "language" that is understandable on public discourse and "resistant" to public exposure. And since the purpose of the Church is the transformation of the world in Christ, it is understandable that it should strive, not only to be in dialogue with the world, but also to renew the world in Christ.

This perspective correlates with its commitment to stand by the side of each human being who is unjust and oppressed by the problems of life, expressing bravely its

opposition using clear and open terms against any form of undermining and circumvention of the freedom of the human person, for which Christ was crucified and resurrected (cf. Kalaitzidis 2007, 515). The fact that the Church cannot live otherwise, if only when it is in dialogue with otherness and when it cares for its fellow human being who suffers, is an evident proof that it constitutes itself as a "political" way of being. Undoubtedly, its members, as they experience the renewal of the world in Christ through the Holy Eucharist, strive to act in the world as "citizens" who perceive their role and realize their responsibility within a universal and worldwide public sphere. Thus, each member of the Church becomes a "citizen" of a cosmo-"polis", a "citizen" of the world, i.e. a cosmo-"citizen" (cf. Kotsiopoulos 2020, 133f).

8. Conclusions

With the present study we have delineated that the dialogue with diversity constitutes a structural element on the basis of which the public space is constituted. In other words, it is not possible for the public space as such to exist if the coexistence of diversity is not provided. Moreover, we have seen that Religious Education Course at school should focus on the public function of religion, which includes, among other things, the competence of students to be into dialogue with religious diversity within the framework of the public space. Finally, by exploring our theme in the light of Orthodox theology, it has become clear that dialogue with diversity is not just a political or pedagogical necessity; it is also an essential condition characterizing the spiritual life of the Church and of each believer as its member. Thus, a Religious Education Course, in which learning contents are basically related to the tradition of the Orthodox Church, can provide pupils with a suitable paradigm about the question of what the meaning of living as a political entity within the framework of a global and universal public space is.

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Religious diversity and cultural pluralism in Greece: Mapping of the situation and educational prospects

C. N. Tsironis

Abstract

The following analysis presents and studies the religious diversity and cultural pluralism in Greece, deepening the outcomes and conclusions of the comparative study (IO1), of the IRENE project. The Church of Greece (The Greek Orthodox Church) is the established/ majority church in Greece while older and newer religious communities live in the country along with an unspecified number of people that don't have any affiliation with a religious community. The Greek state ensures access to education for all children regardless of their ethnic origin, or their cultural and religious affiliation. The analysis presents data of school attendance in preschool and school classes focusing on the mapping of the cultural and religious diversity in the Greek education and on the relevant challenges in a modern, democratic, and inclusive school. A meaningful fact in this perspective is that the University Faculties of Theology and Education in Greece are developing curricula and training programs for pre- and in-service teachers to develop their knowledge and awareness on cultural and religious issues. The analysis concludes with the framing of the religious education role and the current challenges and perspectives in the field of education.

Key words: diversity, religious communities, Greek education, religious education

A. Introduction

After World War II and the international rearrangements that followed, various theories were developed trying to interpret the place of religion in the modern environment. Not few were those who interpreted phenomena like the separation of religion and politics, the weakening of the normative character of religious teaching as well as the declining of religious service attendance in the multicultural democracies of Europe, in the USA and elsewhere as presage of the withdrawal of the religion from the public space. Some people even risked the prediction that the phenomenon of the religions will disappear in the modern world.

Nevertheless, today one can note that the religion(s) element not only still exists in modern societies, but it also constitutes a field of particular interest for a wide range of scientific approaches, of political and social analysis, but also for a dialogue- sometimes of convergence and sometimes of confrontation- in the public space. The

religious communities are rearranged internationally, they redefine their activities and their way of expression, and they are reorganizing their present and structures within the environment of modern multicultural democracies. The endless mobility of people and exchange of ideas, images, goods, and practices[1] create new conditions and new challenges of religious expression and of social realization of the religious values, New and dynamic processes of the collective identities structuring come to the fore. The freedom of religious faith and beliefs, expressions and practices are crucial in the modern democracies, and they are related with the human rights, the Rule of Law, the social norms, the public space and the public order, the dialogue on issues of personal and collective liberties, the identity, and many others.

These issues appear rather often in the education area for several reasons: young people are always the most sensitive recipients of change and consequently the relevant debates appear in schools and generally in the education field with an extreme velocity and multimodality. Moreover, the educational policy is an important issue of the general political directions of modern societies. It is in this field that the basic social priorities, values, and targets are being projected, cultivated, and promoted. Therefore, the political stake is very important. Especially as it concerns the today's condition it should be underlined that in the educational field people of every community group and of every identity reference come together having the fundamental right of equal participation. This fact favors the expression of religious identity, the claim of conditions of security and the acknowledgment of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.[2] Furthermore, an increase in the phenomenon of radicalization among young people has been recorded in recent decades. It is also with great anxiety

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[1] Arjun Appadurai talks about the creation of new "identity landscapes" created by a constant (inter)movement of people, images, ideas, and other, and characterized by parallel tendencies of homogeneity but also heterogeneity. Under these circumstances the local element is in dialogue with the global and forms new "ethnoscapes" that is people and cultures in interaction through many and individual capacities as residents, refugees, tourists etc and "mediascapes". The aspects of cultural (inter)movement are completed by ideoscapes, technoscapes and financescapes. Appadurai Arj., "Global Ethnoscapes. Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology", in R. G. Fox (Ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology. Working in the Present*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991, 191–210. Appadurai Arj., *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

[2] Article 10, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (2000/C 364/01): «1. Every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right involves the freedom of change of religion or beliefs, as well as the free expression of religion or its beliefs, personally or collectively, publicly, or privately, with worship, education, the exercise of religious duties and the ceremonies". The constitutional provisions in Greece for the protection of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as well as the international legal frame of reference are presented by the General Secretariat on the web page: https://www.minedu.gov.gr/gepo-menu-m/nomothesia-2/26522-syntagma-2 . Access: 22.03.2022.

observed that in certain cases the people involved in social and political conflicts and even more in terrorist actions might have been youngsters that grew up in a European society. This concern gives direct priority to the development of an educational system that cultivates respect, dialogue, and collaboration instead of polarization, of a defensive communitarianism and of the closed communities and of the social tensions in the European societies. Finally, it is important to note the fact that diversity is not only appearing *between* communities but also *within* the communities. This fact reinforces the need for a better understanding of the role that religions hold in mobilizing social action and in constructing a broader dialogue on the role of values, of moral principles, of worship and religious practices in the configuration of the public space in multicultural societies[1].

B. Religious diversity in the Greek reality: A mapping attempt

Sociological studies and the modern social theory have demonstrated through the comparison of data coming from many and different countries that in the late modernity the meaning of diversity receives much more broader and complicated dimensions. The differentiation regarding the cultural or even the religious reference, the moral choices, the way of life, the traditions, and the way of participating in modern societies exist to a great extent as built-in realities. Diversity therefore exists not only between different communities but also within the communities[2]. Even though religious communities present a much greater inner cohesion, stability, and tendency for homogeneity (in comparison with other institutions) and seem to develop over time ways of cultivating and controlling this inner homogeneity with doctrines, cult practices, long-lived traditions, and establishment of certain models, the development of differentiation tendencies is recorded in various cases.

The rise of extremism, the acts of violence and terrorism *despite* the declarations of religious organizations for peace, the split of the religious communities and the "cultural wars" affirm the existence of various differentiations and tendencies on the religious field. At the same time, they are probably leading to a cautious attitude over possible generalizations. So, when it comes to "homodox" and "heterodox"- about "Christians" or "Muslims", it is wise to perceive these categorizations as

[1] See also: Ferrari S., Pastorelli S. (Eds.), *Religion in Public Spaces: A European Perspective*. London: Ashgate, 2012. Beckford, J. Public religions and the postsecular: critical reflections. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, v. 51, n. 1, 2012, 1-15. Calhoun, C. (Ed.). *Habermas and the Public Sphere,* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.

[2] Beck U., *A God of One's Own: Religion's Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence*, Cambridge, Malden, MA, Polity, 2010.

methodological choices. These categorizations could help the general understanding of religion phenomenon, but also should be always studied separately. Therefore, when we talk about the "Muslims" in a country there should always be a particular distinctive understanding approach as it concerns which "Muslim communities" in this country. This methodological approach should be applied for every religious community in the same country, instead of a generalized grouping.

Under these circumstances, the map of the religious communities in Greece contains a large majority religious group, older and newer religious communities but also an unspecified number of people that don't have or don't want to have any affiliation to do with a religious community. Therefore, there is a majority religious group, minority religious communities, Christian and non-Christian communities, and older and newer religious communities. The largest religious community is the orthodox Church of Greece, which has religious, cultural, political, and social bonds with modern -but not only- Greece. The Orthodox Church as prevailing (Constitution, Article 3, par.1. "1. The prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ.")[1], is the Church of most Greeks and it is recognized as an important entity and institution regarding issues of the religion, the culture, and the education of the country. It has 81 H. Dioceses and the Archdiocese of Athens while in the country there are also 8 Dioceses in Crete as well as the Archdiocese of Crete, as well as five more Dioceses in the Dodecanese (and the Exarchate of Patmos). There are also other Christian communities, like the Roman Catholic Church with special historical bonds in certain islands of the Cyclades and in others like Corfu. The R/Catholic Church is the second in size Christian community, and its members are raising due to people who came to Greece as economic migrants. There are also the protestant-evangelical communities mostly in urban centers. Additional reference should also be done in the various orthodox churches of an ethnic character, like the Coptic Christians, or other communities like the Anglicans, the Pentecostals, and finally communities with rather fewer members. The Muslim community[2] is concentrated mainly in Thrace and it is recognized as a religious minority with its rights recognized by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). This community has members that belong in different language and even ethnic groups (Pomaks, Turkish-born, Roma,), while new communities of Muslim refugees

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[1] See: https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/en/Vouli-ton-Ellinon/To-Politevma/Syntagma/ Access: 02.05.2022

[2] Tsitselikes K*., Old and New Islam in Greece: From historical minorities to immigrant newcomers*. Leiden, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2012. Ziaka Agg., *Το Ισλάμ στη Βυζαντινή, Μεταβυζαντινή Και Νεότερη Ελληνική Γραμματεία: Πολεμική και Διάλογος*, Thessaloniki: PAMAK, 2016. Asemakopoulou F., Chrestidou-Lionaraki S., *Η μουσουλμανική μειονότητα της Θράκης και οι ελληνοτουρκικές σχέσεις*, Athens: Livane, 2002. Askouni N., *Η εκπαίδευση της μειονότητας στη Θράκη. Από το περιθώριο στην προοπτική της κοινωνικής ένταξης*, Athens: Alexandeia, 2006.

and immigrants are developed in the urban centers in the last years, which in certain cases belong in different religious sub-groups (Sunnis, Shiites etc.). This confirms the initial hypothesis on the development of inner diversifications. The Jewish community[1] was rather prosperous in Greece and has a special importance because it is consisted by the Greek Jewish Holocaust survivors. Thessaloniki had a very important worldwide center of the Jewish community. The Greek Jewish Community continues its presence in the Greek society even though has been dramatically reduced. Finally, there are the communities of Jehovah Witnesses, Sikhs[2], Buddhists´, Baha´i and others.

Specific quantitative data for the members of the religious communities are not officially kept, as these data are sensitive personal data. However, the Orthodox Church of Greece counts a significant number of members in the general population, taken in consideration the percentage of the baptized and based on relatively recent research, such as Eurobarometer (2005), Kappa Research (2015) and others. According to the first research (Eurobarometer) the percentage of the Greeks who state that they believe in the existence of God reaches 81%[3], while according to the second research (Kappa Research) the percentage of those stating to belong to the orthodox faith reaches 81,4%[4]. Based on the above percentages it seems that there is a solid religious and cultural reference to the Orthodox Tradition, something which is also evident from the thousand churches, the monasteries, the Holy Springs, and the holy places that are scattered around the Greek territory. On the other hand, research confirm the reduced participation in Church life and the distinction between the religious commitment and everyday life in Greece. Studies rather show a variation of attitudes and reactions in the religious community concerning the presence and the role of faith in the life of Greeks but also in the collective reference of the country. In a recent study[5] Greece has a very high position between countries of the so-called Western World regarding the importance of faith in God for the development and cultivation of moral values, while

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[1] Naar D. E. *Η Θεσσαλονίκη των Εβραίων. Ανάμεσα στην Οθωμανική Αυτοκρατορία και τη Νεότερη Ελλάδα*, Athens: Alexandeia, 2018; Saltiel L., *The Holocaust in Thessaloniki: Reactions to the Anti-Jewish Persecution, 1942-1943*, London: Routledge 2020; Karampampas An., *Στα ίχνη των Εβραίων της Ελλάδας*, Athens: Psychogios, 2022; Sidiropoulou M. *Οι Έλληνες εβραίοι στη σύγχρονη Ελλάδα: η περιδίνηση στη νεωτερικότητα*, Thessaloniki: εκδ. ΠΑΜΑΚ, 2020.

[2] Papageorgiou N., *Θρησκεία και μετανάστευση. Η κοινότητα των Σιχ στην Ελλάδα*. Thessaloniki: Kornelia Sfakianaki, 2011.

[3] See Special EUROBAROMETER 225, "Social values, Science & Technology", 2005, 9-10.

[4] See Κάπα Research, Πανελλαδική έρευνα. Πάσχα, Θρησκευτικές συνήθειες, Εκκλησία, Πίστη & Κοινωνικές αντιλήψεις. 2015.4: https://kaparesearch.com/wp-content/ uploads/2017/12/ KapaVima_Religion_GR.pdf πρόσβαση: 16.03.2022.

[5] Tamir Chr., A. Connaughton and Ar. M. Salazar, *The Global God Divide*. Spring 2019 Survey Data, Pew Research Center, July 20, 2020: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/07/20/the-global-god-divide/ access: 14.03.2022.

80% answers that religion is important or very important in their lives. Research highlights a variety of diversions within the population depending on age, income, educational level etc.

Majorities in emerging economies connect belief in God and morality
% who say it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values
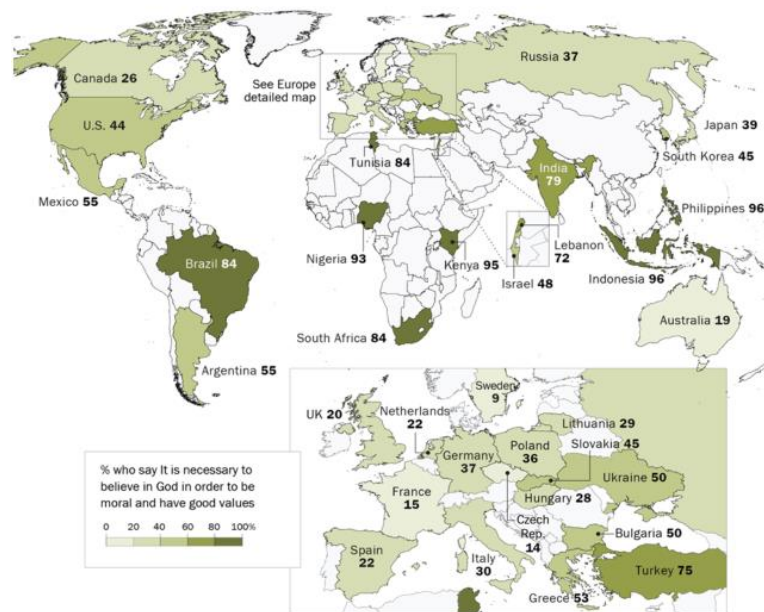
Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q30.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Pew Research Center, Spring 2019 Survey Data

In another research, conducted during the pandemic, Greeks in the question "where do you find meaning in your life" responded "to the family" at 54% while the faith is a choice that ranks low between the given answers[1]. It probably seems that "the phenomena of individualized approach to the religious life and the disconnection of religious faith from the practices and institutions of the religious communities

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[1] Silver L., P. van Kessel, Ch. Huang, L. Clancy and Sn. Gubbala, What Makes Life Meaningful? Views From 17 Advanced Economies, Pew Research Center, November 18, 2021: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/11/PG_11.18.21_meaning-of-life_Topline.pdf access: 14.03.2022

(believing without belonging or belonging without believing) make their appearance in the Greek space as well"… It's therefore necessary that every analysis must take into consideration that "… the most inner dimensions of the religious experience remain almost inaccessible for the social recording and analysis. So measurable recordings of participation of the ecclesiastical life can offer a general view of the incorporation of religion in the structural function of the society, but it should not be forgotten that they are being formed in a dynamic, almost liquid field of social change."[1].

Regarding the other religious communities in Greece, General Secretariat for Religious Affairs under the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs does not keep numerical data of members but has data on the existence of religious communities that are registered in Greece by religion and doctrine as well as on the places of worship that they have. After a request to the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs for providing data in order to write the current study in the context of the *Innovative Religious Education NEtwork: educating to the religious diversity (IRENE) project* (ERASMUS+ programme), relevant information derived and the analytical data appear in the table that follows[2]:

	CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES PER DOGMA	TOTAL OF WORSHIP HOUSES
A	CATHOLICS	228
B	PROTESTANTS	294
B1	ANGLICANS	4
B2	EVANGELICALS	98
	a. EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF GREECE	38
	b. SOCIETY OF FREE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES OF GREECE	46
	c. EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THESSALONIKI	2

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[1] See also Tsironis C. N., «Οι έρευνες για τη θρησκευτικότητα στη σύγχρονη Ελλάδα. Επιστημολογικά προλεγόμενα», in *Culture and Research, Vol. 1\2012, 67-82*: http://ejournals.lib.auth.gr/culres/article/view/2715

[2] Ypourgeio Paideias kai Threskevmaton, Γενική Γραμματεία Θρησκευμάτων, Διεύθυνση Θρησκευτικής Διοίκησης, Τμήμα Διοικητικών Υποθέσεων & Μητρώου, 16/03/2022 Αρ. Πρωτ.: 29722/Θ1

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	d. SOCIETY OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES	8
	e. ARMENIANS	1
	f. GERMAN SPEAKING	3
B3	PENTECOSTALS	99
	a. THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH OF PENTECOST	17
	b. FREE APOSTOLIC CHURCH OF PENTECOSTE	92
B4	THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS	3
B5	ADVENTISTS	10
B6	OTHER NO ORTHODOX	80
C	**CHRISTIANS JEHOVAH WITNESSES**	**104**
D	**ORTHODOX (PRECHALCEDONIAN)**	**14**
	EGYPTIAN COPTIC ORTHODOX	4
	ETHIOPIANS	1
	ARMENIANS	9
	SYRIANS	1
E	**GENUINE ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS (Old Calendars)**	**195**
	OTHER NO CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES	
A	**JEWISH COMMUNITIES**	13
B	**BUDDISTS**	5
C	**HINDUISTS**	3
D	**ISLAM**	14
E	**BAHA´I**	6
F	**GREEK NATIONAL RELIGION (NEW PAGANISM)**	1

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G	ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION (NEW PAGANISM)	1

It is true that in the last decades new religious communities are emerge in Greece due to the migrations, and that there are not only the horizontal categories of diversity but also the vertical ones. In the horizontal categories are included the particular cultural aspects of identity concerning the language, the religion, the cultural, ethnic or any other reference. On the other hand, the vertical categories are related to the social and economic situation, gender and other social aspects that define, give meaning, or favor empathy regarding the cultural diversity[1]. It's obvious that the socioeconomically degraded groups of students face greater chance of depreciation, social stigma, and marginalization because of their diversity.

C. Institutional framework and educational challenges

Public institutions don't officially record data that are directly referring to the religious beliefs of children studying in Greek schools. Consequently, the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) does not grant –for reason of confidentiality – data for refugee students in Greece and their religious beliefs. Thus, the connection, comparison, and analysis of the existing data mainly for preschool and the primary education, along with middle school, (school attendance of children from ages 05-15) are very useful to understand the current situation. During the school year 2019/2020[2] in preschool education were registered 6671 foreign students (male 3523, female 3148), from whom 541 arrived from EU countries and 5657 from countries outside the EU, while 473 have been registered were of unknown nationality. In the primary education have been registered 24655 students, from whom 1777 arrived from EU countries, 19143 from non-EU countries, while 3735 were of unknown nationality. In the lower secondary education schools (gymnasium) have been registered 10549 foreign students, from whom 852 arrived from EU countries, 9314 from non-EU countries, and 383 were

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[1] See Tsironis C. N., *Κοινωνικός αποκλεισμός και εκπαίδευση στην ύστερη νεωτερικότητα: Προκλήσεις στην ελληνική εκπαιδευτική πραγματικότητα.* Thessaloniki: Vanias, 2003, 298 passim. Plexousaki, A. *Κοινωνικοπολιτισμικό πλαίσιο: Πολιτισμός και Σχολείο*, Κλειδιά και Αντικλείδια. Athens: Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, University of Athens, 2003.

[2] SOURCE: ELSTAT. The data was asked and analyzed within the research context of the *Innovative Religious Education Network: educating to the religious diversity (IRENE) project* (ERASMUS+ programme), data have been uploaded in the web pages: https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SED11/- and https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SED12/- and https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SED21/- access: 01.04.2022.

of unknown nationality. It should be noted that while in the entire student population, children with diverse ethnic origins or religious beliefs do not appear to have a rather high percentage, there are areas or school units in which the participation rate can be very high[1].

ΠΙΝΑΚΑΣ 14: ΠΡΩΤΟΒΑΘΜΙΑ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ - ΠΡΟΣΧΟΛΙΚΗ ΑΓΩΓΗ (ΝΗΠΙΑΓΩΓΕΙΑ)
ΑΛΛΟΔΑΠΟΙ ΜΑΘΗΤΕΣ ΚΑΤΑ ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑ, ΝΟΜΟ, ΦΟΡΕΑ ΚΑΙ ΦΥΛΟ
ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ ΛΗΞΗΣ ΣΧΟΛΙΚΟΥ ΕΤΟΥΣ 2019/2020

Περιφέρεια, Νομός	Σύνολο			ΧΩΡΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΕΕ			ΧΩΡΩΝ ΕΚΤΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΕ			ΑΓΝΩΣΤΗΣ ΥΠΗΚΟΟΤΗΤΑΣ		
	ΣΥΝΟΛΟ	ΑΡΡΕΝΕΣ	ΘΗΛΕΙΣ	ΣΥΝΟΛΟ	ΑΡΡΕΝΕΣ	ΘΗΛΕΙΣ	ΣΥΝΟΛΟ	ΑΡΡΕΝΕΣ	ΘΗΛΕΙΣ	ΣΥΝΟΛΟ	ΑΡΡΕΝΕΣ	ΘΗΛΕΙΣ
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
ΓΕΝΙΚΟ ΣΥ	6671	3523	3148	541	283	258	5657	3012	2645	473	228	245

ΠΙΝΑΚΑΣ 21: ΠΡΩΤΟΒΑΘΜΙΑ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ - ΔΗΜΟΤΙΚΑ ΣΧΟΛΕΙΑ
ΑΛΛΟΔΑΠΟΙ ΜΑΘΗΤΕΣ, ΚΑΤΑ ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑ, ΝΟΜΟ, ΦΟΡΕΑ ΚΑΙ ΦΥΛΟ
ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ ΛΗΞΗΣ ΣΧΟΛΙΚΟΥ ΕΤΟΥΣ 2019/2020

ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑ, ΝΟΜΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΦΟΡΕΑΣ	ΣΥΝΟΛΟ			ΧΩΡΩΝ ΕΕ			ΧΩΡΩΝ ΕΚΤΟΣ ΕΕ			ΑΓΝΩΣΤΗΣ ΥΠΗΚ/ΤΗΤΑΣ		
	Σ	Α	Θ	Σ	Α	Θ	Σ	Α	Θ	Σ	Α	Θ
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
ΓΕΝΙΚΟ ΣΥ	24655	13027	11628	1777	910	867	19143	10203	8940	3735	1914	1821

Δευτεροβάθμια εκπαίδευση - ΓΥΜΝΑΣΙΑ
Πίνακας 15: Αλλοδαποί μαθητές κατά περιφέρεια, νομό, φορέα, υπηκοότητα και φύλο
Λήξη σχολικού έτους 2019/2020

εια, νομός κα	Σύνολο			Χωρών της ΕΕ			Χωρών εκτός ΕΕ			Άγνωστης υπηκοότητας		
	Σ	Α	Θ	Σ	Α	Θ	Σ	Α	Θ	Σ	Α	Θ
Σύνολο	10549	5781	4768	852	439	413	9314	4959	4355	383	383	

Source: ELSTAT

    The Greek state should ensure access to education for all children regardless of their ethnic origin, their cultural or religious references. The recognition of the right to education and of the necessity to protect the integrity of life of all children living in the country has been institutionally guaranteed both by ratifying of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989/ratification in Greece, Law 2101/92) as well as by the relevant Greek legislation on the protection and ensuring of participation of all children. Foreign children have the right not to participate in religion course[2], although in many cases they do choose to join these classes. During the last years the

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[1] Kesidou, A., Διαπολιτισμική εκπαίδευση: μία εισαγωγή. Ένταξη παιδιών παλιννοστούντων και αλλοδαπών στο σχολείο, στο: *Οδηγός Επιμόρφωσης - Διαπολιτισμική εκπαίδευση και αγωγή*, Thessaloniki: EPPAS, 2008, 21-36.

[2] According to L. 1566/1985 - OGG 167/A/30-9-1985 the Religion course is included with the same arrangements that apply to all other sources of the curriculum program with the condition that (article 1, a.) "The freedom of the religious conscience is inviolable", and at the same time is recognized the right of students and guardians to opt out, and special provisions are made for the religious education at the Muslim minority of Thrace in accordance with the Joint Ministerial Decision n. 182721/A3/29-11-2013.

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University Faculties of Theology and Education in Greece are developing special training programs for teachers to enforce their knowledge and awareness on cultural and religious issues. These efforts for more than 15 years are extended to all levels of education and are complemented with special courses in the University programs, where pre-service teachers learn how to respond to the present conditions of the Greek society and the educational environment. Moreover, research is carried out and reports are being published on ethnic-religious groups aiming for a better understanding of their presence in the Greek society[1].

Over the last years an unprecedent number of refugees from the Middle East and other countries have reached Greece. Since April 2016 many refugee accommodation structures are operating in Greece. The Greek State[2] has taken certain measures to face the basic issue of education of minor refugees (L. 4415/2016 and L. 4547/2018)[3]. With a Joined Ministerial Decision of 2016 (No 152360/ΓΔ4) it was regulated the integration of minor refugees in the public school. Special Reception Structures for the Education of the Refugee Children (**Δ.Υ.Ε.Π.**), support and information programs as well as educational material were created by the Ministry of Education and with the participation of NGOs, humanitarian organizations and church institutions.

D. The Greek educational reality and the religious diversity: challenges and directions

In the modern world, there is a constant need for communication and development of synergy skills and peaceful conflict resolution. This need does not only emerge in periods where the migration flow is high. As Hannerz noted early on: «From

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[1] See Sotireli G., *Θρησκεία και εκπαίδευση*, Athens: Ant. Sakkoulas, 1993. Karamouzis P., Πολιτισμός *και Διαθρησκειακή Αγωγή. Η συγκριτική διδακτική των θρησκειών και της θρησκευτικότητας στο σύγχρονο σχολείο*. Thessaloniki: Epikentro 2012. Karamouzis P., Athanasiadis E., *Θρησκεία, Εκπαίδευση, Μετανεωτερικότητα. Η Θρησκευτική Αγωγή στο Σύγχρονο Σχολείο*, Athens: Ekd. Kritike, 2011. Zampeta E., *Σχολείο και θρησκεία*, Athens: Themelio, 2003. Tsironis, C. N., Stamou N., Από την προσφυγιά στο σχολείο: Τα παιδιά των Γεζίντι στην ελληνική εκπαίδευση, in Ασκούνη Ν., Θάνος Θ. (Eds), Εθνοπολιτισμικές Διαφορές και Ανισότητες στην Εκπαίδευση. Κοινωνικοί αποκλεισμοί και πορείες ένταξης. Athens: Gudenberg, 2021, 66-82. Papageorgiou N.- Tsironis, C. N., «Φύλο, Μετανάστευση και Οικονομική κρίση στην Ελλάδα: Η τρέχουσα συζήτηση» in Culture and Research, Vol 2 (2013), p. 101-120 Ανάρτηση: http://ejournals.lib.auth.gr/culres/article/view/3943/3995

[2] For the Legislative frame related to refugees and asking for asylum see at Asylum Service: https://migration.gov.gr/nomothesia-1-2/#metanasteusi.

[3] EE: European Commission > EACEA National Policies Platform > Eurydice: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-33_el Access: 11.04.2022.

the First World metropolis to Third World village and popular culture, by way of missionaries, consultants, critical intellectuals and small-town storytellers, a conversation between cultures goes on»[1]. The basic educational goals for both educational initiatives and religious education are completed in a framework that includes **respect** for religious and cultural identity, the **inclusion** of all students and the **development of dialogue and collaboration skills,** as well as the familiarization and **deepening** in the tradition or identity of one's own.

Therefore, a proper and timely education-training of the school teachers on religious diversity is necessary, as well as for its relation with other forms of cultural diversity, because the teacher "is not a passive observer of students' physical maturation….On the contrary, he/she carefully organizes the factors, the ways, and the means of this process and tries to activate the characteristics of the human resources in the classroom, with benefits both in a collective and individual level"[2]. To this end, new adaptations have been made to Higher Education curricula, so that teachers can respond to the new social conditions of the classroom by inserting courses, such as sociology of education, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and more.

In the near future, religious identity seems to be an important aspect of the identity of children integrated in the Greek education system. The way in which religious reference will affect social reality, the children's inclusion, as well as the educational, social, and political perspectives and priorities of Greek society is a serious issue that concerns scientific research and enhances the need for new educational policies. The ability of religion to mobilize human action has been extensively explored[3]. It is therefore important to understand the role of religions in motivating social action in a pluralistic environment, because the classroom is a field of multi-faceted interaction as "interaction is realized in the form of collaboration, cooperation, conflict, distancing,

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[1] Hannerz, Ulf, 'The World in Creolization', *Africa* 57(4), 1987: 546–59 (here 555).

[2] Tsironis, C. N., Κοινωνική αλληλεπίδραση και κοινωνικές σχέσεις στο σχολείο. Ο ρόλος του εκπαιδευτικού στην ενσωμάτωση των μαθητών. Στο: *Ένταξη παιδιών παλιννοστούντων και αλλοδαπών στο σχολείο: Οδηγός Επιμόρφωσης - Διαπολιτισμική εκπαίδευση και αγωγή*, Thessaloniki: EPPAS, 2008, 123. See also: Chatzichrestou, Ch. *Διαφορετικότητα και πολιτισμός. Βιβλίο για τον εκπαιδευτικό δευτεροβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης*, Athens: Typothito, 2004. Sakka, D. (2009). The views of migrant and non migrant students on cultural diversity in the Greek classroom. *Social Psychology of Education*, Vol. 12, 21-41 (here 25).

[3] Wuthnow R., *Acts of Compassion. Caring For Others and Helping Ourselves*. New York: Princeton University Press, 1991. Wuthnow R., *Saving America? Faith-Based Services and the Future of Civil Society*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004. Tsironis, C. N., *Θρησκεία και Κοινωνία στη Δεύτερη Νεωτερικότητα: Λόγοι, διάλογοι & αντίλογοι στο έργο του Ul. Beck,* Thessaloniki: Mparmpounakis, 2018.

active initiatives and passive reactions"[1]. The question is whether religious identity is going to be soon a factor of peaceful dialogue and coexistence in the Greek school environment, as well as how this factor will interact with other cultural aspects of the identity. The possible emerge of new, hybrid cultural identities (such as those described in Derek Walcott's emblematic verse "either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation", "The Schooner Flight") is also a new question.

Equality in education remains a major social and political issue, that "is constantly proclaimed but never realized"[2]. Inequality in the access of educational goods seems to play an important role in shaping and reproducing not only social inequality but also social exclusion, lack of opportunities for access to public goods and of social cohesion, and rise of radicalization. Religious identity does not in itself cause social inequality. However, the multiple levels of differentiation and the correspondent social discriminations are related to each other. If differentiation regarding social identity is combined with poverty, low educational level, and other elements of diversity, then this differentiation can determinately intensify social exclusion. So, in this case religion holds a double role: a. may contribute to an active attempt to dismantle racism and discrimination speech and b. it can and should turn public attention on the anthropological bases of the religious teaching (which is particularly true in the case of Orthodox tradition in Greece) on human equality and respect for the integrity of human life. Going from the micro-level of the local community (school, neighborhood, parish) at the macro-level of the international scene, religious education can also contribute to a peaceful dialogue between different political entities, cultures, and religions, to reconciliation and healing the wounds[3]. In this respect, religion course can become par excellence course of reconciliation.

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[1] Tsironis. C. N., *Κοινωνικός αποκλεισμός και εκπαίδευση στην ύστερη νεωτερικότητα: Προκλήσεις στην ελληνική εκπαιδευτική πραγματικότητα*. Thessaloniki: Vanias, 2003, 261-262.

[2] Piketty, T. (trans. Rendall S.), *A Brief History of Equality*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022, p. 176.

[3] As Robert Crawford notes "the benefit of understanding beliefs, customs and cultures of others is great; in addition, it is essential in a pluralistic society and in a globalized world to educate children for something like that … Consequently, what we need to encourage is the conversation, the collaboration, and the brotherhood with the stranger and not the hostility and racism", in: Crawford R., *What is Religion*, Athens: Savvalas, 2002, 170-171.

Conclusions

The analysis of the situation in Greece confirms the initial hypothesis of developing differentiation not only *between* religious communities but also *within* them. After all, these data are also confirmed by similar trends internationally. This is an existing trend[1] that one can observe in the religious field. Pluralism seems to be a reality that brings new challenges, new questions, but also doubts for everything was taken for granted not only in the religious field but also in other areas of social life[2]. In the modern environment of constant changes and rearrangements it seems that the lack of knowledge on religion can cause serious problems, and particularly the development of fundamentalist views and radical attitudes *enface* of every form of diversity prevailing in the social field, based on poor and instrumentalized information on religions. On the contrary, documented, and integrated knowledge about religions can contribute to a rational and democratic dialogue based on scientific knowledge and leads to the realization of the goals of modern democracies. Religious education that leads to learning *about* religion but also *with* religion[3] can be achieved in the best possible way if it is cultivated by Higher Education institutions and transferred to schools by well-educated teachers and trainers. In this case, knowledge and democratic dialogue can contribute to the restriction of extremism and instrumentalization of religious diversity.

Therefore, there is still space for the development of educational approaches aiming in a course of inclusion and equal participation, in the Greek society. Approaches according to which moderation, participation of children in education and the rational dialogue can create fertile conditions so that the given multiculturalism of modern societies can be treated as a field of dialogue and development of social collaboration[4].

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[1] Riis, O. Modes of Religious Pluralism under Conditions of Globalization. *In: Koenig M & Guchteneire P. Democracy and Human Rights in Multicultural Societies. Hampshire, England: Ashgate; 2007*, 251-266. Roy O. *Is Europe Christian*? Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2020.

[2] Response by Detlef Pollack: Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociology of Religion? in P. L. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*. Boston: De Gruyter; 2014, 111-122.

[3] Jackson, R. "Teaching about Religions in the Public Sphere: European Policy Initiatives and the Interpretive Approach." *Numen* 55, no. 2/3 (2008): 151–82. Keast J. (Ed.), *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: A Reference Book for Schools*, Council of Europe CDED (2006)14, 2007.

[4] Cohen-Almagor, R. *Just, Reasonable Multiculturalism: Liberalism, Culture and Coercion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

With the support of the
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IRENE Innovative Religious Education
NEtwork: educating to the religious diversity

In the field of intercultural education, the value of an ecosystemic theory (see also Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory 'EST'[1]) has been emphasized in various ways. In the context of ecosystem planning, interventions are made at the level of educational policy and school classroom, concerning all children and the proper training of the teachers. The concept of identity is in any case par excellence multidimensional[2] and the approach of its various aspects demands a dynamic and sophisticated approach to the school environment. Especially, the role of sensitized και skilled teachers is important. As I noted on another occasion, teachers can become factors of positive change for their students: "Teachers therefore who seek to ensure the conditions of integration of all students:

✓ They explore and try to understand the social/cultural reality *of all* students. They give them opportunities of self-knowledge and deepening of their personal identity, because teachers and students who know their identity act and communicate without phobic attitude.

✓ They adapt the educational procedure to the students' needs, talents, and skills on an individual and collective level.

✓ They respond to the challenges that society puts in education (i.e. understating the difference and the possibility of cooperation in cultural pluralism).

✓ They enrich the educational process, the knowledge and own values horizon of the students and the simultaneous understanding of diversity in human principles, needs, characteristics.

✓ They promote the dialogue and interaction of students aiming at broadening interpersonal relations (exchange of information, approaching individual experiences with empathy) and the critical understanding of social and international conditions in which their experience is included.

✓ They cultivate respect and interest in human life and put in critically explore stereotypes, prejudice, and other negative factors in social interaction "[3].

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[1] See: "An ecological orientation points to the additional importance of relations between systems as critical to the child's development (e.g., the interaction between home and school, family and peer group)." In: Bronfenbrenner, U. (1974). Developmental research, public policy, and the ecology of childhood. *Child development*, 45(1), 1-5.

[2] Dragona, Th. (2003). *Ταυτότητες και Ετερότητες: Ταυτότητα και Εκπαίδευση*, Κλειδιά και Αντικλείδια. Athens: Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, University of Athens.

[3] Tsironis, C., Κοινωνική αλληλεπίδραση και κοινωνικές σχέσεις στο σχολείο. Ο ρόλος του εκπαιδευτικού στην ενσωμάτωση των μαθητών. Στο: *Ένταξη παιδιών παλιννοστούντων και αλλοδαπών στο σχολείο: Οδηγός Επιμόρφωσης - Διαπολιτισμική εκπαίδευση και αγωγή*, Thessaloniki: EPPAS, 2008, 123-140 (here: 130).

As the above analysis showed, cultural pluralism in Greece is now a fact that also accompanied by religious pluralism. This reality brings to the fore the necessity of information, sensibilization, awareness and developing dialogue and synergy skills. To this end the four Schools of Theology that have been operating in Greece for decades have a de facto very important role. They are involved in the formation of primary and secondary educational curricula, in organizing educational and academic meetings, in the interchristian and interfaith dialogue on a national and international level. Especially, religion course can contribute to the general goals of education as a course that gives students the opportunity to know and understand the **religious experience,** to deepen into their own tradition and debate with the global developments of religious phenomenon.

In the description of the goals of the Religion education of Muslims students in Thrace, the Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs gives a comprehensive description of the aims of the official Greek educational policy today, regarding religious and cultural diversity in the Greek school: "The Religious Education today must respond to the modern educational needs of the students, serving, on the one hand, the general purposes of education and, on the other, a "religious literacy", that contributes to the creation of citizens religiously conscious and open to dialogue. This religious education aims at a religious literacy, but also at the sensibilization and the self-reflection of students as far as concern their own religious and moral concern."[1]. Modern pedagogical approaches acknowledge the role of religious education in the modern school. To achieve the above-mentioned objectives, good practices need to be collected and tested in different educational conditions and countries; use of research data and a long-term educational planning to create conditions that respect students' personality, the democratic principles of European Union and the aim of the complete development of students in primary and secondary school. The IRENE project is another essential step in this prospect.

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[1] https://www.minedu.gov.gr/dimotiko-2/didaktea-yli-dimot/18393-29-02-16-proairetiki-i-didaskalia-tou-koraniou-gia-tous-mousoulmanous-mathites-tis-thrakis-2

Educating for Inter-Faith Dialogue

Brunetto Salvarani

Abstract

Education can play a key role in today's process of multireligiosity in the western society. In front of the current swirling changes happening in the religious field, it is necessary to react with a process of adjustment to them, that requires a new approach in the fields of education and training. During the history of the latin church, for many centuries the largely dominant position was that of being *exclusive*, o *church-centered*, exemplified by the axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, up until the Second Vatican Council, that opened it – with the declaration *Nostra aetate* – towards an inclusive view and of a christocentric cut. Following that, the Pontifical Council for the interreligious dialogue has produced two important documents, *Dialogue and Mission* (1984) and *Dialogue and Announcement* (1991), in which four possible models of dialogue were indicated: the dialogue of everyday life, the dialogue of **works/actions**, the dialogue of the theological exchanges and that of spirituality and of the mystics. Here are some indications of the method in sight for a fruitful education in the interreligious dialogue: no renouncing at one's identity; the maturation of a positive attitude towards the other religions; while it would also be useful to work together in a specific section, dealing for example with social problems or injust discriminations, on the background of the project for global ethics, promoted by Hans Küng (pope Francis speaks of *a social dialogue for peace* since the exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*). Even because today, it seems impossible to refuse that "without dialogue the religions either get entangled in themselves or they sleep in the mooring … or they open up one at the other, or they degenerate" (R. Panikkar).

Key words: education and training – interreligious dialogue – dialogue of the works – identity – global ethics

Who is not familiar with *The Simpsons*, the family of the cartoon sitcom, that has been raging on screens all over the world for over 30 years? Matt Groening, the creator of the series, immediately decided to offer a realistic interpretation of his shabby heroes, declaring: 'Right-wingers are always complaining that not enough is said about God on television, but the Simpsons not only go to church, but they also happen to talk about God'. He was right (of course). In the series, the religious element is very present, and it is present in the most natural way for a country like the United States, where the social scene is characterised by great multi-religiousness, and even new religions sprout daily like mushrooms and the freedom to profess one's own religious is jealously protected. Let's take, for example, an episode titled 'Homer the Heretic', all focused on the most varied religious drives, which eventually sees the forces of the Jew Krusty the Clown, the Hinduist Apu and the Christian-tendency-fundamentalist Ned Flanders join forces to save the Simpsonian house now burnt down because of the incorrigible negligence of the *paterfamilias* Homer. In this episode, Homer makes a series of gaffes against his friends who do not follow his religion (the original one, linked to an unspecified Presbyterian-Lutheran church, and the one he has just created in defiance of the first one), cruelly mocking Apu and closing the door in Krusty's face.

AN UNPRECEDENTED PANORAMA

Dad Simpson's embarrassing exposition on the process of multi-religiousness in action can help us to focus on the fact that there is an important role that education can play, in relation to the environment around us: the role of helping us to interact in a positive way with it and to encourage the growth of a harmonious relationship between people of different faiths or political orientations, until a mutual (cultural or spiritual) enrichment is reached. These considerations are valid in general, but perhaps above all for that particular area represented by the religious environment, which has been marked by deep changes in the last three decades, even in countries religiously uniform such as Italy. Unlike in the recent past, today, even a quick snapshot of religions shows them first and foremost as a work in progress. It is possible to choose to be an atheist, to follow a religious orthodoxy, to change confession, to carve out one's own path within the religions themselves[1]. Everything seems more fragmented, more uncertain than in the past, and believers generally feel freer, though less firm in their spiritual

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[1] Cf. P. BERGER, *The many altars of modernity*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2014.

direction. The great religious institutions appear more vulnerable than ever, and the absoluteness of the divine message is usually challenged by the plurality of possible choices before us. The mosaic of faiths is becoming more complicated day by day, creating perplexity, doubt and, only rarely, hope.

I believe that we have to react to these whirlwind changes in the religious sphere with a process of adaptation to them, which in turn requires a new approach in the fields of education and training, so that human beings can deal with this change in a positive and mutually fruitful way. Until recently, the majority of people in Europe lived within narrow, socially circumscribed religious groups, with a rather pronounced – because essentially undisturbed – awareness of their own identity and of the difference that separated them from people belonging to other religious traditions. For instance, Buddhists, Hinduists, Sikhs, but Muslims as well, lived in distant countries, frequented only by a few Western tourists and scholars, and were generally perceived as icons of curious, exotic, and even somewhat folkloristic spiritual paths. The current forced proximity, moreover, has not been accompanied by specific training, correct information or adequate reflection, while the collective emotion aroused by events such as the attacks of the 11th of September 2001 and the recurrent violent actions in the name of the god of the moment have contributed to spreading fear, suspicion and distrust. Such things also contributed to a very negative perception of religious pluralism, which is often seen as a senseless wedge suddenly driven into the calm scenario of previous indifference, apathy, secularisation, masked by a Catholicism of façade and by the motto 'We cannot but call ourselves Christians', Benedetto Croce style[1].

If we look at the history of the Catholic Church, for example, the picture appears linear. The largely dominant position, for the many centuries between the first Christian community and the eve of Vatican Council II, is called 'exclusivist', or 'ecclesiocentric', exemplified by the axiom *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. The perspective was exquisitely soteriological, and touched on the possible (albeit improbable, except in very particular situations) salvation of non-Christians; indeed, of infidels... During this long period, missionary proclamation remained tied to an exclusive vision of salvation: Christ or Satan; God or the idol; the truth that saves or the error that loses. *Tertium non datur*. It was only in the immediate post-war period that authors, such as J. Daniélou, Y. Congar, H. De Lubac, and K. Rahner, with his *anonymous Christianity*, elaborated the thesis according to which the positive values of other religions would find fulfilment in Christianity, especially in the so-called eschatological Christ. In particular, the theologians of the 'Nouvelle Théologie' spoke of religions as a preparation for the Gospel, reading Christianity as God's response to

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[1] Cf. B. CROCE, "Perché non possiamo non dirci *cristiani*", *La Critica*, 20 November 1942.

the strong desire that He Himself arouses in humanity, but to which it is not able to respond on its own: this is the 'inclusive', or 'Christocentric' position, that will find full implementation in Vatican Council II. (1962-1965).

According to Paul VI, who signed the encyclical of dialogue, '*Ecclesiam Suam*', on the 6th of August 1964, the time had come when 'The church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives'. Indeed, with a climax effect, 'the church becomes word; the church becomes message; the church becomes conversation' (ES 67)[1]. The declaration '*Nostra Aetate*' - which, adopting an anthropocentric approach, indicates as the founding principle of relations the unity of the human family, by virtue of the unity of the divine plan of salvation for all – recommends in turn, towards the faithful of other religions, sincere respect, collaboration and dialogue (NA 2). We could speak of the emergence of a new anthropological and theological status of the non-Christian, which saw the word dialogue enter the ecclesial vocabulary, alongside the usual terms such as announcement, teaching, catechesis, evangelisation and witness. Since the Vatican Council II, therefore, the crucial question is no longer whether and how non-Christian individuals can be saved (the classic *de salute infidelium*), but what revelatory and salvific value should be assigned to other religions as such: in this context, in what sense is Christ necessary for salvation and is the church a means of salvation?

FOUR TYPES OF DIALOGUE

In this regard, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has drafted two important documents, called 'Dialogue and Mission' (1984) and 'Dialogue and Proclamation' (1991), in which Pontifical Council indicates the four possible models of dialogue. The first model mentioned is 'The dialogue of life', in which people, mutually well-disposed, strive to live in a spirit of openness and good neighbourliness, sharing each other's joys and sorrows, problems and human concerns. I would call it, to paraphrase Pope Francis, 'The dialogue of the next door'.

The second is 'The dialogue of works', which takes place when Christians and other men and women of faith work together for the integral development and liberation of peoples, aiming at education for peace and respect for the environment, solidarity with the vast world of suffering, the promotion of social justice and peace among peoples.

The third modality is that of the dialogue of theological exchanges, in which experts from the different parties seek not only to arrive at a minimum common denominator, but also to deepen their mutual understanding of their respective religious heritages, to

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[1] The Latin term used is *colloquium*, to indicate its daily dimension, lived; while *dialogus* it would have appeared only in the conciliar texts following this encyclical.

the point of appreciating each other's spiritual values. The aim is to render a courageous service to the truth, highlighting both areas of convergence and fundamental differences, in a sincere effort to overcome prejudices and misunderstandings, that have not been lacking over the centuries.

The last one is 'The dialogue of religious experience', which is what happens when people rooted in their own religious traditions share their spiritual riches, *they holding their arms outstretched towards the heavens* (pope Paul VI): for example, regarding prayer and contemplation, faith and the ways of seeking God or the absolute. The exercise of contemplation, in particular, responds to the immense thirst for interiority of spiritually searching people and helps all believers to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of God.

The two documents are part of the discussion on the relationship between dialogue and proclamation and show that the missionary attitude is not cancelled out by the choice of dialogue, but that, on the contrary, dialogue is precisely the place of mission. In presenting the different modalities of dialogue, they identify four impediments to dialogue: prejudice, fundamentalism, syncretism, and polemic spirit. Ultimately, when engaging in dialogue, one must have an attitude of openness, curiosity, and a willingness to confront, which does not undermine our faith but, on the contrary, enriches it. Since '*extra Ecclesiam*', of course, the whole perspective has changed.

EDUCATING FOR DIALOGUE, SOME INDICATIONS OF METHOD

Against the backdrop of this quick overview, Groening's cue in the misadventure of 'Homer the heretic' does not seem trivial. No authentic dialogue can take place on the basis of a renunciation of one's own identity (which is neither an idol nor a *moloch*, but a path of research and an ongoing process), or of a generic 'Let's all love each other', or of an indifferentism that trivialises differences at a low price. These differences are there, they will remain, and should not be minimised: if anything, they should be properly contextualised, and never dramatized. A serious dialogue, on the other hand, implies interlocutors who are aware of and in love with their identity! 'Having firm convictions,' writes Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, the founder of the Theology of Liberation, 'is not an obstacle to dialogue, but rather a necessary condition. To accept, not by one's own merit but by the grace of God, the truth of Jesus Christ in one's own life is something that not only does not invalidate our way of dealing with people who have assumed perspectives different from our own, but also gives our

attitude its genuine meaning'[1]. In an apparent paradox, the ability to listen to others is all the greater the firmer our convictions and the more transparent our identity of faith. A second criterion for fruitful inter-faith dialogue is the development of a positive attitude towards other religions. This is the common thread not only of Vatican Council II, especially in the declaration '*Nostra Aetate*', but also in the subsequent stages: from John Paul II's choice of a 'pedagogy of gestures' (from his embrace of rav Elio Toaff at the main temple in Rome on the 13th of April, 1986, to the World Day of Prayer of Religions for Peace in Assisi on the 27th of October of the same year, from his approaching the Western Wall in Jerusalem, in 2000, to his walking barefoot in the mosque of Damascus, in 2001) to the joint proclamation by the Christian churches of Europe of the '*Charta Oecumenica*' in Strasbourg, France (2001), to the repeated gestures and speeches of Pope Francis, such as the *Abu Dhabi Document*, on the 3rd of February, 2019[2]. Education and training for inter-faith dialogue, or at least for a life of friendship and sympathy with people of other religions, must first of all seek to create a general attitude whereby we emphasise what is positive, good, beautiful, in the other religion, rather than its negative aspects, and place the emphasis on whatever unites or fosters cooperation and friendship, rather than on what divides.

In view of this acquisition, it is obviously a question of embarking on a path which may prove to be long, complex and bumpy: it is pointless to have any illusions (but also to wrap one's head around it before having tried seriously, of course!). Here are some indications of method that would favour this meeting and make it less tense and dramatic. First of all, inter-faith dialogue will have to mature within the framework of an acknowledgement that those engaging in dialogue are not religions (abstract entities) but women and men of flesh and blood, with their own unique and unrepeatable histories, experiences, sufferings and hopes. This is not an obvious consideration: how many mistakes have been made, and continue to be made, because of an entirely ideological and metaphysical interpretation of the other! Examples would be endless. First of all, create and foster opportunities to meet, therefore, in environments that encourage effective contact. It will then be necessary to have a good mutual knowledge of the interlocutors involved: knowledge of the texts and official documents of the churches and religions (*learning about religions*), but also human knowledge, starting from a sincere attitude of listening to the narratives of others (*learning from religions*). Working together in some specific area, for example, tackling social problems or unjust

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[1] G. GUTIERREZ, "Un nuovo tempo della teologia della liberazione", *Il Regno – Attualità* 10 (1997), pp.298-315.

[2] PAPA FRANCESCO – AHMAD AL-TAYYEB, *Documento sulla Fratellanza Umana per la pace mondiale e la convivenza comune*, Paoline, Milano 2019.

discrimination, could make an interreligious relationship denser and more convincing (against the background of the project for a global ethic advocated by Hans Küng[1], while Pope Francis has been talking about a 'social dialogue for peace' since the exhortation '*Evangelii gaudium*', 2013). Valuing experiences and lived testimonies in a fruitful dialogue, therefore, especially in the eyes of the youngest – in need of lived models and refractory to excessive theorising – will certainly help the dialogue process: with direct encounters, when possible, visits to the various places of the communities, and so on. The fatigue of the present time, which has also been hit by the experience of the ongoing pandemic, in the face of such clearly complex issues, can also be a valuable opportunity to rethink the meaning of evangelical radicalism, in the context of the pluralism of cultures and religions: without nostalgia for an improbable return to Christianity and without escaping into the future without roots, depth and realism.

THOSE WHO DO NOT REGENERATE...

Today, therefore, if we are intellectually honest, it seems impossible to deny that 'Without dialogue, religions become tangled up in themselves or sleep at their moorings... Either they open up to each other, or they degenerate' (R. Panikkar[2]). And that, as Edgar Morin often repeats, 'He who does not regenerate himself degenerates. Who knows if, with what has happened to him, Homer will be regenerating himself...? It is legitimate to have some doubts in this regard. Even if, in another episode ('Screaming Yellow Honkers', 1999), we hear him praying in no uncertain terms: 'Jesus, Allah, Buddha, I love you all!'[3].

[1] H. KÜNG, *Global responsibility. In search of a New World Ethic*, Crossroad, New York 1991.

[2] R. PANIKKAR, *L'incontro indispensabile. Dialogo delle religioni*, Jaca Book, Milano 2001, p.25.

[3] On the topics covered, I refer to two of my volumes: *Vocabolario minimo del dialogo interreligioso* [*Minimum vocabulary of interreligious dialogue*], EDB, Bologna 2008² and *Il dialogo è finito?* [*Dialogue is finished?*], EDB, Bologna 2013².

Religious Diversity and Pluralism in Italy

Enzo Pace

Abstract

The analysis offered in this article is divided in two parts: in the first part the intention is to define the outline of the question relevant to religious diversity, while in the second part the intention is to document the diffusion of the new religions that are mostly present in Italy today, using maps of the places of worship.

It is important to record a passage: from a society characterized by the monopoly of Catholicism to a society distinguished by an unexpected and without precedent religious pluralism. This diversity that has started to emerge in Italy requests an updating of the maps on religiosity and on secularism that Italian sociologists of the religion study so that they can interpret the happening changes during the years. To do that, there is need of a glance that is able to go beyond ethnocentrism and catholic-centrism with which religious diversity has been looked at till now, in the italian context.

Key words

Pluralism, religious diversity, maps and religious geography, secularization, and post-secularization

Introduction

Because of the flow of many people coming from various countries – more than 180 -around the world, to what extent the Catholic monopoly in Italy is challenged by an increasing degree of religious diversity? Roughly speaking, the question concerns the relation between religion and migration in Europe, in particular in the Southern countries, focusing on the switch from being countries of emigration to becoming countries of immigration. Secondly this process affects the peculiar religious structures of those countries. Many of them – like Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain[1] – for

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[1] Vilaça, Helena. Furseth, Inger. Pace, Enzo. Pettersson, Per. *The Chaning Soul of Europe*. Farnham, Ashgate, 2014 ; Perez-Agote, Alfonso (ed.). *Portraits du catholicisme en Europe*. Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012.

historical reasons are countries up to now with a dominant religion: Orthodox in Greece, Catholicism in the others.

The monopolistic structure of religious field in any case is now challenged by the increasing religious diversity. It means an increasing of the social complexity that implies a differentiation of the religious field in relation and tension with the dominant system of belief.

From theoretical point of view, it seems to me useful conceptualize the socio-religious change occurring in the Southern part of Europe according to system theory[1] . The point of view of the theory of social systems seems to me particularly useful to analyze what happens in a society when its environment changes, becoming in many ways not easily attributable to the apparatus of social cohesion and social control (political, ideological, economic and cultural) that could apply to a society relatively more stable and homogeneous. The risk of the entropy both for the society as a whole and for a Catholic institution is higher when the flow of immigrants coming from a variety of countries around the world is not homogeneous too. There is diversity within the diversity. Not only Islam, but Muslims; not only Orthodox Christians, but Romanians, Ukrainians, Serbs, Moldovans, Greek, Russians Orthodox each with its own specific religious characteristics; not only people coming from Asia, but Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian Tamil and so on; not only Pentecostals, but African, Latin-American and Chinese Pentecostals with belonging to a plurality of different denominations.

Focusing on to the Italian case, the political system is called upon to rethink the way the State has traditionally managed the relations on the one hand with the Catholic Church - the dominant religion of the majority – and on the other with the other denominations considered minorities, *admitted* today to enter the public space legally ruled. It means the Italian way to manage the religious diversity. The peculiar policy of religious pluralism in Italy is another evidence of the relevant conceptual difference introduced by many scholars[2].

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[1] Luhmann, Niklas. *Soziale Systeme*. Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987 (*Social System.* Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996); Luhmann, Niklas. *Introduction to Systems Theory*. Cambridge, University of Cambridge Press, 2012; Pace, Enzo. *Religion as Communication*. London, Routledge, 2011.

[2] Beckford, James T. Demerath Jay N. (eds.). *The Sage Handbook of Sociology of Religion*, 316-348. Los Angeles, Sage, 2007; Doe, Norman. *Law and Religion in Europe*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011; Richardson, James T. Bellanger, François (eds.). *New Religious Movements and Minority Faiths*. London, Routledge, 2014; Wuthnow, Robert. *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005.

The article is divided into two parts. In a first, I am intending to specify the contours of the issue of religious diversity. The second part will document with the help of maps of places of worship the spread of major new religions in Italy today.

1. The impact of the migration on the Italian society

I propose to analyze the social changes taking place in Italy from a particular angle, i.e. the passage from a society under a Catholic monopoly to one characterized by an unprecedented and unexpected religious pluralism. The maps illustrating the presence of several different religions from those of a typical Italian's *birth* (Catholicism) show how the country's social and religious geography is changing. Such a change is a major novelty in a country that has always seen itself as Catholic for long-standing historical reasons and also for deeply rooted and still strong cultural motives.

Despite the religious diversity that is beginning to make itself socially obvious, the Catholic Church continues to have a central role in the public arena, but it is beginning to realize that Italian society is *moving* on, not only because other religions are striving to gain visibility and public acknowledgement, but also because they are contributing in some cases to making the religious field more variegated.

The Catholic Church is a system of belief that is still well-organized, with a complex *potestas indirecta*[1] in the sphere of political decision-making. This is the *religion of Italians' birth*. Albeit with growing difficulty, it has continued to withstand the onslaught of secularization, as an analysis on a representative sample of the population[2] and an ethnographic study[3] have recently confirmed. By comparison with other situations in Europe, Italy appears to have become secularized while remaining *faithful* to its image (in collective representational terms) as a Catholic country, thanks to the Church's organizational strength. It is no longer a Catholic country in terms of many Italian people's practices, but the collective myth of the Italians' Catholic identity[4] still seems to hold. But the socio-religious shift is taking place: from a religious

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[1] Poulat, Émile. L'Église romaine, le savoir et le pouvoir, in *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 1974, 37 : 5-21.

[2] Garelli, Franco. *Gente di poca fede*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2020; Cipriani, Roberto. *L'incerta fede*. Milano, Franco Angeli, 2020.

[3] Marzano, Marco. *Quel che resta dei cattolici*. Milano, Feltrinelli, 2012.

[4] Garelli, Franco. Guizzardi, Gustavo. Pace, Enzo (eds.). *Un singolare pluralismo*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003.

single culture to a novel form of religious diversity. This is a slow process that is going largely unnoticed, generating no particular tension or conflict (except for the case of the Muslim places of worship), but it is ultimately producing a change in the country's socio-religious geography. Italian people are no longer born inherently Catholic.

My aim in the following pages is to illustrate and describe this change with the aid of data collected in a study completed in 2012[1], which enable us to go beyond mere generic estimates of the presence of other, non-Catholic religions in Italy to map the different places of worship, by region and by religious confession. Although the number of immigrants reached plus than 5 million in 2014 (accounting for 7% of the population), neither the central Italian Statistics Institute (ISTAT) nor the Ministry of the Interior have succeeded in providing a circumstantiated picture of the real presence of the various religions in the country, apart from the case of the Muslim places of worship, which are monitored by the police and the intelligence services on behalf of the Ministry of the Interior for reasons of public security. Indeed, this source provides a good starting point for examining and further analyzing the situation, as was done recently by Allievi[2] and Bombardieri[3].

Be that as it may, the 189 different nationalities of Italy's immigrants make it plain that religious diversity is now part of our lives, at the local market, in our hospital wards, prisons and school rooms, at the offices of our local social services, and so on. Estimates may be a starting point, but they no longer suffice to give an accurate picture of Italy's socio-religious geography, capable of *realistically* illustrating people's experiences and their ways of belonging to a given religion. In other words, estimates cannot answer the question of what people that we formally classify as Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Pentecostals, and so on, actually believe in.

We are beginning to gain an idea of the areas where the immigrants' different religions tend to become concentrated, but we have only a very incomplete and imprecise map of their places of worship. These places are still not very obvious to the naked eye – to our cursory gaze, at least: though we are accustomed to recognizing a Catholic church at a glance, we are less well equipped to notice buildings that identify the presence of other, non-Catholic religions. Our eyesight has a role in religions. Our eyes reflect and record an orderly outside world, where we see things that are familiar to us.

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[1] Pace, Enzo. *Religious Congregations in Italy: Mapping the New Pluralism*, in C. Monnot & J. Stolz (eds.). *Congregations in Europe*, Springer, Cham, 2018, 139-158.
[2] Allievi, Stefano. *La guerra delle moschee*. Venezia, Marsilio, 2010.
[3] Bombardieri, Maria. *Moschee d'Italia*. Bologna, EMI, 2012.

To begin to really *see* how Italy's socio-religious geography is changing, we must first go a step further, going beyond mere estimates of the different religious realities that have now become well-established in our country. Some religious communities show a marked degree of homogeneity, while others are differentiated even amongst themselves. It is easy to find information on the former, much more difficult for the latter (as in the case of the Muslim communities that refer to different associations, some of which represent the world of believers as a whole, while others are based on geographical origin). For some religions, despite some degree of differentiation, we can deal with the problem of obtaining a credible picture of their places of worship by relying on a network (that we have patiently constructed) of witnesses, who have provided addresses and other precious details.

Maps are used for travelling, and combined with a compass, they help us to orient ourselves in an effort to interpret the new map of religions in Italy. If somebody were to travel through Italy from north to south, and from west to east, they would certainly not be immediately aware of any Sikh temples or mosques, nor would they know how to recognize an Orthodox church (barring a few exceptions in Trieste or Venice, or in Bari or Reggio Calabria in the south, where there are churches that bear witness to the historical presence of flourishing Greek and Albanian Orthodox communities). They would be even less likely to stumble upon evidence of Hindu mandir or Buddhist temples, and would have virtually no chance of noting any African, South American or Chinese neo-Pentecostal Churches. While the African neo-Pentecostal Churches have been the object of a specific investigation[1], their Latin American and Chinese counterparts have remained in the background. A problem with the new Churches, moreover, lies in that it is very difficult to find them because they are often born and survive in very precarious logistic and operating conditions. It is nonetheless common knowledge that some Latin American mega-Churches, and particularly the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (born in Brazil in 1977) are now widespread in many countries[2]. This Church has ten locations in Italy (in Rome, Milan, Turin, Genova, Mantova, Verona, Udine, Naples, Florence and Siracusa). Then again, little or nothing is known about the religious habits of the Chinese, except for two studies conducted in Turin and Prato (Tuscany)[3].

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[1] Pace, Enzo. Butticci, Annalisa. *Le religioni pentecostali*. Roma. Carocci, 2010.

[2] Corten, André. Dozon, Jean-Pierre. Oro, Ari Pedro (eds.). *Les nouveaux conquérants de la foi. L'Église du royaume de Dieu*. Paris, Khartala, 2003 ; Garcia-Ruiz, Jesus. Michel, Patrick. *Et Dieu sous-traita le Salut au marché*. Paris, Armand Colin, 2012.

[3] Berzano, Luigi et al. *Cinesi a Torino.* Bologna, Il Mulino, 2010; Giordan, Giuseppe; Cao, Nanlai; Pace, Enzo (eds.). Chinese Religions in China and Italy, *Religioni & Società*, 2018, 1, p. 120.

2. *Mapping religious diversity*

Taking a quick look at the map of religions in Italy, we see the following situation in as much as concerns the places of worship (Table 1).

Table 1: Places of worship and membership estimates (2018)[1]

Religions	Places of worship	Membership (estimates)
Islam	794 (of which 6 mosques)	1,614,000
Orthodox Churches	486 (parishes)	1,528,000
African Neo-Pentecostals	858	150,000
Sikh	42	80,000
Buddhism	136 meditation centres and two pagodas (Rome and Prato)	80,000
Hindu	2 mandirs, Altare (Savona) and Pegognaga (Mantova)	1,500
		3,453,500

The Chinese and Latin American evangelical Churches are not on the list: the former are difficult to survey; the latter are beginning to spread, but they are of little importance by comparison with the other denominations included in the above table.

There are Islamic places of worship dotted all over the country, with a greater density where the concentration of small and medium enterprises (in the numerous industrial districts of northern and central Italy) has attracted numerous immigrants from countries with a Muslim majority. This means not only the Maghreb countries (Morocco taking first place, with half a million men and women who have now been residing permanently in Italy for 20-25 years), but also Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The relatively large Iranian and Syrian communities date from further back, having become established at the time of their two countries' political troubles, with the advent

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[1] Source: Pace, Enzo (ed.). *Le religioni nell'Italia che cambia*, Roma, Carocci, 2013.

of Khomeini's regime in Iran, and Hafez el-Assad's repression of the political opposition in Syria in the 1980s.

The places of worship are mainly prayer halls (*musallayat*), sometimes precariously occupying uncomfortable premises. In fact, the number of mosques, in the proper sense, can be counted on the fingers of one hand: there are only three, the most important being the one opened in Rome in 1995, which can contain 12,000 faithful. These prayer halls are concentrated mainly along the west-east axis, peaking in Lombardy, followed by the Veneto and Emilia-Romagna regions. This distribution also reflects the different components of the Muslim world, recognizable in some of the most important national associations - if for no other reason than because almost all the places of worship included in the census refer, from the organizational standpoint, to one of these associations. On the one hand, there is the Union of Islamic Communities of Italy (UCOII), which is historically close to the Muslim brotherhood (though it is currently undergoing internal change): this is one of the best-organized associations, which manages 31% (205) of the prayer halls identified in the census, while another 32% (209) are part of the new Italian Islamic Confederation, (CII), which mainly enrolls Moroccan immigrants (and their families). The other 240 *musallayat* belong to other, smaller associations, at least one of which – called the Islamic Religious Community (COREIS) - was founded by an Italian converted to Islam (through the esoteric tradition that goes back to the figure and thinking of René Guénon), so it is easy to imagine that this is, strictly speaking, an Italian Islam. Although this is numerically a small group, it has a public visibility unlike any of the other, above-mentioned associations.

The presence of the Orthodox Christians appears to be much more stable and well-defined than the still precarious position of the various Muslim communities (also in terms of the often poor, derelict urban locations made available to them as places of worship), since the latter are still waiting to see their legal position confirmed on the strength of an understanding between these Muslim communities and the Italian State, in accordance with the Italian constitution. This difference is not only because one of the Orthodox Churches was recently recognized (in December 2012) by the Italian State, but also because their inclusion in the Italian social and religious fabric has been facilitated - for the Romanian, Moldavian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, at least - by the bishops of the Catholic Church. In many dioceses, where there was a visible and pressing demand for places of worship or parishes, the Catholic bishops have authorized Orthodox priests to use small churches left without a priest, or chapels that had remained unused for some time (located on the outskirts of towns). By comparison with the Muslim communities, the Orthodox parishes are more evenly distributed all over Italy.

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If we now look at the 42 Sikh temples (*Gurdwara*), their uneven territorial distribution stems from the segments of the job market that immigrants from the Punjab have gradually come to occupy. A sizeable proportion of these workers has filled the space abandoned by the Italians throughout the central portions of the North West and North East of Italy, including parts of Emilia, as breeders of cows serving the large dairy industries and pigs for pork meat products: the historical figure of the Italian *bergamini* (as they were called throughout the Po valley) has been replaced by men with a turban, the Sikh. By contract, these migrants have not only benefited from a good salary, they have also been given a home (usually adjacent to the husbandries so that they could take care of the animals round the clock), and this has made it easier from them to bring their families to Italy – something that is much harder for other communities of migrants to do because they are usually unable to demonstrate that they have a stable home. Consequently, a generation of Italian Sikh was soon to develop (either because they arrived at a very young age, or because they were born in Italy).

The Sikh communities now amount to about 80,000, out of the 120,000 immigrants from India. Most of them arrived in Italy around 1984, driven by a combination of factors and severe social problems in the Punjab region because: United Kingdom (the country to which these migrants had historically flocked) refused them entry; there was a crisis in the farming sector; and there was political conflict between the independent's Punjabi movement and the government in New Delhi[1].

First, the map shows a gradual institutionalization of the Sikh communities that have proved capable not only of finding the financial resources needed to renovate old industrial sheds and convert them into places of worship, but also of negotiating with the native communities without encountering any particular administrative difficulties or political obstacles (unlike the Muslim communities when they try to set up a prayer hall or mosque). The map also shows the early signs of a differentiation amongst the

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[1] Bertolani, Barbara. *Gli indiani in Emilia: tra reti di relazioni e specializzazione del mercato del lavoro*, in D. Denti, M. Ferrari, F. Perocco (eds.) *I Sikh, storia e immigrazione*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2003, 163-176; Bertolani, Barbara. Ferraris, Federica. Perocco, Fabio. *Mirror Games: A Fresco of Sikh Settlements among Italian Local Societies*, in Kristina Myrvold and Knut A. Jacobsen (eds.), *Sikhs in Europe: Migration, Identities and Translocal Practices,* London, Routledge, 2011, 133-161; Bertolani, Barbara. *I Sikh*, in E. Pace (ed.) *Le religioni nell'Italia che cambia*, Roma, Carocci, 2013, 31-46.

Sikh: there are two different associations (the Association of the Sikh Religion in Italy and the Italy Sikh Council), to which the various temples refer. There is also a religious minority that mainstream Sikhism considers heterodox, the Ravidasi, followers of a spiritual master called Ravidas Darbar, who appears to have lived between the 14th and 15th centuries in Punjab; for his wisdom and authority, he was recognized as a new guru and added to the ten that all of the Sikh world venerates. Although some hymns attributed to Ravidas have been included in the Sikh's sacred text (the *Granth Sahib*), most Sikh deny him the same status as the gurus officially acknowledged by tradition.

We are facing to a slow movement of Italian society towards an unprecedented, unexpected socio-religious configuration that is still, in some aspects, unknown to many Italian people. Just to give an example, in the areas where the Sikh have settled, for a long time they were mistaken for Arabs with a turban, or Orthodox Christians; few people grasped the differences that exist between them in terms of their different national Churches.

To complete the picture which reflect changes underway in Italian society that are not only due to exogenous phenomena (like the immigration of men and women from other countries). The following table shows the presence of other Christian Churches or Congregations which have intertwined their history with Italian history for a long time. This presence constitutes the old stratum of the religious pluralism on which today the new religious diversity is superimposed and grafted.

Table 2: Historical Denominations and Congregations in Italy (membership and agreement with the State) (2013)[1]

Denomination and Congregations	Membership	Places of worship	Agreement with the State
Waldensian and Methodist Church (united since 1975)	25,000 /30,000	22	1984
Lutheran Church	8,000	11	1993
American Episcopalian Church	600	2	No agreement
Federation of Evangelical Baptist Churches (UCEBI)	25,000	100	1995
Church of Brothers	14,000	216	No agreement
Assemblies of God	150,000	1,181	1986
Federation of Pentecostal Churches	35,000	520	No agreement

[1] Sources: Naso, Paolo. *Protestanti, evangelici, Testimoni e Santi*, in E. Pace (ed.) *Le religioni nell'Italia che cambia*, Roma, Carocci, 2013, 97-130 and Introvigne, Massimo, Zoccatelli Pierluigi (eds.), *Le religioni in Italia*, Torino, Elledici, 2013.

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Seventh-day Adventist Church	7,000	18	1986
Jehovah's Witnesses	430,000	3,070	Draft Agreements in 2000, 2007 and 2015 never approved by the Italian Parliament
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Saints (Mormons)	20,000	3 missions, 14 districts Big Temple in Rome (2019)	2012

It is important to stress the growth in the last 10 years of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the various Pentecostal congregations (the most important of which are the Assemblies of God and the Federation of the Pentecostal Churches), both of which have been recruiting new members from among Italian people who were originally Catholics but have opted to adhere to another form of Christianity.

The Jehovah's Witnesses first came on the scene in 1891; since then, they have grown constantly in number. Today, they are widespread all over Italy, with more than 3,000 congregations, 1,500 kingdom halls, 250,000 evangelizers, and a similar number of supporters. They also have a far from negligible number of new conversions drawn from among the Albanian, Romanian and Chinese immigrants, as well as from the French- and Portuguese-speaking Africans.

The diffusion of the Pentecostal Churches is even more significant. Most of them come under the heading Assemblies of God, with 1,181 communities dotted all over Italy, with a greater density in certain southern regions, areas that are generally believed to have strong Catholic traditions. The other group, the Federation of Pentecostal Churches, currently has 400 congregations and approximately 50,000 members.

If we combine the Pentecostal communities and Churches with a Protestant matrix with the African, Latin American and Chinese neo-Pentecostal Churches, and then add the movement that has formed within the Catholic Church called Renewal in the Spirit (which now includes approximately 250,000 people in Italy, with 1,842 communities established in almost every region), we can see that the Church-religion model - that Catholicism has developed over the centuries, with its parish-based civilization, is being challenged by an alternative model where the experience (through community rites) of a charisma counts for more than a set of dogmas.

Above all, the organizational format of these alternative religions no longer preserves the traditional separation between clergy and layman. If the spirit blows where it will, as Pentecostalism (in all its various expressions) becomes more established in Italy's traditionally Catholic society, it could become an element of further differentiation in Italians' choices in the religious sphere.

If the new type of Pentecostal Christianity challenges Catholicism, Eastern religions represent another alternative that extends the spiritual religious supply in a country of wide and long Catholic tradition.

The Italian society had already met in the 70' and 80' of the last century the new face of westernized Buddhism, through the various spiritual movements from India and Japan respectively. The most famous were, among others, in the first case, the Hare Krishna movement and Osho Rajneesh, while in the second, Soka Gakkai. There is, therefore, a long-Italian Buddhism. Today it is recognized mainly in association approved by the State, the Italian Buddhist Union (about 80,000 members). With the arrival of immigrants from Sri Lanka, India, and China a new layer of followers of various schools of Buddhism has formed. It is in fact an innovation that makes even more plural the presence of Buddhism in Italy[1]. The distribution of the various meditation centres, as the map shows, it clearly documents.

Conclusion

Italy's socio-religious geography is changing - slowly, but constantly and irreversibly. The above maps and figures also faithfully record a demographic transition, affecting Italian society as a whole that has been going on for at least 50 years.

The Italian population is continuing to age (nowadays, 20% of the population is over 65 years old). Meanwhile, the size of Italy's population is not diminishing thanks to a higher birth rate per female (from 1.19 in 2002 to 1.25 in 2012), due to the greater propensity of immigrant families to have children, and more of them, by comparison with Italian couples. Set against this background, it is hardly surprising that the Catholic clergy is constantly ageing too: while there were 42,000 priests in Italy in 1972, this figure is expected to drop to 25,000 by 2023; 48% of Italian clergymen are now over 65 years old, and the mean age of the clergy as a whole is 62. There is a paucity of vocations and policies to recruit young Asian and African priests seem unable to fill the gap that is already apparent in the ranks of the Italian clergy[2]. By comparison, the new popes of the 355 Orthodox parishes are much younger: 60% of them are between 30

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[1] Macioti, Maria Immacolata. *Il Sutra del Loto*. Milano, Guerini e Associati, 2001; Molle, Roberto. *I nuovi movimenti religiosi*, Roma, Carocci, 2009; Molle, Roberto. *L'Oriente italiano*, in E. Pace (ed.), *Le religioni nell'Italia che cambia*, Roma, Carocci, 2013, 73-84.

[2] Castegnaro, Alessandro. *Nordest. Una società in rapida trasformazione*. Vicenza, Osservatorio Socio-Religioso Triveneto, 2012.

and 45 years old, and 6% are under 30; the mean age of the Muslim communities' 600 imam is under 35; and the 300 pastors of the African Pentecostal Churches are usually between 28 and 35 years old.

For the Italian Catholic Church, the changes taking place on the religious scene are an absolute historical novelty. Being used to seeing themselves, quite understandably, as a well-organized salvation organization, with a capillary distribution throughout the country (with 28,000 parishes and a considerable number of monasteries, sanctuaries, centers for spiritual retreats, and so on). Though it is still an authoritative actor on the public stage, the Catholic Church is having to cope with the changes underway. For a good deal of the short history of Italy as a nation, right up to the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church had maintained a sort of civil disinterest in the country's religious diversity. Then it changed tack, during the years of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, becoming more open to exchanges with the Hebrew communities and the Churches of a Protestant matrix. It succeeded in considering the other religious presences established in Italy as potential parties to a dialogue between different faiths, promoted by the Catholic Church with a view to appearing tolerant and open-minded, while emphasizing that it was still the *dominant figure* on the *public stage* in the Italian religious sphere*,* the *primus inter pares* in regulating public communication on matters of religion.

From the religious standpoint, the Italian case is a good example of how, and to what extent, a symbolically monopolistic system can be transformed exogenously. The unprecedented, unexpected religious diversity that has begun to emerge in Italy[1] makes it necessary to update the maps of religiosity and secularization that the country's sociologists of religion study to interpret the changes taking place over the years. In the past, these changes often occurred within Catholicism itself, often involving small percentage displacements in a picture of apparent substantial immobility in terms of the Italians' collective representation of themselves. They saw themselves as Catholic in more than 85% of cases, though they revealed marked differences (and diversified levels of secularization) in both their attitude to their belief and their behavior (from their religious practices to their moral choices, which were sometimes highly individualized and by no means consistent with the official doctrine of the Catholic Church).

Now, for the first time after years of research, the maps (some of which are illustrated here) show that we need to use a different compass to interpret a rapidly and

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[1] Cartocci, Roberto. *Geografia dell'Italia cattolica*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2011

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radically changing social and religious scenario. With time, Catholicism will also experience some degree of internal change. In the debate on pluralism within the Catholic Church, it will no longer be enough to say "bring in the cavalry" to conceal the fact that 5% of Italy's immigrant population are Catholics, but they come from worlds that are moving away from the theology and the liturgy of the *Roman* Catholic Church. These African, Latin American, Philippine, Chinese and Korean Catholics will add their own point of view to what being Catholic means, which will not necessarily be consistent with Italian mainstream traditions.

This will give rise to a new area of research that will require new intellectual energies to investigate the real religious experiences of so many people belonging to so many religions, going beyond the ethno-centrism (or Catholic-centrism that has inevitably characterized our research on our predominantly Catholic society). We also have to reflect critically on the concepts and theoretical reference systems needed to deal with the unprecedented religious diversity that has been increasingly characterizing life in Italy.

Some considerations about public theology. Origins, trends and basic ideas

Prof. Călina Gelu

In the Christian sense, the call to contribute to the common good in the 1980s came to be visibly discussed under the label of "public theology" and led to the establishment of a global network of public theology in 2007, although the relationship of Christian theology (public) with other religions did not receive the attention it needed to speak its word.

Saint Augustine in the work *The city of God* proposes a redefinition of the public itself, arguing that there is life outside the Christian community as well. The key aspects of S Augustine's contribution to public theology could be summarized in four areas: Firstly, he placed theology in broader policy contexts and saw a close connection between the Christian community and wider politics. Augustine paved the way for an open discussion about Christian theology of public life. Secondly, Augustine saw, as a theologian of the time, God's sovereignty over politics and society, and he showed confidence in the Christian faith and authority to bring the whole of society under the authority of the Church as a God-ordained institution. Thirdly, he saw the stability and order of society as crucial to both the sacred and the profane, and argued that Christians and non-Christians should work together to establish a working relationship. Fourthly, he considered that the divine order would constantly interact with the natural order and should be the guiding principle for statesmen.

In the same context, many of the reformers[1] used the terms of jurisdiction of a secular ruler or magistrate who was not opposed to Christian principles. This was also taken over by Martin Luther, as an Augustinian friar, who restricted the secular government's duty to protect the good people and punish the wicked people. In Luther's view, the secular authorities were charged with preventing chaos, but this could not be done by law alone. He challenged the doctrine of the two spheres of medieval church authority: temporal and spiritual, in Augustinian theology, fundamental to him was the principle of "priesthood of all believers", meaning the same status and yet having different functions. This principle was extended beyond the realm of the Church when Luther exposed his doctrine of the two kingdoms, the worldly government of God is accomplished by the use of the sword and civil law by secular rulers while fulfilling a divine role, so unlike of the two powers, the two kingdoms existed in parallel. In

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[1] Harro Hopfl, *Introduction*, in Harro Hopfl, trans. & ed., *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. Vii – xxiii at vii.

Luther's view, good can be led by the Spirit, but evil must be led by the sword. Luther's political theology was pragmatic in keeping with the political reality of the time as he strengthened political authority in divine providence.

On the other hand, Calvin provided a new way of thinking about civil government[1]. He considered that the government authorities had the right to coerce because the spiritual authority assumes the responsibility of promoting virtue. Therefore, Christian magistrates and priests are dedicated to the same cause and differ only in their sphere of authority. Calvinism was essential in making the transition from a medieval notion of worldly order to a modern order "based on change".[2]

Thomas Müntzer, a radical leader, approached the relationship between church authority and the state differently. He believed that true faith should counteract false faith and that secular authority should help this task. Unlike Luther, he emphasized the duty of government authorities to the people not only to maintain peace and order, but also to protect and spread the Christian faith in order to establish a new socio-political order. Müntzer led a revolution that involved a radical break with the state church as well as civil authorities. At the same time, the reformer Ulrich Zwingli's view of the relationship between church and state was that they were not separate entities, but different ways of managing the city (Zurich) from the point of view of God's rule. Zwingli encouraged Christians to pursue politics.

Following Zwingli's ideas, the Anabaptist movement, which started in Switzerland, also advocated for social justice and the transformation of the church because it caused the church to fall out of political authority.[3]

The Reformers saw involvement in politics and wider society as less relevant due in large part to their political understanding that the authorities were ordained by God and also because of their concern for the Church.

Catholic social teaching

A significant area of theological thought that developed in the late 19th century in the Roman Catholic Church regarding the theology of economic and political life at the national level and global context, it is about Catholic social teaching (CST). It is at the heart of its principles the concept of the common good. In this thinking, the common good is one of the three key principles of the Church's social doctrine, along with subsidiarity and solidarity. In addition, the common good is emphasized as the main goal of society; it is also stated that the reason for being of political authority is to

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[1]Alister McGrath, *Reform Thought: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell. 205–210.

[2]Jurgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1999), pp. 5:00

[3]McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, pp. 215–217

promote the common good and that state must ensure the common good by keeping the demands of justice for individuals and groups within it.

The common good is considered a comprehensive means of organizing political life regardless of political orientation, the development of this concept is primarily concerned with economic order and a necessary solidarity with the poor. There is also controversy around this concept, and a major one refers to the way in which individual rights can be protected while seeking the common good. Another question concerns who should define the common good in a modern, pluralistic and secular state. Even so, the theology of the common good has provided significant insights into the dignity, sacredness, and social nature of the human person. A special emphasis is on the doctrine of the creation of man by God, which militates for a just society.

Ecumenical development of public theology

Christian theology has always had a discourse on social welfare, many Christian authors supporting the Church's involvement in the socio-political field and in debating economic issues. The Church has always had a focus on those who suffer, which the Christian conscience cannot ignore. From an educational point of view, Christian justice is a duty for those who seek God.

The Church encourages Christians to reform the existing order in accordance with moral principles, and from this perspective value judgments are always needed. At the heart of this reflection are: human freedom, solidarity and service or the power of sacrifice.

Christian social thinking in the United States.

Richard Niebuhr was considered a "theologian of public life" due to his ability to reach a theological interpretation for a wider audience. For Niebuhr, theology aims to help the ethical reconstruction of modern society by forging a religious imagination that supports a strong commitment to public life.

Inspired by the above theologians and in response to the demand for social-political involvement in theology at the end of the 20th century, three authors contributed substantially to the formation of public theology: Martin Marty[1], Jürgen Habermas and David Tracy.

Martin Marty presented his vision of "public theology" or "public church" in the volume *Public Church* (1960); Jürgen Habermas[2], in the paper *Structural transformation of the public sphere* (1962), stimulated much debate in the public sphere

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[1]Martin Marty, *Public Church: Mainline-Evangelical-Catholic* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

[2]Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity, 1989)

and David Tracy[1] by volume *The Analogical Imagination* (1981), suggested the three spheres of theology as academy, church, and society, while arguing that there are three types of theology for each audience: fundamental theology, systematic theology, and practical theology. Other theologians such as David Hollenbach, Richard John Neuhaus, Duncan Forrester, Gavin D'Costa, Rowan Williams, Max Stackhouse, Linell Cady, Ronald F. Thiemann, and David Ford explored the possibility of "public theology" from different perspectives and contexts.

Promoting public theology as a theological discourse

In recent years, along with the establishment of public theology as a discipline, the scope and methodology of public theology have expanded and interacted with a number of contemporary public issues. They also give us a basis for discussing some of the areas that have not been discussed in public theology and that, in terms of approaches, it can be done in several ways. First of all, there are studies that deal with the theological and theoretical framework for public theology and the concept of "public sphere" that is systematically engaged. Secondly, there are articles that examine current issues and topics in order to develop an appropriate methodology for public theology. Thirdly, there are articles that discuss public figures in order to increase their relevance for the development of public theology. A fourth category of articles is situated in the interaction between theory and practice, between theology and practical theology. Fifthly, there are articles that examine particular issues in different social-political contexts to develop methodologies for the content of public theology. As mentioned, the five categories of studies are not mutually exclusive and the authors interact with various issues.

The power of public theology lies in the diversity of approaches and engagement in a variety of issues; this results in a number of methodologies that discuss a more systematic approach to continuing the effort of public theology and its methodology. Firstly, the concept of "public" in biblical, historical, and ecclesiastical perspective and the rationale for the meaning of "public theology" from the perspective of systematic theology would strengthen the platform of engagement with other theologians.

Until now, various functions of the "public" in contemporary society have been conceptualized in many ways: church, academy, and society (Tracy); religious, political, public academic and economic spheres (Stackhouse); political sphere,

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[1]David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

economic sphere, civil society and public opinion (Smit); institutional public, a built public and a personal public (Elliot); and the state, the market, media, religious communities, academies and civil society (Kim).

The conceptualization of these realms or main bodies from the needs of the public sphere must be further developed and each sphere must be examined using the expertise of different academic disciplines. Secondly, there needs to be a more active engagement with different specialists of disciplines, as well as various bodies that interact in the public sphere beyond the borders of theology or the Christian community for the pursuit of the common good.

Jürgen Moltmann argues that theology must maintain in public the universal concerns of the future Kingdom of God, publicly, critically, and prophetically by presenting its reflections. "Interactive Pluralism" by Rowan Williams in his 2008 lecture (*Civil and Religious Law in England: a Religious Perspective*) talks about two dimensions of mutual responsibility: one explicit and one implicit. On the one hand, it calls for the recognition of the potential contributions of religious communities, the obligation of the state to provide this possibility in the public sphere and the challenge of the state to a monopoly on the rule of law. On the other hand, it brings religious communities into public discussion. He argues that interactive pluralism helps religious communities to be more open to public scrutiny and therefore encourages them to integrate into the wider society. This should be welcomed because it would benefit both religious communities and society at large. Williams challenges both the secular state, for monopolizing public discussions, and the religious communities for their tendency toward exclusive approaches to issues related to a wider society. Charles Taylor, in his book *Secular Age*, states that the key norm of a secular society is that it has transformed from a society in which faith in God was undisputed and free from problems for a context where having faith is a human possibility, among other things. In secular contexts, God is no longer axiomatic and suggests the creation of a public sphere in which communities meet to discuss common principles and interests, of intercommunication, and that this social imaginary is the key to development in modern society.

As a Christian theology, public theology must take its resources from Scripture, and the concept of wisdom in the Bible could be a vital methodological tool. In recent years, the use of scriptural wisdom has been widely promoted, and this seems to provide a

possible approach to public theology.[1] Wisdom is the result of the practical and pragmatic advice of the sages, that is, grounded in God and His presence in its foundation, but not limited to it in its foundation, scope, and application. In other words, it covers both religious and wider societies in terms of both sacred and secular issues and concerns.

These features of the wisdom of Scripture provide an important perspective for building an appropriate methodology for theology for involvement in the public sphere, in contemporary society.

In other news, justice and the common good, which are recurring themes in the development of public theology and support for minorities, the poor, the marginalized and the voiceless, need more expression. Freedom, equality and the rule of law are key aspirations for the modern state, which allow human society to flourish, but society must also address the "minority issue" and this is not just a matter of tolerance, compassion or charity from the majority or from those who have authority, wealth and power.

As Hollenbach convincingly argues, the choice today is not between freedom and community, but between a society based on mutual respect and solidarity and a society that leaves many people behind, and that choice will have a powerful effect on the well-being of all.

Public theology has been articulated throughout the history of the church as Christian, theologians have expressed a commitment to link private faith with the public as we have seen above, but it also requires critical evaluation in theological circles to continue its efforts to bring God in the public sphere for the common good.

Public theology and reconciliation

"Reconciliation" has a long history as a theological concept, but too short as a prominent term in politics and public debate. The current interest in reconciliation as a social issue developed in the 1990s has become a significant issue and topic in discussions on post-conflict peacebuilding but also in emerging societies in the field of transitional justice. These debates looked at post-conflict challenges or transitions after sustained human rights abuses and how societies could best negotiate the competing challenges of truth, justice, reconciliation and the restoration of democracy as they tried to build from scratch the future, the manner in which theologians saw the mission of

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[1] Jurgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1999), pp. 5:00

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reconciliation in response to this renewed interest in social and political reconciliation in other academic disciplines and in political discussions.

The word "reconciliation" is now commonly used in other disciplines and in wider public life as a secular term to describe a key challenge in post-conflict societies if communities divided by violence and enmity want to live together in a common society. In the academic literature, the discussion of reconciliation addresses the legacies of conflict and division, as well as the mechanisms to help former adversaries live and work together more peacefully. Scientists and practitioners trained around the world have sought to clarify and define a more precise concept and understanding of reconciliation in this regard. Before further exploring the theology of reconciliation, three features of the recent discussions on reconciliation are worth mentioning as relevant.

A first feature is that reconciliation is understood as part of a peacebuilding process that involves different stages and dimensions. Reconciliation is the work that usually remains to be done after peace and after political agreements or reforms have been signed, if the agreement of substance and meaning for the wider society is desired. This paper involves demographic masses wider than those directly involved in the political negotiations.

Political leaders can negotiate and sign agreements, but for most conflicts this is not enough. These agreements have only value and are only sustainable in the long term, if they are followed by a broader process of reconciliation at a broader social level. Moreover, if reconciliation is part of the peace-building process, it is also clear that reconciliation itself is often a process rather than a finished stage.

The language of reconciliation is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition and its theology. The emergence of reconciliation in recent decades in discussions of peacebuilding and just transition has not introduced the idea of reconciliation in Christian theology, but has given a fresh context if we consider the old ideas. In light of this, it is not at all surprising that there has been public discussion about social reconciliation, especially in countries where a high percentage of people have identified themselves as Christians. This has led to new knowledge and a new way of thinking about the relationship between reconciliation as a post-conflict social challenge and long-term Christian and theological significance.

As is well known, the Greek terms translated as "reconciliation" and/or "to reconciliate" appear only fifteen times in the New Testament, and this is mainly in Pauline literature. However, the idea of reconciliation was given more attention in sacramental and systematic doctrine than it might suggest. However, one of the paradoxes that Christian theology has given to reconciliation is that, despite the widespread attention to reconciliation in a sacramental and systematic way, the challenges of social

reconciliation have not received much attention from Christian churches and Christian writers prior to 1990. Two factors that probably help explain this apparent neglect are: first, the tendency to privatize the faith, and second, the reluctance of churches to engage in political controversy. From the Enlightenment, there was a strong tendency to privatize the religious sphere in Europe and North America. Faith has been seen more and more by both believers and the wider society as a personal and private matter. This conception highlights the individual in his relationship with God and limits religious authority to personal-ethical authority. From this liberal point of view, there are significant political benefits to accommodating religious freedom and cultural pluralism in various democratic societies. However, with the Christian faith turning inward and constantly withdrawing from the public domain, this tendency toward privatization of the faith was particularly noticeable in terms of reconciliation. The Church's commitment to reconciliation has and has had both a sacramental and doctrinal emphasis, but none has developed a strong collective dimension or a clear social message. For Catholics, reconciliation has been understood primarily in a sacramental tradition, as the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, reconciliation is one of the seven recognized Catholic sacraments. This sacramental status of reconciliation could have been a basis for supporting the theological exploration of social and political reconciliation and its challenges. In practice, however, the close association of reconciliation with the sacrament usually served to limit the horizons of the wider theological interest in reconciliation. Reconciliation has been identified with the inner spirit. It was related to individual confession and repentance for personal sins, which were usually identified as private. The Church has not done much to reconcile structural or collective sins or to apply creative ideas from sacramental rites to political violence, divisions and conflicts, or vice versa.

A second factor that has likely discouraged historical Christian engagement as reconciliation, reconciliation initiatives are invariably controversial and demanding, even today, when reconciliation has been established as a term of trust and most people see reconciliation in positive terms as a desirable goal, there are different opinions about what it means and how it should be. Some critics are wary of any notion of reconciliation, others warn that the ideal is attractive, but it is often impractical in reality. Part of the difficulty in public debate is that, as mentioned above, the word reconciliation refers to both a process and a state. Some of the criticisms of reconciliation arise rather from its portrayal as a finished state, an ongoing process that could never be fully realized, but it is nevertheless a desirable commitment. An expectation of reconciliation as a state of perfect harmony places too great a burden on what is realistic. This can distract from the significance of positive steps toward better relationships. Since no human society can claim to be perfectly peaceful or perfectly

just, no society can claim perfect reconciliation, but, as in the case of peace and justice, this is not a reason not to promote reconciliation as much as possible.

From another angle, some critics object to reconciliation as simplistic, naively "doing good". This critique suggests that reconciliation is optimistic and the deep issues can only be addressed through goodwill and thus to be a way to avoid the basic structural problems that generate and sustain larger problems. This objection is closely linked to the view that the rhetoric of reconciliation is a form of avoidance and a deadline for doing nothing. It is a more cynical view of reconciliation in this regard, it is a deliberate distraction. This criticism sees reconciliation as usually an empty gesture promoted by those in power who want to maintain the benefits they get from this state. In both cases, if reconciliation is seen as a benign thing, both the privatization of theology and the reluctance to engage in difficult issues of practical reconciliation may explain why, until the 1990's, Christian theology had relatively little to say on the subject of social reconciliation.

The much broader literature and tradition of Christian writings on the theology and ethics of "peace" had paid relatively little attention to social reconciliation, at least in terms of the public dimension.

Throughout history, Christian churches have been engaged in areas of peace and/or conflict in a wide variety of contexts, spanning the entire spectrum, from conflicts between individuals and families to broader conflicts between groups or social bodies, to national or international conflicts. Looking back at this record, there are many achievements, but the overall result is insufficient, the history in this field offers a wide spectrum, from the militancy of the crusades to the non-violent fight for civil rights. There are certainly cases in which the Christian churches have brought a positive message of peace as an alternative or at least as a partial mitigation of destructive conflict. There has always been at least one implicit theology of reconciliation in these contributions.

Origins

While the Roman-Catholic Church has struggled to promote and nurture the common good, the evolution of this concept has been long and complex, drawing on such diverse sources as Plato and Aristotle and the writings of early Christian leaders, including John Chrysostom and Augustine of Hippo.

The question of whether the "good life" is "social" has a strong and affirmative answer in the book *The city of God* of Augustine and in his writings John Chrysostom states: "This is the rule of most perfect Christianity, its most exact definition, its highest point, namely, the seeking of the common good. . . for nothing can so make a person an imitator of Christ without caring for his neighbours".

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Thomas Aquinas, who wrote in the 13th century, was the one who first gave the common good the form it has today, then a succession of Papal Encyclicals from the late 19th century further refining it and giving it a contemporary meaning. Summarizing the writings of Augustine and Aristotle, Aquinas analysed how the good life could be achieved, not only by the individual in pursuit of goals such as health, education, and life support, but also in a collective sense, as all seek to achieve for such purposes. For Aquinas, this task is the responsibility of the virtuous leader to ensure that society as a whole enjoys such benefits and that all are able to live together peacefully and in a spirit of mutual assistance.

While the common good is widely regarded as a Christian doctrine, its roots in ancient Greek philosophy make it clear that it does not necessarily require a religious meaning and will be actively promoted by secular writers.

Public theology in the context of globalization

In fact, the common good should not be confused with utilitarianism, nor is it a concrete vision of a future ideal state, a "utopia" towards which employees strive to direct history, rather it is a way of "doing politics" that goes beyond promotion.

Globalization is the inevitable social, cultural and economic reality of the 21st century. The background noise is what colours our social experience, our economic relationships, and the political possibilities that are available for examination and critique in the discourse of public theology. We live, as William Schweiker said, in "the age of many worlds", yet, at the same time, the boundaries between those worlds have become ever higher. As David Held and Anthony McGrew describe it: globalization simply means expanding scale, increasing magnitude, accelerating and deepening the impact of transcontinental flows, and patterns of social interaction. It refers to a change or transformation in the scale of the human organization that connects distant communities and expands by reaching power relations in the regions and continents of the world.

But it should not be interpreted as foreshadowing the emergence of harmony in world society or as a universal process of global integration in which there is a growing convergence of cultures and civilizations. Not only does raising awareness of interconnectedness create new animosities and conflicts, but it can fuel reactionary politics and deep xenophobia.

As a substantial proportion of the world's population is largely excluded from the benefits of globalization, it is a serious problem and, consequently, a highly contested process. The inequality of globalization assures us that it is far from being a uniformly experienced universal process across the globe.

While those who dream of global political structures and world governance remain only in the minds of many, either an inaccessible dream or a dystopian perspective, the increasingly integrated nature of economic systems and the transnational nature of more informal social relations, suggests the emergence of an ungoverned and as yet unregulated global society. This situation has the potential to produce significant benefits, especially for the emerging global society, but only at a significant cost to the global.

The economic crisis of 2007-2008 illustrated the precarious nature of these unregulated intersections, as a lack of regulation in the global financial industry, led to unprecedented market manipulation and corruption in the "safe" framework of mortgage securities. The result has been the biggest recession since the Great Depression and a staggering global economy on the brink of collapse. More recently, the Greek debt crisis has illustrated the economic difficulties of integration into the euro area. Greek governments have received cries of injustice against harsh austerity and measures demanded by the German banking industry. Throughout this controversy, the power of nationalism has remained a strong motivator under a genuine transnational set of economic relations.

The role of public theology in the global social, economic, and political situation in which we find ourselves is to shed light on how the global dynamics that underlie our reflection have a theology or not. By analysing and interpreting the present situation in the light of the resources provided by the Christian theological tradition, public theology can examine how concepts embodied in that tradition may appear unexamined, presumptions, and unexpected solutions to the ongoing enigma of globalization.

Context of globalization

Identifying globalization as a context of public theology becomes necessary to understand both what globalization is and how it functions as an engine of human social and cultural reality. This is complicated by the multifaceted nature of the concept itself, as well as the lack of any agreed definition.

Globalization is often simply defined by a description of what it does, how it affects local communities, how it destroys barriers between nations and ethnic groups, and how (depending on who speaks) it either exacerbates or overcomes social and economic inequalities in worldwide.

However, in our view, globalization can be defined as "a global set of social, political, cultural, technological and ethical dynamics, influenced and legitimized by certain

theological, ethical and ideological motives that create a world civil society that exceeds the capacity of any national state to control it[1]".

In many discussions, globalization is described only in terms of increasing the transnational nature of economic activity, freed from the regulatory constraints of individual national states, and therefore the agendas of any individual country or political entity are not taken into account. However, globalization is taking on much more than that. It encompasses and transforms every dimension of culture, including art, academy, medicine, media, technology, and religion.

While global economic forces are the most obvious manifestation of globalization and are affected by the increasingly global nature of human society to varying degrees. Political institutions and structures, on the other hand, seem to have some legitimacy.

Thus, while Friedman and other proponents of globalization see "the flattening of the world as an emancipatory force for social change, opening up opportunities and possibilities where none had previously existed, critics of globalization, such as Ulrich Duchrow and Franz Hinkelammert, see it as what they call the 'global tyranny of capital'". Thus, for them, "Globalization has the sole purpose of freeing the accumulation of capital from all social and ecological barriers. The result is the total market, which is in the process of destroying not only life on earth, but its own foundation". Similarly, David Korton warns of "global dreams of vast corporate empires, compliant governments, a globalized monoculture of consumers, and a universal ideological commitment to corporate libertarianism", which jeopardizes both democratic structures of social governance, the economic well-being of the vast majority of the human community and the ecological sustainability of the planet.

Both narratives are valid and both must be taken into account in any theological account of globalization. It is undeniable that globalization has opened up opportunities for political manipulation, labour exploitation and increasing downward social mobility, among many others.

In addition, there is legitimacy in the question of the long-term sustainability of the good that globalization offers even to those who see its benefits as a lack of governance and regulation. The fact that these competing perceptions of globalization are both ingrained in different analyses and interpretations of its real effects, it paradoxically indicates the nature of globalization as it has developed so far, as well as the difficulties inherent in a state of affairs for current governance structures to keep up. It also

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[1]Max Stackhouse, *Globalization and Grace: God and Globalization vol. 4*. (New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 7.

indicates the difficulty of analysing the real consequences of globalization without referring to ideologies that seek to support one or the other narrative.

Again, each of these ideological positions reveals something about how globalization functions as an abbreviation for genuine concerns about the freedom, justice, and future of the human community. To the extent that globalization can only be understood and discussed within these ideological alternatives, debates about globalization will continue to cover the same ground, with very little news to offer. Public theology should ideally provide an alternative framework for analysis and interpretation that can help develop a set of critiques and constructive proposals for creating a globalization that has the potential to improve the well-being of all human beings, but also to expand a realm of human social possibility.

The place of public theology

To what extent then does public theology, as a special approach to theology and moral reflection, appear to have something to contribute to the debate on globalisation? If it can add to our understanding of the effect globalization is having on the larger public world we inhabit, in what ways might it do so?

The theologian who has written the most in this field is Max Stackhouse, whose volume *God and Globalization* set out to develop a public theology of globalization. Building on the work of many collaborators, co-editors, and contributors, he developed a multifaceted theology of globalization that saw God's providence manifested toward a process of social and economic realignment that is globalization.

From a broader perspective, public theology is engaged in the analysis of the whole range of social and cultural institutions that constitute pluralistic modernity. This analysis is particularly well suited to understanding globalization as a collision of more institutional realignments than as a monolithic phenomenon.

In addition, public theology aspires to go beyond the purely local, secular epistemological positions that defined much of the discourse around religion in the second half of the 20th century. On the contrary, public theology, as articulated by Stackhouse, strives to provide a perspective that, if not universal, at least has the capacity to generate a constructive religion, a discourse beyond the boundaries of local communities. As Stackhouse writes: "Today, globalization demands the recognition of a wider audience, which understands and relativizes all the particular contexts in which we live. A new kind of particular contextual transcendence is needed. Thus, a number of researchers around the world are trying to develop a public theology, because it has become a serious question whether a society or civilization can be supported either on a purely local basis and a particular faith or a purely secular basis that claims to transcend all religion and theology. In fact, the moral fibre seems to come out of a

society or civilization if it is not supported by a compelling vision of transcendence to continually feed its spiritual capital".[1]

Whether or not we agree with Stackhouse's assessment, religion addresses the inevitable need for a principle of transcendence in society, and public theology offers a language through which the Christian has distinguished the conception of a transcendent point of view that can be applied to pluralism, the topography of a society in which there is a profound dissent on questions of supreme concern. Options for an analysis of the relationship between theology and society that embraces either the total divorce of Christian thinking from a robust public commitment (as in some forms of post-liberal or post-modern, on the one hand or, on the other hand, insists on the exclusivity of the legitimacy of a single form of theological discourse in public life (as in the case of American religious law) fails to do full justice to the complex ways in which religion contributes to public discourse.

At the same time, a completely secularized discourse, which considers religion irrelevant to public life, also fails to recognize the continuing relevance that religion holds in a modernity that often seems to push it sideways. Moreover, the proponents of neo-atheism insist that religion "poisons everything"[2], much of the deep dimension of culture is rooted in religious symbolism that continues to hold the power of even secular imagination. This is a point made by Elaine Graham when, in a dialogue with Jürgen Habermas on the "post-secular", she wrote: "The boundary established by the Enlightenment, between the public sphere of the economy and political processes on the one hand and the private domain of faith on the other hand, thus dissolves under the paradoxical currents of the religious renaissance, but even in the version of an enduring secularity. Similarly, there is a crisis in secular modernity which seems to have lost "control over the images, promoted by religion, of the moral whole - of the Kingdom of God on Earth - in a collusive way. Some people would regard the ideal of the Kingdom of God on Earth as a secularized version of complex theological thinking anyway, but Habermas's point is that mere pragmatism is not enough to sustain a global vision of human dignity and move into the secular, materialist space.

This lack can best be understood by a reclassification with symbols, resources provided in religious discourse, moreover, taking seriously the sociological implications of how

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[1] Max L. Stackhouse, et al., *God and Globalization*. Four Volumes. (T & T Clark: 2000–2007), p. 78; Max Stackhouse, 'Civil Religion, Political Theology and Public Theology. What's the Difference?', *Journal of Political Theology* 5 (2004), 275–293. See also Max Stackhouse, *Globalization and Grace: God and Globalization vol. 4*. (New York: Continuum, 2007; idem, *Public Theology and Political Economy: Christian Stewardship in Modern Society* (Langham, MD: University Press of America, 1991);

[2] Elaine Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age* (London, SCM Press: 2013), p. 49.

these symbols are used by communities of faith, it is possible to provide moral resources that to help achieve a measure of social justice, now far from providing a horizon due to the complete secularization of social discourse.

The challenge that globalization presents to public theology lies in how it is possible to use the particular symbolic resources of the Christian tradition effectively, given the wide range of symbolic frameworks that exist in a globalized context. In addition to the narrative of secularization that has become prominent in Western society, Christian theology must fight and engage in dialogue with the symbolic worlds of Islam, Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and countless local religions around the world. To the extent that the boundaries between local conceptions of final concern have been broken by the process of globalization, no conception can claim ideological authority for establishing the normative limits of discourse.

As Jorge Rieger points out[1], globalization, as it came into existence in the 21st century, does not require the homogeneity of faith and action. On the contrary, globalization seems to be evolving, while it continues to expand, it is no longer a question of erasing the difference - as long as the difference remains trivial. Few would consider their religious view as trivial, but in the context of an emerging global society that marginalizes any religious discourse in the name of eroding national borders and establishing open markets and free trade, religion must reaffirm its relevance against claims that it is a transient phenomenon.

The threat to religion it poses is at least in part due to the rise of religion-based terrorism in recent decades. In the face of "McWorld", some are opting for "Jihad", wrongly. Religious reactions against globalisation, whether or not they resort to violence, are attempts to escape, if that is how they choose to affirm their values then the continued relevance of religious voice in the midst of a changing world is steadily diminishing.

Globalization presents a unique global reality, defined by the breakdown of social, cultural, national and legal barriers between peoples around the world, allowing them to interact with each other in countless new ways. This is often discussed in terms of market relations, but it embraces a lot, more than that. This globalized reality encompasses differences between cultures, including religious views of the world. But religious experience makes the difference that requires Christian theology to develop an account of how this is possible, to be Christian in a meaningful public way, either by establishing that Christian theology has something unique and to say in the public

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[1]Jorge Rieger, *Globalization and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), p.42.

marketplace that is not said by other traditions or by making the case for a common framework within which it can coordinate with other religious traditions to answer the moral questions that globalization raises, or a combination of both.

The way in which public theology articulates its approach to the problem of religious pluralism, social and economic dislocation, and the erosion of national borders will define its ability to provide a relevant Christian voice in the midst of countless cross-pressures created by globalization. The Christian tradition offers many theological resources that can contribute to the development of such a public theology of globalization.

A public theology of globalization

To the extent that public theology is a Christian project, it draws on the resources of the Christian tradition to establish its contribution to the broader public discourse in which it participates. As such, it represents in its content the tension of globalization between particularism and universalism that William Garret and Roland Robertson refer to as "one of the fundamental ways of structuring the contemporary situation".[1] As Steven Bevans points out[2], we live in a church today. . . a world church. There is no longer a European and North Atlantic centre and a third world periphery - indeed. . . this has never been the case. But especially today, the Church is fully established and flourishing in every way, with few exceptions, in every part of the world. Moreover, since the end of the 20th century, the "centre of gravity" of Christianity moved from the white, rich world of Europe, North America, and Australia/New Zealand to the black, brown, and Asian world, Christianity and theology flourishing there. The various resources offered by the Christian tradition cover a multitude of doctrinal and ethical possibilities, but there are several key themes that arise in the interaction between globalization and public theology that are noteworthy.

As mentioned above, as globalization represents a large-scale change in the institutional level of arrangements within each segment of society, it requires an analysis of the moral dimensions of institutional life. If the institutional arrangements are totally arbitrary, then there are few resources available in Christian public theology to provide a critique of the particular institutional arrangements formed by the process of globalization. However, if it is possible to indicate institutionally forms that are

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[1]Roland Robertson and William Garrett, *Religion and Global Order* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), xviii.

[2]Steven Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009, pp. 4–5.

fundamental to the creation of a truly human life, then public theology can even support the preservation of those forms of life in the radical change of the field of globalization. Usually, the theological cornerstone of institutional analysis can be found in the idea of the covenant, especially as a dimension of the idea of common grace in the Christian tradition. To the extent that, as created beings, we exist both individually and socially for particular and then institutional purposes, the forms in which we live must serve those particular purposes. The idea of the covenant expresses our fundamental dependence and connection with the God who created us to live in a relationship with one another through certain institutions. As Stackhouse wrote, it is good to note that what is given to us in advance to guide the conduct of life is both standard and final, both as a law (*nomos*) and as an ultimate goal (*telos*), as philosophers have long remarked. Both the correct general order of things and the supreme destiny of creation must be interpreted, of course, and none of them are easy to read in the raw data of life. This lies in part in the limits of human understanding, in part in the distortions brought about in life by the sinful failures of men to use their freedom, and in part because the full data of creation and history is not yet fully understood. But those who believe in this God will claim that He is known enough to believe with good reason that life is governed by a moral law and that existence is not without purpose. Ultimately, human existence is governed by the first principles, and we are moving toward a final goal that we cannot know in detail or achieve without divine help and guidance[1].

The question of how those first principles manifest themselves in the formal institutional framework is an ongoing argument in Christian social thinking. For some, the institutional forms of human life — family, state, church, and other economic and social forms that make up the whole of social life — are quite well defined and largely unchangeable as particular forms of sovereign spheres in society. As such, while they may change over time, they should do so only within strictly constrained limits, so that they do not abandon their covenant purpose and cease to function in the manner in which they are intend by God. Others see these spheres as quite plastic in their form and relationship, capable and even necessary to reform in the light of changing social realities and circumstances.

The value of the concept of "spheres" given by God in society is subject to debate, but, understanding ourselves as existing in a covenant relationship with a God through whom we are created for particular purposes and with whom we live in a loving promise relationship, we recognize that the particular institutional forms in which we live are necessary to sustain us, striving to become what we are created by God to be. While,

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[1]Max Stackhouse, in Scott Paeth, Hak Joon Lee, and E. Harold Breitenberg, *Shaping Public Theology: Selections From the Writings of Max L. Stackhouse* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 206.

on the one hand, they are but contingent and penultimate manifestations of Christian eschatology to which, as Christians, we strive to anticipate the Kingdom of God, which is the final institutional form of human life and the covenant relationship God has promised us. To the extent that social structures are formed according to the anticipated Christian hope, they can be embraced and comprised in a public theology of globalization.

Recognizing the reality of sin as a factor in globalization requires us to contemplate the possibility of creating a global conception of the common good to serve as a bastion against our own more serious moral tendencies.

Globalization opens up the possibility of imagining a world in which we can truly transcend the moral and political limitations of the national state and ethnicity, of envisioning a truly global policy that operates for the good of the collective well-being of all mankind.

There is, of course, a great deal of difficulty between asserting this possibility and realizing it. However, only by imagining such a world can we exploit the inner potential of globalization to actually take steps in that direction and possibly prevent the social and environmental disasters that globalization threatens to impose on us at the worst possible time.

The theological cornerstone of this theme is the eschatological possibility of the Kingdom of God. As mentioned above, insofar as the Christian faith is rooted in the promises of God manifested in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God serves as the predominant symbol of Jesus' prayer for God's rule to be manifested on Earth as it is in heaven. Any conversation about its concrete dimensions and economic life in a globalized society within the Christian community must take place against the background of this hope.[1]

Imagining a truly just and equitable form of globalization, but one that anticipates the Kingdom of God in the midst of our fragmented human circumstances, requires us to take seriously the ways in which globalization truly exists, far from marking and seeking concrete solutions to the problems it creates or exacerbates. In particular, it means reaching out to the poorest and most vulnerable of those affected by the social, political, and economic realities of global society - those members of the human family who remain among the poorest of the poor, whose traditional ways of life have been

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[1]Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (London: SCM Press, 2009).

stripped away by the world of capitalism, and those who are victims of worsening environmental crises.

In the former cases, this requires us to insist on strengthening those international political and economic institutions that already exist, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, but doing so in such a way as to genuinely demand and empower them to - and put their efforts at the service of the most vulnerable, with the aim of developing what economist Amartya Sen called "capabilities" through which human beings are able to experience as free members of society.

Unfortunately, the current structures of these institutions continue to be shaped by a post-war consensus that privileged the victorious powers of that conflict over all others. As a result, the noun "liberties" to which Sen refers has been repeatedly subordinated to the politics and economic agendas of these powers.

A truly global set of political and economic institutions would recognize their obligations to act with genuine fairness to all people and to pursue policies that genuinely seek to improve the well-being of all people through more equitable economic development priorities, fairer regulation of the monetary system, and the creation of a system of international and economic law and regulation that has the capacity to fairly apply a common set of standards across the entire world against not only individuals but also national states and/or corporations.

The question of how such institutions should be formed and managed, and how their aims and purposes should be constituted is rooted for Christians in the principle that we are created as human beings by a good God for the gift of life together in community. The ultimate goal of Christian public policy should be the creation of a common good for every human being and for all human beings.

Vast inequalities in wealth, political repression and violence, discrimination against religious, cultural, sexual or ethnic minorities, systemic human rights violations, economic exploitation and ecological destruction are all at odds with that struggle for the common good.

Ultimately, "you shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). The goal is to create institutions that succeed by contributing to the genuine common good for the human community in the sense of enabling all human beings to flourish in all those ways for which God created us - socially, economically, aesthetically and spiritually.

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Brief considerations on methods and techniques of teaching religion
Prof. Călina Gelu

Chapter I. The partnership between the University and the community
An ongoing partnership between a local community and a theological seminary or a university faculty, as a university-community alliance, can provide an ideal context for the training of "public theologians" who are adequately trained with knowledge, skills, and confidence to engage in various community contexts in all their works with humility and wisdom.

Ideally, the courses in the curriculum will be structured to explore topics relevant to the contexts of the students'goals in relation to the course content. These courses would encourage students and faculty to test and build new knowledge from community partners, perhaps by offering interdisciplinary scholarships for the professional and spiritual training of students/pupils. In this way, students can develop knowledge about Christian scripture, history, and theology that are both substantial and relevant.

In the case of Romania, there are supervised internship places and social service stages which form the core of an appropriate study programme. When designed and implemented effectively, this type of engaged and experiential education is essential to the training of young theologians on multiple levels. Firstly, internship experiences provide rich opportunities for practical theology as well as reflection in relation to all disciplines represented within the curriculum. Rather than "applying" theoretical knowledge from the classroom to chosen internship (practicum) places, this type of experiential education allows learning communities to actively build practical-theological knowledge so as to cultivate a more nuanced, contextualized understanding, of course, based on common content across disciplines. Placements (practicum) in Church, pastoral or social work settings, when coupled with intentional and skillful reflection in a learning community, give students the opportunity to question, challenge and theoretically reconstruct knowledge in light of their unique contexts and experiences[1].

A second essential level of training for students in pastoral theology or theology-social assistance involves opportunities to reflect on their own cultures, religions, and training so that they are better prepared to build genuine partnerships and service with people from various cultures and religions. Recent research[2] involving staff of community

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[1]Eyler, Janet and Dwight E. Giles, Jr. *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999, pp. 64.

[2]DanW. Butin, *Service-Learning in Theory and Practice: The Future of Community Engagement in Higher Education* , New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 139.

service agencies found that their most common complaint about student trainees was that students were poorly prepared in the area of "cultural competence" - in knowing both their own cultural backgrounds and the diverse ethnic, economic and religious backgrounds of the people with whom they interact[1]. Adequate preparation for community-social spheres, reconciliation and compassion in a society and world abruptly divided by ethnicity, religion, or economic status, requires that all students reflect in a sustained manner on their own training in history, society and global dynamics, as well as the ways in which Christian theologies have been used both to justify and to oppose race, gender, and religious oppression. Internships should be closely linked to courses that provide excellent opportunities for students to engage in this through multilayered, interdisciplinary theological reflection so that they gain the skills to research, analyze, and respond with compassion and clarity in relation to cultural-historical context of any community in which they serve in the future.

Ideally, through this process of holistic training, each student would integrate not only their theological education but even their personality. In this way, they can become genuine and upright leaders, embodying their faith and service with confidence in their gifts, abilities, and knowledge, as well as their practical ability to listen, discern, and grow through changing communities and contexts.

Mentoring partnership models

The pedagogical effort of the teachers had to allow the students to identify what they thought was valuable in their educational journey. This type of guidance suggests mechanisms that could support the development of successful relationships between teachers and mentors. The following mechanisms are needed to implement this goal:

• Developing a common perspective
• Negotiating and planning together what is going to happen with student teaching
• Using a collaborative planning and review approach
• Identifying the place of participation of the expert in the courses
• Identifying the essential requirements for lessons and determining the person taking the course, as well as identifying who would implement them
• Modifying mentors' approaches to meet students' skills
• Identifying mentors as experts for students
• Appointing delegated teachers to establish and maintain partnerships outside of schools

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[1]Randy Stoecker and Elizabeth Tryon, *The Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service Learning*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009, pp. 119.

In Lave and Wenger's Situated Learning Theory (1991)[1] about learning from and within communities of practice, it is observed that human practice has given rise to a certain experience of the world in which knowledge has been incorporated into practical experiences. The idea of communities of practice is that learning should be based on authentic practice that is potentially gained through the practical examination of others. A key issue, mentioned in each approach, is that ideas need to be shared between teachers, people, resources and communities of practice, and community representatives can help learners better understand how educational content is applied in the real world.

Why religion and technology? Religion as an important sphere of human activity

At first glance, it may seem rather strange that education should have a chapter that combines religion and technology. Academics could be accused of having few explicit relationships found between religion and technology, and those that exist primarily are one-way. After all, many influences from the late 21st century seem to go in the direction of technology, inexorably asserting its influence and power over the realm of religion and spirituality, as has happened in trade and economies, institutions (cultural, educational, social), life, politics, sports and other areas of human effort and activities. But if we are not referring to human activities that are designed to meet human needs for most of our lives, we can see immediately some of the ways in which religion, the technological world, and the goals, skills, and methods associated with technology inevitably and continuously interact.

It should be clear even to an occasional observer that learning requirements inevitably engage the aesthetics, values, needs, desires, and uses of technology from teachers, students, and the wider community that invoke and involve religious traditions, religious practices and specific groups within society whose primary identification is with one or more particular religions that embrace, for example, dietary requirements, particular aesthetics of outfit, sensibilities about human beings and other creatures (both large and very small), and teachings viewed by adherents as integral in how they engage the larger world and values that are likely to profoundly influence their own future entries into that larger world.

Religion, like the word "technology", has proved difficult to define, a reasonable working definition argues that religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices about life and the relative world to the supernatural that unites believers or followers in a

[1]Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991) Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815355

social organization or a moral community" (Yang 2011: 36)[1]. As Yang noted, "this definition includes four essential elements of a religion: (1) a belief in the supernatural; (2) a set of beliefs about life and the world; (3) a set of ritualistic practices that manifest beliefs; and (4) a distinct social organization or a moral community of believers and practitioners" (Yang 2016:15[2]).

Some have predicted the total disparition of organized religion of all kinds in the face of what is imagined as the progress of science and technology as it deconstructs, reconceptualizes and co-mmodifies the world. Religions in general, especially those considered major world religions, are characterized by a narrative and philosophical orientation that seeks to bring all of life under the explanatory power and influence of the religion in question. For religious people, largely since prehistoric times, nature itself is the forum through which the aspects, attributes and desires of a higher, unseen world, mediated through 'signs and symbols', are mysterious. These signs and symbols might include the surface of the Earth itself, things beneath or emanating from the surface, objects falling from the sky, perceptions from man, senses and thoughts and dreams in the mind - including "communion" with one or more other realms that are mediated through language (an ability that is not infrequently itself seen as also a gift from this unseen, mysterious realm). In this sense, nature serves as a bridge between our world and the world(s) that might exist outside our own realm of existence. Even religions that appear to be very otherworld-centric adopt this positioning through the physical reality within that they currently inhabit and value for what it reveals about them or what lies beyond (Bellah, 2011[3]).

The three influential monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that share some common religious texts and perspectives have traditionally argued that there is a distinct separation between the Earth and the physical universe in which God lives. God himself does not need any physicality to exist and lives in outer time "within" the realm of eternity. At the same time, God brings into existence the world and has an intimate relationship with the created order, including human beings living in this order - yet the visible universe neither fully encompasses nor expresses the divine being, nor does it subsume the created order into the divine being.

Other religions have made similar efforts to self-organize and promote interactions among the religious adherents who earn their living in the scientific field. For example,

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[1]David Carless, Diane Salter, Min Yang & Joy Lam (2011) *Developing sustainable feedback practices, Studies in Higher Education*, 36:4, 395-407, DOI: 10.1080/03075071003642449

[2]Yang, F. (2011). *Religion in China: Survival and revival under communist rule*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Yang, F. (2016). *Exceptionalism or chinamerica: Measuring religious change in the globalizing*.

[3]Bellah, R. N. (2011). *Religion in human evolution: From the Paleolithic to the axial age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press

Hans Jonas (1984)[1], a practicing Jew and noted philosopher of technology, sought to build a completely ethical form that could guide technological decision-making, carefully avoiding referring to religious sources who informed him of his own understandings and actions. Other authors have explained the many ways in which values, ethics, and theological considerations should be of interest to the practice of science and technology and politics (Gorman et al.[2] 2005).

Virtually, all technological and design frameworks highlight the role of values in undertaking different types of technological work. All formal religions generally teach precepts of behavior, prescribe or encourage certain forms of action, and inculcate ideas about oneself, others, society, and human purposes. Well-designed discussions can lead to a wide range of ideas that are religiously inspired as part of the class, or the process of deciding what values should be subject to various technological activities. Such an approach can highlight the various sources from which values emanate, the means by which we articulate them in societies, and how groups of people are sorted by these values to arrive at mutually agreed ways to select, adapt, and use values to inform human practices.

The widespread presence of religion-affiliated institutions in human societies, including those in the formal education systems of nations around the world, is another place of importance for working harder to make the links between religion and technology more explicit and deliberate. Schools and universities where theology is taught may want to highlight their own particularities of religious traditions, but quality instruction also requires emphasizing established values. Most prestigious universities around the world have professors of theology, religious studies, or scholars who make them known about their religious beliefs and practices, often from many different branches of a particular religion, and/or familiar with many different religions. These faculty colleagues can prove to be valuable allies and dialogue partners to create and provide balanced discussions that explore the interactions between religions, beliefs and religious practices, and technology-related practices and developments. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, has an organized body of social articulations, a doctrine for its churches around the world, available in several languages (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2005). Such a document can not only make such discussions easier

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[1]Jonas, Hans (1984). *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. University of Chicago Press.

[2]Gorman, U., Drees, W. B., & Eisinger, H. M. (Eds.). (2005). *Creative creatures: Values and ethical issues in theology, science, and technology*. New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark. Grant, G. (1986). *Technology and justice*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press. Harrison, P. (2015). *The territories of science and religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Herzfeld, N. (2009). *Technology and religion: Remaining human in a co-created world*. West Conshohoken: Templeton Press.

to find, but also help all participants (including teachers) to become better informed about the official teachings of the religious group concerned and why these attitudes and values are expressed as they are in relation to modern technology (Teschner and Tomasi 2016[1]).

Theological-vocational education

Vocational education can be reshaped through three main forces. The first lies in the emergence of new technologies that allow new ways of learning and contribute to the reshaping of work. The use of new technologies influences the way people participate in existing learning programs and allows individual access to online resources. Secondly, new occupations in the workplace require new knowledge and skills requirements. They undermine the old boundaries between vocational education and academic education and require stronger emotional and cognitive skills than before. Thirdly, the rise of new disciplinary perspectives generates major new perspectives for all forms of learning.

Since the 1980s, under the impulse of globalization, the field of application of the shaping and use of new technologies and their development and implementation have expanded continuously. While the effects of technological progress are often presented as inevitable consequences, Heidegger and Petersen[2] show how analyses based on the development of technology lose sight of the significance of cultural factors.

Analyzing the recent relationship between work and technology from a learning perspective, especially in the field of vocational education and training (VET), new premises have been opened for such procedures and processes. For Heidegger and Petersen (2018), this involves the development of personality and the continuous development of participatory abilities in adult life; for DeJaeghere (2018)[3], involves the development of critical skills necessary for the sustainability of livelihoods and well-being.

Vocational education continues even after obtaining a diploma or certificate, as new graduates become more deeply involved in workplace practice and teamwork experience. In the context of research that has shown the new state of affairs, the ways

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[1]Teschner, G., & Tomasi, A. (2016). *Turning toward technology: A glimpse into the asian paradigm*. Piscataway: Transaction Publishers

[2]Heidegger G, Petersen W (2018) *Shaping occupational biography and working conditions: a pedagogical principle in different VET systems*. In: McGrath, S., Mulder, M., Papier, J., and Stuart, R. (eds.) (2019). 'Handbook of vocational education and training: Developments in the changing world of work'. Switzerland: Springer.

[3]DeJaeghere J (2018) *A capability approach to entrepreneurship education: fostering recognition and community care to address inequalities for marginalized youth*. In: McGrath S, Mulder M, Papier J, Suart R (eds) Handbook of vocational education and training: developments in the changing world of work. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-49789-1_13-1

IRENE Innovative Religious Education
NEtwork: educating to the religious diversity

in which different forms of knowledge are put into operation, vocational education is required to accept and use innovative methods and techniques, in step with scientific progress but without losing content on which transmits them.

The way people become known and develop their creative abilities requires new conceptualizations of the relationship between knowledge and vocational practice. Hordern[1] explores how vocational practice can be understood in terms of specialization in the substantiation of knowledge and the extent to which this knowledge is explicit in the school curriculum.

A contrasting approach to the recontextualization of knowledge in vocational education of students by Gustavsson and Persson-Thunqvist (2018)[2] focuses on creating favorable conditions for the implementation of knowledge, so the student can receive deeper perspectives on the conditions related to the vocational framework of education, requiring a rethinking of vocational learning priorities in systemic contexts. Vocational learning is embedded in national systems and innovation and digitisation pose the challenging question of how education and education professionals can keep abreast of the skills and areas of expertise that are needed to develop new types of professionals.

Teaching in the digital age

Digitization fundamentally changes our world and, with it, the roles, requirements and potential of learning through technology. While the definition and scope will no doubt be changed, and this will have to be done, imaginatively, efficiently, and fairly. Digitisation implies a profound growth forward in a new dimension - an essential leap in human potential as deep as the wheel in relation to development and as significant as the book in the context of education (Prensky 2001). Young people have grown up in a digital world; young people necessarily perceive it, although the digital age requires a reassessment of what is for the educational process. It should also be noted that artificial intelligence creates technologies that are encoded in machines and infrastructures, in frames of knowledge and action. Today's technology helps us solve some of the most annoying problems in the world - everyday communication, health care, transportation, loneliness - but its real magic will be technology that adapts to people. Computers are not here to give us all the answers, but to ask new questions, in new ways, to the universe.

[1]Hordern J (2018) *Knowledge, practice, and workplace learning*. In: McGrath S, Mulder M, Papier J, Suart R (eds) Handbook of vocational education and training: developments in the changing world of work. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-49789-1_63-1

[2]Gustavsson M, Thunqvist D (2018) *Students' vocational learning: enabling conditions for putting knowledge to work*. In: McGrath S, Mulder M, Papier J, Suart R (eds) Handbook of vocational education and training: developments in the changing world of work. Springer, Cham

What are those "digital skills"?

Digital skills are already highly valued throughout the world of work. The application of these skills can be classified as follows:

• Digital literacy, which is able to think and use creatively the evolution of the language of the digital world, in other words, those abilities that a person possesses to live, learn and work in the 21st century.

• Digital comprehension [or fluency], which relies on a confident familiarity with this language to reflect on its practical implications.

While jobs in the explicit sector and so-called ICT and mobile are booming, these are by no means the only opportunities that require digital skills.

While "difficult skills" are those needed to do real work, "soft skills" are those interpersonal qualities (also known as human skills) and personal attributes that are desirable to thrive in the workplace. These include, for example, effective communication, courtesy, flexibility, integrity, a good sense of humor, and a work ethic.

Possibilities of the Moodle - virtual learning platform

Among the open educational resources, the Moodle environment has become more and more popular. "Moodle" is an abbreviation for "Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment" and is an automated computer and web-based learning management system.

Despite the fact that the Moodle system was initially oriented towards university education, it was later used successfully for the organization of both pre-university (school) and secondary and post-university education (corporate).

You can access this community at www//moodle.org/and take a Moodle course. There you will find many people who are ready to help new users get started with Moodle, fix problems and use Moodle effectively. Moodle is currently translated into over 75 languages (http://moodle.org).

Moodle is used to organize:

• Distance learning - in which the teacher and the student often do not meet in person.

• Remote support for full-time education - using e-learning tools, the student can receive assignments and after solving send them for verification using the Moodle system.

• Support for full-time education - implementation of individual practical tasks; tests take place during training sessions in the Moodle e-learning system.

Moodle allows training at an individual pace (the speed of studying the material provided is set by the student himself/herself, depending on personal circumstances and needs); offers freedom and flexibility (the student can independently plan the time,

place and duration of the courses); provides accessibility (educational resource is available regardless of geographical and temporal position of the student and the educational institution), mobility (effective teacher-student feedback is one of the main requirements and foundations for the success of the learning process), technological learning (use of the latest achievements in information technology and telecommunications in the educational process) and creativity (creating comfortable conditions for the trainee's creative self-expression) (Dobrydina *et al*. 2014, pp. 285–286).

As mentioned above, Moodle's main training units are training courses.

Chapter II. Research methods in the study of religion

It is generally agreed that methods, together with theories, concepts and categories, are fundamental to modern science: knowledge accepted as "scientific" must be based on empirical material (data) gathered using methods accepted as "scientific" and their analysis must be carried out following rules based on "scientific" methods by employing concepts and theories accepted by the academic community concerned. Of course, the rules for what qualifies as scientific data, methods, categories and theories can be changed. Instead, the boundaries between what is science and what is non-science, or pseudo-science, are a matter of ongoing debate and negotiation.

Research methods issues are rarely addressed at conferences. Very few articles on methods have been published in top journals, even in the one with the "method" in the title.[1] Methods are rarely discussed in introductory textbooks, and separate courses on research methods are rarely included in religious study programs. In this regard, the study of religion is in stark contrast to other disciplines, which place great emphasis on training in research methods - often in the first year - and which have a strong record of published papers on methods, including specialised journal articles, textbooks and volumes. There is no discussion in the study of religion that can compete with the level of technical refinement established in many other disciplines.[2] The present study seeks to take a significant step toward exposing the study of religion through more robust research methods, especially for graduate students.

The current study starts from the basic assumption that methods are the rules of the game for scientific work. Resonating with the Greek etymology of the word (from

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[1]B B. Lincoln, „Theses on method", în *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (3), (1996), (pp. 225 – 227), p. 225.

[2]C. Smith, „Five proposals for reforming article publishing in the social scientific study of religion (especially quantitative): improving the quality, value, and cumulativeness of our scholarship", în *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49 (4), (2010), (pp. 583 – 595), p. 589.

meta "after" and *odos* "way"), the concept is understood here as a metaphor that refers to a "way" (planned), a specific way of doing things, an organized procedure. A scientific method, in very broad terms, is the generally accepted mode of procedure in the sciences in a broader sense (including humanities). In the light of theories, methods build, collect and/or generate data for scientific work. The data is not simply "there", independent of observer and observation. There is no data without methods and theories. The methods help us to analyze the reality, but at the same time, they produce, in part, the data to be analyzed. In this sense, by partially producing the realities that they will then analyze, the methods are efficient[1]. The methods and concepts that inform and describe them also have a history, which changes over scientific generations.[2] The purpose of this study is to give a sense of current methods and discussions about the method in the study of religion.

Formally, research methods are techniques for collecting and analyzing or adopting data from scientific research. Although there is always some degree of improvisation, these procedures or techniques usually follow a plan, routine, or scheme. These established procedures should not be misunderstood as immutable laws, but as guidelines and examples of established or best practices (which does not mean denying the dynamism of practices). Consequently, the present study does not intend to regulate or standardize research practices in the study of religion, but to improve research and stimulate its further development, providing reflection and suggesting alternatives.

One of the most significant debates in methodology concerns the use of quantitative versus qualitative methods. For simplicity, quantitative methods use numerical measurement, while qualitative researchers do not. Disagreements reflect the basic positions on research design: some proponents of qualitative approaches argue that certain things simply cannot be measured; while some proponents of quantitative methods criticize the subjective nature of qualitative work.

Three well-known criteria for assessing the goodness of research data are their reliability, validity and generalizability. In general, reliability refers to the consistency or stability of the data or the measurement of a concept; validity refers to whether an indicator (or set of indicators) correctly reflects (or measures) the concepts it is designed to reflect or, alternatively, whether it accurately predicts the relevant results; and generalizability refers to the applicability of findings beyond the sample of a given study.

Another strategy for validating research is triangulation. This refers to the use of multiple methods and/or sources (or types) of empirical material in a study. The

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[1]J. Law, *After Method: mess in social science research,* Routledge, London, New York, 2004, p.143.
[2]J. Platt, *A History of Sociological Research Methods in America, 1920–1960,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 44–52.

metaphor of the triangle indicates the multiplicity of perspectives on the method and the data[1]. In addition to the involvement of different (or different variations of) methods and data, the concept also refers to the employment of several researchers (observer) and/or theory. This reflects the view that the differences between the methods and their various implications need to be actively considered. Triangulation is often seen as part of research into mixed methods. Although this is not possible for most humanities research projects, which are usually carried out by an investigator with strictly limited time and resources, the integration of triangulation elements is also useful for smaller projects. Methodological pluralism does not teach that all methods are equally good or bad for every task. In any case, the selection of appropriate research methods is an important methodological issue, which all researchers will have to address.

Theory plays a different role in different research models, and this influences the role of methods. We can distinguish approximately between different models along an often disputed continuum of scientific practice, which cannot be discussed here in any detail. At the opposite end of the spectrum are models for testing theory (scientific method) and building theory (grounded theory). In the scientific method, a theory refers to a body of statements (axioms and hypotheses), which are constantly tested and revised by empirical verification and falsification. Experiments are the classic method of this type of survey, while surveys and other quantitative methods play an analogous role in the social sciences. Based theory, on the other hand, refers to a model of scientific practice that does not use data to test theory, but builds concepts, categories, and ultimately theory from a dynamic interaction between data collection and analysis.

Compared to a number of other disciplines, not only has there been a lack of interest in research methods among religious scholars, but there seems to be a limited interest in actively exploring new methodological options. Consequently, one of the main objectives of this volume is to make academics in the field of religion aware of the range of methodological options and the many options that have been and can be used in the pedagogical act, as well as the various limitations. The study will stimulate an appropriate and creative approach to research methods and will help researchers avoid methodological pitfalls. At the same time, it will help readers to evaluate scientific work and develop a critical awareness of strong and weak research. Given the centrality of methods for science and scientific work, reflections on methods and methodological issues are crucial to determine and improve the quality of academic work.

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[1]E.G. Guba and Y.S. Lincoln, *Competing paradigms in qualitative research,* în N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA, London, 1994, (pp. 105 – 117), pp. 105–106.

Epistemological topics for the study of religion

Most topics of epistemology are as relevant to the study of religion as they are to any other academic field. However, some topics deserve more specific discussion because they are important for scientific practice in the study of religion. Probably the most important issue is the status of religious discourse in relation to applied discourse in the science of religion, or simply the question "who is right?" and "what is true?" We must first say that religious and scientific claims to validity are radically different. Religious statements about truths or transcendent agents are impossible to validate scientifically, and most religious discourse is impervious to the data, explanations, and interpretations of science. That being said, it is equally obvious that the topics of the study of religion can, in fact, be studied as human behaviors, ideas, and institutions, and, in this sense, there do not appear to be any particular problems with assertions of truth. In this sense, the science of religion belongs entirely to the humanities and social sciences and faces virtually the same problems. However, because of its academic history and its global, intercultural ambitions, there are a few points that are worth mentioning about epistemology in general. These include: the nature of the data; inferential reasoning modes; consequences of relativism; reasons for argumentation and justification; the problem of "epistemic virtues"; and the problem of "unobservable knowledge".

The first vision, empiricism, is the standard idea that most of us have as a "default" psychological mechanism: the basis of our knowledge of the world is derived from experience, through sensations on which we base our beliefs, make statements and thus reach (a kind of) knowledge. For the empiricism, the means for constructing knowledge come by induction and the criterion of validity is provided by reference[1]. The categories by which we understand the world are largely shaped by the way the world is. In the second "-ism", rationalism, the categories by which we interpret the world are considered innate, stable and not derived directly from experience. On the contrary, our experience and knowledge are shaped by cognitive mechanisms. The third "-ism", constructivism, is so far a well-known position in the humanities and social sciences (it is rare in the natural sciences, though not in the philosophy and sociology of science). This view argues that social conditions and forces are responsible for our knowledge and the processes of knowledge formation.

Two related "-isms" have circulated countless times in discussions about the study of religion, namely positivism and reductionism. Positivism developed as a key philosophy of scientific progress in the 19th century. The basic principle is that science

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[1] A. Chalmers, *What Is This Thing Called Science? An assessment of the nature and status of science and its methods*. 3rd edn., Open University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 1-21

should be concerned with problems about which we can have positive and reliable knowledge and therefore metaphysical speculation should be avoided. This is essentially a very strong push towards objectivity and neutrality. Last but not least, the study of religion has benefited from positivist attitudes in research. Again, even positivists have opinions and biases and also subscribe to theories even if they are not aware of it. In the second half of the 20th century, positivist thinking began to decline, and "positivist" and "positivism" became pejorative terms for researchers who were theoretically unaware of their own presuppositions. The ideal in current research is more an attempt to include the premises of research and thus extend the goal of objectivity to scientific practice itself.[1]

"Reduction", "reductionism" and "reductionist" are also regularly found as derogatory terms in the study of religion, most often applied to those (opponents) who "reduce" religion to "something else" (e.g. politics, economy or knowledge) and thus the supposedly essential religious qualities of religion. The term "reduction" has several meanings, but in science it means primarily a change in theory or level and thus produces a "new picture of things". Reductionism plays a role as soon as it is said "in other words"[2], because then a different explanatory framework is employed, along with related interpretations and explanations. If the study of religion was to avoid being completely reduced, in this sense the only task left would be to repeat what believers believe, say, and do. Most of the discussions in epistemology and philosophy of science have focused on the conditions and problems for the natural sciences in the search for reliable knowledge, foundations, and justifications. The formation of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences has not been considered to the same extent, and these fields have not been considered by some to be at all scientific.

In summary, many epistemological concerns reveal that you do not have to be a physicist or a philosopher to know what science is, because scientific virtues are in principle quite easy to understand and use. There are extensions and continuations of human faculties that have evolved so that we do not walk in the trees in the jungle. When we add to this the obligations of social life and the normative use of language, we see the contours of scientific practice as similar to human practice in general. The same standards apply in the practice of science, which is why I think we should prefer the "virtues" scenario to adhering to the search for a strict set of rules. Anyone can follow strict rules, but it is much more difficult to stay rational when the rules run out. There is a solution to this, too, because, as the philosopher Hilary Putnam once said, we have an underestimated, primitive obligation to be reasonable, not a "moral

[1] *Ibid*, pp. 113-123

[2] J. S. Jensen, *The Study of Religion in a New Key: theoretical and philosophical soundings in the comparative and general study of religion*, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus 2003, pp.134–139.

obligation" or an "ethical obligation", certainly, but still a very real obligation to be reasonable"[1].

Content of the analysis

With research methods such as experiments and surveys, people respond to controlled situations or answer questions and thus provide data that was not previously available. Some researchers prefer to study messages that already exist in recorded or visual form. Textual analysis is the method used to describe and interpret the characteristics of a recorded or visual message. "Texts" are any object, artifact, or behavior that involves the use of symbols. Texts can be written transcripts of speeches or conversations, written documents (letters, staff records, newspapers, magazines, textbooks), electronic documents (audio tapes, movies, videotapes, computer files), or visual texts (paintings, photographs, and architecture).

Content analysis has been developed primarily as a method of describing and explaining the characteristics of messages embedded in mass and public media texts (although this may include messages of a private nature or directed to one or more people). Content analysis is defined as a "research technique to make replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other significant material) in the context of their use"[2]. It includes "any of the many research techniques used to describe and systematically analyze the content of written, spoken, or pictorial communication — such as books, newspapers, television programs, or transcripts of interviews"[3] and usually results in the development of objective and quantitative data, although qualitative varieties that rely mainly or exclusively on qualitative analysis and reporting are common.
1 Content analysis has its roots in religious studies and can be traced back to 18th-century Sweden, when researchers counted the number of religious symbols in a collection of 90 hymns to determine whether hymns were preached against the church.[4]

Firstly, content analysis is useful if researchers are interested in tracking specific data to identify and understand the direction or changes in specific phenomena over time. Secondly, content analysis is appropriate if researchers want to identify common patterns or elements in a particular genre. Thirdly, if they are not looking for common ground, researchers can use content analysis to identify differences by comparing

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[1]H. Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism*, Open Court, LaSalle, IL, p. 84.

[2]K.H Krippendorff, *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology,* Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California, 1980, p. 18.

[3]W.P. Vogt, *Dictionary of statistics and methodology*, third edn. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California, 2005, p. 59.

[4]Cf. K Dovring, „Quantitative semantics in 18th century Sweden", *Public opinion Quarterly 18*, 1954-1955, (pp. 389 – 394).

similar types of variables in two different systems or in different contexts. Fourthly, researchers can use content analysis to assess the image of certain groups in society. Fifthly, content analysis can be used to measure a specific phenomenon against a certain standard in order to classify the phenomenon, make a judgment about it, or determine how close it is to meeting a certain standard or expectation. Sixthly, content analysis can be used to correlate certain features of the message with other variables.

For starters, content analysis is a discreet way to measure phenomena. Secondly, content analysis allows researchers to systematically manage and summarize large amounts of relatively unstructured information more easily than other research methods. In addition, content analysis can be used to describe communication phenomena in a way that allows for triangulation with other research methods.

Despite its empirical foundations, content analysis is not a purely objective method. The texts do not have purely objective qualities; are not "independent of reader"[1]. In the case of content analysis, the meanings are brought to the texts by researchers who carefully design the analysis using particular theoretical frameworks, prepare independent coders to describe particular features, and carefully interpret the results. In addition, the content analysis is based on the assumption that there are uniform relationships between symbols and their meanings. Finally, the very nature of texts and textual analysis require that researchers draw specific inferences from texts in particular contexts - that is, from the text to what the author intends, from the text to what the text means to users, and from the text how which text affects users.

In this category, researchers focus on religious ritual practices or on performing (either individually or collectively) more or less invariant sequences of formal religious acts and utterances. For example, researchers are interested in the content, structure, and performance of prayers. Sometimes the content of the prayer is related to other variables, and it links the content of the prayer to physical, mental, and spiritual health. Others study worship music and hymns. To understand the content of Sunday school stories and songs. Analyzing the content of conversion narratives and God's views helps to identify common experiential themes that place individual religious experiences in larger social environments.

One category of studies explores how mainstream news media describe or frame religious people, groups, or events. Secondly, studies may focus on the presence or absence of religious content in mainstream entertainment and commercial media, often

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[1]K. Krippendorff, „Reliability in content analysis: some common misconceptions and recommendations", *Human Communication Research* 30 (3), 2004, (pp. 411 – 433), p. 22.

as a way of describing certain religious beliefs, identifying trends, or highlighting prejudices. Thirdly, researchers study religious media to determine the attitudes, beliefs, practices, and identities of religious organizations or individuals. Several studies in this field refer to government and citizenship. Secondly, many studies focus on religion and its relationship to health and well-being. Thirdly, the intersection between religion and education generates significant interest. Fourthly, many researchers are interested in the role of religion in family life. Finally, studies in this area focus on race and gender issues.

Content analysis is ideal for religious studies because it allows researchers to move beyond the obvious content found in texts - visible, superficial content - to latent content or interpretations of content that involve something about the nature of communicators or effects on communicators. However, despite its many advantages described here, there are some limitations in content analysis. Firstly, it can be difficult to find representative samples. Secondly, generalizing the results of one content analysis to another is difficult because researchers may not use similar coding units or categories. Finally, while content analysis is useful for describing the characteristics and trends of the message, it does not allow researchers to draw conclusions about cause and effect, as in the case of experiments.

Conversation analysis

Conversation analysis is a method of analyzing spoken interaction. It is especially concerned with the sequential organization of the interactive conversation[1]. That is, it seeks to explore how the actions and twists of speech follow one another in a systematic way.

Although conversation analysis nowadays is practiced in a multitude of disciplines, e.g. linguistics, communication studies, psychology and education, is initially rooted in sociology. It was created by sociologist Harvey Sacks in the 1960's[2]. It was especially influenced by Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodological sociology. The main field of application for CA in religious studies is the microanalytical study of religious speech events. In every religious community there are a multitude of recurring discursive events.

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[1] Cf. E.A. Schegloff, *Sequence Organization in Interaction: a primer in conversation analysis. Volume 1.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007.
[2] Esa Lehtinen, „Conversation analisys", *The routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religions*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, (pp. 122-133), p. 123.

Conversation analysis data consists of recordings of the so-called natural talk-in-interaction.[1] This means that field notes or interviews are not considered sufficient data. In the analysis of the conversation, the analysis must be reconciled with tiny details of the actual discussions, and such details are difficult, if not impossible to remember later. Both audio and video recordings are used, but video recordings are preferred because they can capture non-verbal aspects of the interaction. This type of data logging can cause access issues. There are religious groups among whom it is impossible to obtain permission to register. Other methods should be used in these groups[2].

There are also ethical questions in recording interactive data. The confidentiality of the participants in the interaction must be protected. Especially when the recording is done in a non-public setting, it is necessary to obtain the written consent of all participants. They must be informed of the purpose of the study, how the data is used and where the records will be viewed. In transcription, the usual practice is to protect the confidentiality of participants by changing all names, places and other details that make it possible to identify.

Conversation analysis involves a detailed microanalysis of the data. This is both a force and a limitation of the method. The main strength of the method is that it is about what actually happens in the religious-interaction conversation. Also, because the conversation analysis is concerned with sequential analysis, it can explain how the participants themselves interpret the actions of others. This is done by examining how the shares are handled in the next round. Thus, the analysis of the conversation can shed light on the aspect of religious practice from the point of view of practitioners.

However, because the analysis is so detailed, a conversation analyst should usually focus on one type of religious encounter. Thus, it can be argued that the results of the conversation analysis provide a limited picture of any religious community. Also, especially when researchers study a religious community with which they are unfamiliar, they need cultural knowledge of the community to understand the inferential frameworks involved. In order to obtain such knowledge, ethnographic observation of the community must be carried out. Thus, a combination of ethnographic analytical and conversational methods can provide excellent results. The best possible scenario would be to set up a research group of ethnographers and conversation

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[1] Cf. J. Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1984.
[2] Esa Lehtinen, „Conversation analisys", *The routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religions*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, (pp. 122-133), p. 128.

analysts. Ethnographers may focus on providing a holistic picture of the speech community, while conversation analysts may focus on specific types of speech events.[1]

Hermeneutics

When the interpretation is developed in a scientific method, it is given a Greek name – "hermeneutics" - a concept derived from *hermeneuein*, which means "to express", "to translate", "to interpret". The source material of hermeneutics is texts and other statements, and the goal is to gain an understanding of their meanings. In religious studies, the study of texts and utterances is not an end in itself, but a means of saying something about religion and the religious processes in a society.

Christian authors have distinguished between different layers of meaning in the Bible. Origen (185–254) distinguished between the literal, moral and spiritual meaning of Scripture. In practice, such distinctions have often been reduced to a division between the literal and the allegorical sense. In the Renaissance, hermeneutics was closely linked to philology, combined with source criticism and viewed as the basic method of the humanities.

Hermeneutics consists of a reading that moves back and forth between the parts and the whole text, between its structure and meaning, between the horizon of the reader and the horizon of the text and between the text and its contexts. Hermeneutics is both a method and a philosophy of interpretation. The method cannot be used or explained satisfactorily without being firmly rooted in the theories of interpretation, because the act of interpretation should always include a systematic reflection on the hermeneutic process and one's own starting points in this process.

The first guide to using a hermeneutic method is to read the text slowly and thoroughly. A text can be read hundreds of times - forward, backward, and transversally - each time providing new information. According to the model of the hermeneutic circle, we go to the text with our own prejudices and then project meanings into it. The knowledge gained through the initial reading changes one's prejudices and the text gets a richer interpretation in each of the following readings.

A second guide is to apply everything that is known about the language and context of the text. The word "text" is derived from Latin *textere*, tissue", which is quite appropriate, as a text is a network of references to concepts, ideas, practices and other texts (intertextuality). A context represents the interdependent conditions under which

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[1] Vezi E. Lehtinen, „Conversation analysis and religion: practices of talking about Bible texts in Seventh-day

Adventist Bible study". *Religion* 39, pp. 233 – 247 *apud* Esa Lehtinen, „Conversation analisys", *The routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religions*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, (pp. 122-133), p. 130.

something happens or appears. In the case of a text, the context includes in particular its environment and its social and cultural environment. According to a version of the hermeneutic circle, the reader moves back and forth between the text and its context. A text always has several contexts, not just one.

The modern history of hermeneutics includes impulses from biblical studies, philosophy and comparative literature. It reflects the development of a deeper perspective on the nature of interpretation, as well as conflicts over hermeneutic processes and the purpose of interpretation. Significant names in the modern history of hermeneutics include Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) and Paul Ricoeur (1913 –2005).

Hermeneutics is important in religious studies because it deals with texts, meaning, and interpretation in a theoretically reflective way. One of the strengths of this approach is that new perspectives and contexts will invite new questions and interpretations[1].

A hermeneutical approach to religious texts presupposes an intimate knowledge of the tradition of interpreting the given religion from within. Therefore, there is a difference between the creative uses of religious texts and their scientific interpretations. Hermeneutics in the field of religious studies are committed to constructing interpretations that I believe say something about the users of a text and textual communities at a certain point in history. The range of acceptable readings of religious texts is thus limited and should not exceed the limits of interpretation that depend on the cultural and social contexts of the text.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a powerful method, but it is underused in the study of religion - in part because too many scholars misunderstand what it entails. Any research project is interesting. What sets them apart is the visual depth they look for. Superficial and deep views are different research objects that require different research techniques - surveys and interviews, respectively.

In the study of religion, the term "phenomenology" draws us to the experiences that should underlie religious life. The call to experience gained scholarly importance in the late 17th century, with Friedrich Schleiermacher's (1799) attempt to justify Christianity against Enlightenment rationalism. As he reflects on this experience, he develops the idea of an almighty and benevolent God, the only possible source that such

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[1] Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, „Hermeneutics", *The routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religions*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, (pp. 275-284), p. 282.

an experience can have. This idea is an "overconfidence" to use William James's later term: an intellectual deduction and the elaboration of the experience itself. In James's words, religious ideas "presuppose immediate experiences as their subject. They are a consequence of religious feeling, not co-ordinate with it, not independent of what it ascertains"[1]. Husserl began his philosophy with conscious experience. Phenomenology involves the thick description of such subjective experiences in order to locate their structures. Phenomenology seeks models in such descriptions, without imagining that they refer to anything other than subjective consciousness.

Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger, developed phenomenology in a somewhat different direction, noting that subjective experience is not isolated. Instead, it is always located in a pre-existing world. Not only is experience always something, but things presented to the experimenter are always presented in a context that shapes both sides of the action. Heideggerian phenomenology explores the role that these contexts play in constituting both the experience and the experimenter.

Where Heidegger focused on context, Maurice Merleau-Ponty focused on the living body. Because the body is both the mechanism of consciousness and one of its objects, inseparable, bodily perception is the only point at which consciousness itself cannot be separated from consciousness-of-something. This time, the body-mind-world present themselves to the consciousness in a uniform manner. The difference is striking. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology tries to describe such differences, seeing them as differences in what we might call the "living body". Experience is always an embodied experience, incorporated in a lived, embodied world. This form of phenomenology inevitably places the body at the centre of religious life.

From the above, it should be obvious that the activity of researchers in religious studies such as Mircea Eliade and Ninian Smart was not "phenomenology" in any strict sense of the term. As James Cocs points out, they and others used "themes that have been associated with phenomenology — encompassing previous hypotheses, using a completely empathic approach, identifying typologies, and insisting that religion encompasses a category in itself"[2].

Contemporary empirical phenomenology seeks to do something completely different. They try to understand the world as people experience it, ignoring their interpretations of those experiences. Husserl's followers emphasize the dynamics of consciousness and consciousness-to-be. Heidegger's followers stress the simultaneous

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[1] W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* Modern Library, New York.1961, pp. 424.
[2] J.L. Cox, *A Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion,* T&T International, London, 2006, pp. 204–205.

experience of object and context. Merleau-Ponty stresses the embodied nature of all experiences. Yet, nevertheless, he seeks to capture subjective consciousness. This is the object towards which the phenomenological method is directed.

There seems to be a contradiction at the heart of the phenomenological project. On the one hand, phenomenology should investigate pure experiences, removing people's interpretations of them. On the other hand, anthropological, psychological and sociological phenomenologies produce different accounts of these experiences.

All serious phenomenological researchers are struggling with this problem - one of the reasons why phenomenology is one of the most difficult research methods to use correctly. We must always pay attention to the narratives that prevent us from looking phenomenologically.

Auditory mterials

Given that religious studies have developed in such a multi- and interdisciplinary field of research, as this study also shows, it is necessary to refer to methodologies generated by the "recognition of the ear"[1]. Moreover, some of the areas that religious scientists traditionally describe and analyze, such as practice, experience, identity, liturgy, performance, mediation, embodiment, and spatiality, lend themselves to sound analysis.

To begin with, there is still more research to be done on the perceived relationship between particular sounds (ambient or produced by voices or instruments) and specific deities or spiritual beings, what Ter Ellingson calls "isoformalism"[2]. More studies are needed on the historical and cultural factors that have led to certain sounds that have become emblematic of certain religious traditions, whether they are vocalizations in Islam, man in Hinduism, chanting in Buddhism, shofar in Judaism, or bell in Christianity. Similarly, the lives of contemporary composers and musicians can be productively examined through (self) biographical study and personal interviews to discern the religious and/or spiritual beliefs and practices, as well as the social forces that shaped their music.

The shift from "speech" and "text" to a new emphasis on the senses as mediators of experience has been labeled a "sensual revolution"[3].

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[1]Cf. Erlmann 2004 *apud* Rosalind I.J. Hackett, „Auditory materials", *The routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religions*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, (pp. 275-284), p. (pp. 447-458), p. 450.

[2]T. Ellingson, „Music: music and religion", L. Jones, (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion,* Macmillan, New York, 2005, pp. (pp. 6248 – 6256), p. 6253. T. Ellingson, „Music: music and religion", L. Jones, (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion,* Macmillan, New York, 2005, pp. (pp. 6248 – 6256), p. 6253

[3]*Concordia Sensoria Research Team (CONSERT)*, available at: www.david-howes.com/senses, accessed on 11/10/2021.

Howes emphasizes the importance of focusing on "the interaction of the senses in cultural experience and expression"[1]. Moreover, in Howes's estimate, the sensor is "dynamic, relational and political (not as contemporary psychologists say)"[2].

Research on circulating sounds or music globally presents a number of obvious practical challenges for any researcher who might be interested in the therapeutic or moral effects of listening practices in various cultural locations. However, computer-mediated information and communication are excellent opportunities for new research, while at the same time raising new questions about what constitutes data for auditory and acoustic research in the field of religious studies.

In conclusion, whether large-scale or additional research is being done on the production, propagation, perception, or practice of sound in religious traditions and communities, the results should be beneficial to both scholars and students. While not everyone can have a mature musical ear, given the proliferation of sound technologies and multi-sensory change in many scientific fields, this field can be a very productive horizon for more sonic-conscious religious studies.

Material culture

Material culture is an emerging interdisciplinary field that integrates aspects of the disciplines of history and theory of art and visual and performing culture, archaeology, religious studies, history, anthropology, folklore, history of technology, cultural geography, psychology, sociology, materials science, conservation science and archeometry, among others, dedicated to the scientific interpretation of material culture[3].

Material culture may seem primarily a study of a collection of things - artifacts. In fact, material culture is much more than that, although the whole can be derived from artifacts, for each thing involves a set of material activities and meanings that interact with the artifact and with each other and that mediate a cultural landscape.

Therefore, material culture refers to everything that is both perceptible and cultural, not only artifacts, but also contexts, processes and skills of use and production that surround and interpenetrate artifacts. Music, for example, is material (its sound, as well as the instruments and bodies that make it); so is the taste of a sacred meal, the smell of incense, the sense of rosary beads in beings, one's own reception of the body

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[1] D. Howes, *Empire of the Senses: the sensual culture reader,* Berg, Oxford, New York, 2004, p. 399 and V. Erlmann, (ed.), *Hearing Cultures: essays on sound, listening and modernity,* Berg, New York, 2004, p. 4.

[2] D. Howes, op. cit., p. 400.

[3] S. Lubar and W.D. Kingery, (eds), *History from Things: essays on material culture,* Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1993, pp. ix – xi.

(proprioception) in sacred postures or gestures (kneeling in prayer, for example, or making the sign of the cross) or the kinesthesia of one's body involved in religious activity (e.g. sa''y during Hajj)[1].

The interpenetration between religion and material culture is complex and multidimensional; therefore, the methods of studying these interpenetrations are also complex and multidimensional. Three analytical distinctions are useful to clarify the field of religion and material culture: material religion; material religious influences on secular culture; and material components that exceed these limits. These should be understood as heuristic devices, rather than categorical distinctions.

Material religion extends beyond explicitly religious contexts. "Religions discipline and interpret bodies; create and define sacred spaces through architecture; generate, adore and study images in all environments; regulate food intake; the structure of temporal experience; and, in general, they penetrate and are in turn penetrated by the cultural landscapes in which they exist".[2]

The method, although often presented as a disciplined and orderly procedure for investigating data and developing knowledge, can be validly understood as the means by which data and knowledge are made to occur and appear obvious.[3] In the study of religion, as elsewhere, methods of studying material culture involve methods of data collection and interpretation.

Studying material culture connects us to our own material culture: our bodies and physical entities, the context, processes, and abilities with which they are related. As scientists, we become aware of the embodied aspects of scholarships and the material culture of the academy.

Human bodies are material entities. Becoming competent in a culture is a complex form of physical education that shapes the total experience of the world, including oneself and one's abilities. "Whether we realize it or not, we are all involved in lifelong self-cultivation projects"[4]. While material culture is a human product,

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[1] A variety of subfields of religious studies address aspects of material culture. For example, there is a field of visual culture and religion, there are studies of religious music, there are ritual studies. Spatial and temporal studies of religion address material culture, as do documentary studies when considering material aspects of documents.

[2] R. M. Carp, „Teaching religion and material culture", *Teaching Theology and Religion* 10 (1), 2007, (pp. 2 – 12), p. 3.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 7.

[4] G. Downey, *Learning Capoeira: lessons in cunning from an Afro-Brazilian art form,* Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, p. 3.

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material culture is also an objective reality, and people are products of material culture.[1] That is, human bodies are artifacts of material culture[2].

Our bodies are themselves the context and source of methods. "The everyday world of cultural normality and the specialized world of academic knowledge are co-produced by a common set of skills embedded in our bodies and their technical and technological extensions"[3]. "Bodies, cultures, feeling and perception, and knowledge and faith are woven together into a network of interconnections that cannot be cut. As acquaintances, we inevitably find ourselves in a network that allows us and limits our knowledge"[4].

All material culture is a manifestation of human behavior, and its continuous uses, including its "meanings", are human behaviors. This involves the use of "specific circumstances and the incorporation of the principles of the psychological, communicative and interactive process"[5] to understand it.

An interconnected series of material culture can be described as a cultural landscape. According to Lewis, a cultural landscape includes "everything people do with the natural earth for any reason"[6]. The notion of cultural landscape urges us to look at both the "common" and the elite components of the built environment; the assumption is that "the whole human landscape has cultural significance"[7].

In terms of style, we are not interested in the minds of individuals, but rather "the matrix of feelings, sensations, intuitions, and understandings that are nonverbal or pre-verbal, and in any given culture many of them are shared"[8]. Style is the key to discovering these components, where style means common formal features. "Those

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[1] P. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality,* Anchor Books, New York, 1967, p. 61.

[2] Of course, body inculturation, including its sensory dimensions, is not a monolith in a particular culture. It can vary by gender, age, class, ethnicity and a variety of other factors and changes over time. These factors may be important to consider in any given research paper.

[3] R.M. Carp, „Perception and material culture: Historical and cross-cultural perspectives", *Historical Reflections/Réfl èxions Historiques* 23 (3), 1997, (pp. 269 – 300), p. 103.

[4] R.M. Carp, „Seeing is believing, but touching's the truth", Watkins, G.J. (ed.), *Teaching Religion and Film,* Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, (pp. 177 – 188), pp. 178–179.

[5] M.O. Jones, „Why take a behavioral approach to folk objects?", S. Lubar and W.D. Kingery, (eds), *History from Things: essays on material culture,* Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1993, (pp. 182 – 196), p. 194.

[6] P. Lewis, „Axioms for reading the landscape: some guides to the American scene", T.J. Schlereth, (ed.), *Material Culture Studies in America,* The American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, TN, 1992, (pp. 174 – 182), p.116.

[7] P. Lewis, *op. cit.,* p 176.

[8] P. D. Prown, „The truth of material culture", S. Lubar and W.D. Kingery, (eds), *History from Things: essays on material culture,* Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1993, (pp. 1 – 19), p. 5.

similarities or resonances constitute the style"[1]. Style analysis can, however, be used to discover and interpret sensibilities as they arise in contemporary times.

"The material itself conveys metaphorical and other messages about objects and their place in a culture"[2]. Reasons for using the materials include function, availability, economy, style and tradition[3].

A wide range of relevant texts can provide useful information on any aspect of the study: religious texts, technological treatises, practice guides, interpretations of the object of study, and so on. Here we are talking about the informative aspects of the texts, considered apart from their materiality.

Material culture and religion represent an emerging interdisciplinary field that interrogates religious cultural landscapes and the presence of religion in secular cultural landscapes. It highlights the embodied and material character of both religion and scholarship, generating a potential critique of our earlier, more immaterial, and disembodied understandings. As an emerging field, material culture and religion require methodological creativity and clarity. It needs to borrow methods from a range of adjacent fields, while integrating them in new ways and seeking new own methods. In this way, the field emerges through a dialectic of data and method: while data determines methods that can interpret it, methods determine the emergence of data and require interpretation. Thus, material culture and religion provide a creative and challenging arena for inquiry, especially for junior scholars and graduate students who are now clarifying their research interests.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study contributes to the progress of methodological reflection and sensitivity in the study of religion. The selection of methods offered and the details in which they are explored are solid steps, but they go a long way. We hope that this work will inspire and guide the steps of other researchers to continue the journey on their own.

These areas of study are characterized by interdisciplinarity and, for obvious reasons, by multi-methodological research projects. However, while they have developed methods for studying specific materials, they cannot be copied just for the purpose of studying religion. Finally, our life, including our professional life, can be hard to imagine without accepting the reality of the world in which we live. Therefore,

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[1] *Ibidem*, p. 4.
[2] R. Friedel, „Some matters of substance", S. Lubar and W.D. Kingery, (eds), *History from Things: essays on material culture,* Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1993, (pp. 41 – 50), p. 43.
[3] *Ibidem*, p. 44.

in order to cope with the promises and dangers of this environment in a methodologically appropriate way, it requires a certain rethinking of the world.

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CONCLUSIONS

The articles of this e-book are characterized on the one hand by the objectives and on the other hand by the variety of approaches to the subject.

In the following lines we will try to present some key conclusions that emerge from a comprehensive, critical, and comparative reading of the texts.

I. *Religious profile of Europe*

Many of the articles attempt a mapping of the modern religious map of Europe. This mapping does not end with a "horizontal" approach to the numbers of the social and spiritual landscape. It reveals the causes and consequences of the phenomenon. According to the authors of the articles, the religious physiognomy of modern Europe has the following characteristics:

Religious liquidity and de-Christianization of Europe. Europeans gradually and under the influence of historical events and circumstances, tend to abandon their traditional religious beliefs. Others associate religious belief with the methods of repression and exclusion used by communist governments in the past to fight religion. Others have simply turned away from faith because of effective atheist propaganda.

Weak thought. The liquidity mentioned above is fueled by the weak thinking that prevailed in the religious mentality and behavior of the second half of the last century and continues to this day. The collapse of powerful ideologies and socio-political systems has also engulfed the narratives and interpretations of religions, including Christianity. To a large extent, the Christian roots of the Old Continent have become dehydrated and can no longer give meaning to the life of modern man, who seems to be sinking more and more into relativism and the contradictions of globalized postmodernism.

Social complexity, religious diversity, and multiculturalism. The large movements of immigrants and refugees in the Old Continent in recent decades have transformed the European big cities, but to a certain extent the broader regions as well, into multicultural and multi-religious murals. The fear of many Europeans that they might lose their cultural identity has led them to seek and revive religious traditions that had been forgotten in the pre-Christian subsoil of the European popular culture and mythology.

Private religiosity and individual (à la carte) spirituality. In contrast to the boundless and vast virtual community formed by cultural and economic globalization,

modern man feels more alone and understands himself as an autonomous unit among others. Even the ties that held religious communities together have loosened. Modern Europeans prefer to practice their religious faith individually, without the ties of the community and outside of it. This favors the development of a private religiosity and an individual, personal (à la carte) spirituality, which everyone can choose and compose with elements coming from different religious traditions. Thus, pagan movements and cults, sometimes linked to the issue of ecology, emerged on the religious horizon of modern Europe.

Secularization and rigidity of the Churches. Christian Churches and denominations have undergone varying degrees of secularization, making them vulnerable to harsh criticism by biblical and spiritual standards. On the other hand, the Churches, and denominations become more conservative and rigid, for fear of losing their flock. In this case, however, they are unable to deal with the demands of the modern world and are further marginalized. This phenomenon is more pronounced in countries where a religious tradition initially prevailed but is now called upon to share public space with others.

A-culture. On the other hand, there are former Christian societies that find religious interest or refuge in Eastern religions or embrace the doctrine of a-civilization.

II. The priorities of the Churches and theology

The authors of the e-book articles, despite their different perspectives, agree on some fundamental findings about the role and priorities of Churches and theology in the peculiar, complex, and extremely demanding multi-religious and multicultural environment of modern Europe.

In fact, what the Churches and Christian theologians are called to do today is no different from the very mission of Christ and the Church itself during its two-thousand-year history in time and space. That is, to teach love and unity between God and man and between people, to show that salvation is a collective event and not an individual one. And, of course, to emphasize that faith and life in Christ does not mean an escape from society and the world, nor indifference to the social and other problems faced by man and humanity. On the contrary, it is an uninterrupted course and a lifelong struggle of inner purification and social action for the constant renewal of the universe.

Among these priorities of the Christian Churches and denominations, the authors of the articles emphasized the following:

The urgent need to cultivate a culture of dialogue. This dialogue concerns both the Church and the other religious communities and social organizations, as well as the dialogue of the faithful among themselves.

Public theology. Several articles stressed the need for the Churches to develop a theological discourse, simple, accurate, sincere, convincing and, above all, capable of claiming an equal position in public space. This priority is more difficult but also even more necessary in societies where in a relatively short period of time religious diversity has disrupted the unified cultural and religious citizenship and sovereignty of a Church or denomination.

The development of a positive attitude towards the religiously different. It is necessary for the Churches to admit that the "other", more than any religious commitment, cultural peculiarity, or ethnic origin, is primarily a human being. A man with needs, worries and longings that unite all people. This reminder of our common human nature is of particular importance to all the denominations of the Christian faith, which in its turn believes in and glorifies a common heavenly Father of all people with no exception.

More action and less theory. The Christian Churches are called upon to listen and act upon the daily problems of the everyday man and, especially of the underprivileged, the poor and the wronged. In an age like today, where the image dominates it serves manipulation and consumption and speech has been diverted to a slogan or advertising caption with the common goal of profit, practical care and selfless service is the most convincing testimony of the truth of the Christian Churches.

Defending and promoting the common good. Even on the verge of a neutral, multi-religious, multi-cultural or even non-cultural environment, the Church and theology must serve the common good that springs from the biblical alphabet. As one of the e-book texts aptly points out, the common good in a modern, pluralistic, and secular state is difficult to define. "Even so, the theology of the common good has provided important insights into the dignity, sanctity and social nature of the human person. Emphasis is placed on the doctrine of the creation of man by God, a theology that fights for a just society" (C. Celu).

III. Religious education and otherness

It is a common finding in several articles that modern education can be used as an effective tool to combat prejudice, hostility, alienation, exclusion, and marginalization, as well as a means of strengthening social unity and cohesion.

Indeed, religious education is necessary since religion remains, or rather has returned dynamically to the forefront of social ferment and personal pursuits, despite of or even exactly because of a barren anti-clericalism or any systematic ideological attempt to treat it as a useless remain of the past, destined to die.

Religious education, in this perspective, favors the understanding of the *conditio humana* (human condition) and the understanding of the other, the different,

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as a brother. It is indicative that, as from the Orthodox point of view, the attitude towards the religious other is a criterion of biblical fidelity and imitation of Christ.

With all these facts, the positive role of religious education as a factor that cultivates respect for any religious and cultural identity, the inclusion of all students not just as tomorrow's citizens but as actors in a multicultural reality, the cell of which is the school environment, becomes clearly understandable.

In addition, the revival of religious fundamentalism and totalitarian ideologies is forcing religious education to theologically deconstruct racism and discrimination, alluding to the anthropological constants of the Christian faith but also to peaceful dialogue and reconciliation. In other words, religious education is called upon to become the protagonist of education in religious diversity both for theological and social reasons.

IV. Character and content of the Course of Religion

Although all the articles in the e-book explicitly or implicitly share the above purposes of religious education, there are two different trends and proposals regarding the nature and content of the Course of Religion (CR) in Primary and Secondary Public Education.

The two different models of the CR are as follows.
1. Confessional, catechistic and monophonic

The Course of Religion draws from and transmits knowledge to one and only religious tradition and less, or even not at all, from or to other religions. In this case, the course is homologous and monophonic, in the sense that it is addressed to students of a particular faith. The same applies to the teacher, who is sometimes approved not only by the educational authority but also by the relevant religious leadership. Such a course, in terms of its content and purpose, is not much different from catechism. It is obvious that such a Course of Religion, in terms of content and of the target group to which it is addressed, can become the long arm of religion and the religious community within the school that essentially becomes the space for the exercise of a purely ecclesiastical duty, such as catechism.

Although it does not actively serve the acceptance of religious diversity, this confessional and catechistic CR serves the pastoral needs of a dominant Church or Christian denomination, which may even have an institutionally established role or discourse in the curriculum. But it can also serve the needs of a minority denomination, which through the Course strengthens the identity of its young members vis-vis other denominations or religions.

2. *Non-confessional and polyphonic*

The Course of Religion does not serve a religious tradition or confession and it does not draw information and knowledge from only a particular religion but from all religions. It is addressed to all students regardless of their religious tradition or identity and the teacher does not have to belong to a particular religious tradition.

The character of such a course is extroverted and polyphonic. It also cultivates an ecumenical spirit and encourages the acceptance of otherness, since it is itself an event of encounter, acquaintance, and relationship with the religious and cultural "other". In addition, such a course contributes to the disconnection of the CR from the dominant religious tradition and national identity, which is especially the case in Orthodox countries.

This differentiation is even found among columnists who belong to the same Christian denomination, but in different member countries of the IRENE project. Conversely, there is an agreement between different member states but also Christian traditions. It is obvious that these internal disagreements or unexpected agreements should be attributed to the particularity of each place and the special needs of each religious tradition.

However, the economic factor also plays a decisive role in choosing the character of the Course. For example, financially strong countries may, at the request of the churches and religions, hire different teachers to teach each religious community. In contrast, in economically weaker countries, this is practically impossible.

Related to the character of the CR is the issue of Christian schools. The example of Estonia is typical, where, as we read in the relevant e-book article, two radically opposite views prevail. According to the first, the institution of these schools, since it is based on the distinction between Christian and non-Christian, runs counter to liberal values and must be abolished. The other view, however, considers them necessary because "it is the only way to ensure that people with different worldviews have the opportunity to educate their children accordingly." (Triin Käpp).

Concluding, we hope that the common findings as well as the different approaches of the articles that make up this e-book will help the reader to understand the wider concept of contemporary religious education more fully, to deepen to the content of each article and to make better use of it in their own special social, spiritual, and educational environment.