

The Routledge International Handbook of Religious Education

How and what to teach about religion is controversial in every country. *The Routledge International Handbook of Religious Education* is the first book to comprehensively address the range of ways that major countries around the world teach religion in public and private educational institutions.

It discusses how three models in particular seem to dominate the landscape. Countries with strong cultural traditions focused on a majority religion tend to adopt an "identification model," where instruction is provided only in the tenets of the majority religion, often to the detriment of other religions and their adherents. Countries with traditions that differentiate church and state tend to adopt a "separation model," thus either offering instruction in a wide range of religions, or in some cases teaching very little about religion, intentionally leaving it to religious institutions and the home setting to provide religious instruction. Still other countries attempt "managed pluralism," in which neither one, nor many, but, rather, a limited handful of major religious traditions are taught. Inevitably, there are countries that do not fit any of these dominant models, and the range of methods touched upon in this book will surprise even the most enlightened reader.

Religious instruction by educational institutions in 53 countries and regions of the world are explored by experts native to each country. These chapters discuss:

- legal parameters in terms of subjective versus objective instruction in religion;
- constitutional, statutory, social, and political contexts to religious approaches;
- distinctions between the kinds of instruction permitted in elementary and secondary schools and what is allowed in institutions of higher learning;
- regional assessments, which provide a welcome overview and comparison.

This comprehensive and authoritative volume will appeal to educators, scholars, religious leaders, politicians, and others interested in how religion and education interface around the world.

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The Routledge International Handbook of Religious Education

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Religious education in Latvia

Ringolds Balodis

Demographics

Considering the data available in the public space in 2011, there are 2,067,880 inhabitants in Latvia. National or ethnic composition is: Latvian 58.8 percent, Russian 29.6 percent, Belorussian 4.1 percent, Ukrainian 2.0 percent, Polish 2.0 percent, Lithuanian 1.4 percent, Jewish 0.4 percent, German 0.1 percent, other 1.6 percent.¹ According to a survey made by a Latvian public opinion research center in 2003, 49.3 percent of the inhabitants of Latvia do not read the Bible, 4 percent read the Bible almost every day, and about half read the Scriptures from time to time. According to the survey, the declared religious affiliations of the population are: Orthodox 25 percent, Lutherans 25 percent, Roman Catholics 21 percent, Old Believer Orthodox 2.7 percent, Adventists 0.4 percent, and Jews 0.1 percent. In this survey 9 percent considered themselves to be believers without identifying themselves with any particular denomination, while 12 percent declared themselves to be non-believers. There are significant numbers of atheists. Orthodox Christians, many of them Russian-speaking, non-citizen, permanent residents, are concentrated in the major cities, while many Catholics live in the east.

In the academic year 2009–10, there were 948 schools of comprehensive curriculum in the state: 45 of these were primary schools, 463 elementary schools, 377 high schools, and 63 special schools.² In Latvia, 19 Christian educational institutions received state licenses in 2009; 13 of these are state schools.³ The others are preschool institutions (for example, the Christian consultative and play center of the Jesus parish "Jēriņš" ("Lamb")). There are also elementary schools of nontraditional religions, for example the elementary school of Priekā vests "Harmonija,"⁴ which includes grades 1 to 6.

Traditional and other nontraditional religion subjects, such as Judaism, are not compulsory in Latvia. Each school may offer these subjects as electives. The standard in these subjects is formed through coordination with the Ministry of Science and Education.⁵ Since September 1, 2004, either Ethics or Religion has been offered as compulsory subjects in grades 1–3; the parents of pupils have to choose one of the mentioned subjects beforehand.

By taking a broader perspective on the interpretation of the Law "On Religious Organizations," it can be stated that Christian teaching is the teaching of the common faith principles in the Bible. Christian teaching is interdenominational; it concentrates on the essentials of Christianity

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that are important to both the state and society. In Christ's teaching the open society model is with God at its center and the human as the highest value in it.⁶ In the Christian teaching students gain knowledge and understanding about the order of the world created by God; learn to master the skills of Christian life (praying, serving, and commonwealth); and create motivation of action based on Christian values. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church declares that by learning the Christian teaching under democratic circumstances students will be able to create their own world outlook.⁷ According to the Law on Religious Organizations (Article 1.6), Christian teaching is the system of views, doctrines, and ideas of certain Christian denominations, but religious teaching (Article 1.7) is a system of certain religious views, doctrines, and ideas. According to the law everyone shall be entitled to acquire religious teaching, either individually or together with others in the educational institutions of religious organizations, but in the state and municipal schools only the Christian religion may be taught to persons who have expressed such a wish. Since 1998 the law has been supplemented by Article 6.5, which provides that religious teaching and ethics classes are financed from the state budget.

As already mentioned, in Latvia if a student does not want to receive religious teaching he/she has to choose teaching of ethics. The amount of the compulsory subjects and their content⁸ in educational programs of the institutions run by the local governments that provide general education and private educational institutions that carry out licensed general elementary or secondary education programs of the Republic of Latvia is defined by Regulation No. 1027 of the Cabinet of Ministers of December 19, 2006 ("Regulations on the State elementary education standard and elementary education subject standard") and Regulation No. 715 of the Cabinet of Ministers of September 2, 2008 ("Regulations on the State general secondary education standard and general secondary education subject standards").

The standards of the subjects included in these regulations define the basic demands for these subjects on completion of grades 3, 6, 9, and 12, but they do not define the order of their attainment. In the examples of the educational programs publicized by the State Educational Content Center the order of the teachable subject themes is provided by school year, as well as according to methodological information, but nevertheless those are recommended documents and are not legally mandatory for educational institutions that do not act under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science.

Religious instruction after 1990

On May 4, 1990, the Supreme Council of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic adopted the declaration "On restoration of independence of the Republic of Latvia"⁹ and Latvia began a rapid dismantling of the Soviet system. This applied both to the economy and the limitations of human rights. By taking into consideration the wish of Latvian religious organizations to initiate positive action even before the adoption of the so-called constitutional law "On human and citizen rights and responsibilities,"¹⁰ on September 11, 1990, the law "On Religious Organizations" was adopted. This law regulated the registration issues as well as the rights of the religious organizations to religious education. In Article 3 ("Education and Religious Organizations") of the law, it was stated that religious education may be taught individually or together with other students in religious organization schools, Sunday schools, hobby groups, summer camps, as well as, on a voluntary basis, at extracurricular activities, and public and private educational institutions. This law stated that the public and private school students in the study process will be provided with the opportunity to become acquainted with different religious content, nature, and history. The law did not provide a specific number of denominations or churches that would be allowed to teach religion. The law "On Religious Organizations" of September 11, 1990 was

replaced by a new law¹¹ on September 7, 1995; this happened because the law of 1990, like other laws adopted at that time, was incomplete and poorly drafted.

The new law "On Religious Organizations" of 1995 provides a specific range of denominations that have the right to teach religion in schools. The early romanticism of regaining independence had diminished and instead harsh competition between the religions emerged. Even *dievturi* (Latvian Pagans), who during the national awakening were seen as a symbol of freedom, were excluded from schools. Despite the desperate attempts to enter the circle of those denominations that can teach children religion, they are in the same situation as the new movements. Basically, the new religious movements are the ones that entered Latvia after the drop of the "iron curtain"—the Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, charismatic Christians, Mormons, and similar non-traditional groups. Even though the number of new religious organizations is rapidly growing, they cannot qualify to enter the list of denominations that have the right to teach religion, because they have to fight for registration.

First, parishes of Jehovah's Witnesses were registered in the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Latvia in October 12, 1998; nevertheless only in 2008 did they obtain "independent religious organization status" enabling them to begin entering the schools with their teaching. A similar arrangement was made with the Mormons. A different situation arose with the Methodists and Adventists, who, judging by Article 6 of the law "On Religious Organizations" of 1995, were not counted in the "chosen denominations" that may teach in schools. Both Adventists¹² and Methodists¹³ have such rights stipulated in their special laws. The author believes that the placement of these two confessions on the list of the law "On Religious Organizations" is only a matter of time, as they have both confirmed the special status of traditional denominations¹⁴ after the adaptation of their special laws.

Legal sources

In the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia (*Satversme*) religion/church is mentioned only in Article 99, which declares that: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The Church shall be separate from the State." This provision was included in the Constitution in 1998, when the Constitution was supplemented with a new section on human rights. In practice Latvia is a partial separation state, where constitutionally declared separation of church and state does not work in practice. Latvia does not associate itself with any specific religion, and the main question is not about religious tolerance, but about the meaning of church and state separation in the Constitution, because there is no clear opinion about where the borderline between the state and church should be strictly marked. The state and the church are separate; however, if we speak about the main conditions that ensure state-church separation, then practically none of these conditions exists in Latvia.

The clause specifying religious freedom that is included in Article 99 of the Latvian Constitution should be noted. It follows the right to religious education contextually treated in the Constitution through the prism of Article 112 (rights for education), because the same Article provides the right of everyone for education. Article 114 also states that "persons who belong to the minority nationality, have a right to preserve their language and cultural, ethnic particularity." It all indicates that every person in Latvia, including minorities, has an equal right to the free choice of religion. This is also declared in Article 2 of the Law "On Religious Organizations," which states: "The state does not grant any privileges to any religion or confession."

The religious freedom clause included in Article 99 of the Constitution's first sentence includes the freedom to freely believe or disbelieve, and to practice or not to practice faith. The right to withdraw from religious education or the right to alternative education does not need

to be *expressis verbis* in the basic law of the state, but arises automatically from the positive and negative breakdown of religious freedom. The rights to protection (for example, of symbols, etc.) of their own religion (religious belief) can be as widely interpreted as the rights to religious rituals. The state has an obligation to provide individuals and/or religious organizations with space for action where the world outlook can develop and be guarded from the followers of other religions or the attacks or restrictions of competing religious groups. Without doubt one can add to this the rights to religious education, which includes also the rights to study one's own religion, the rights to the provision of religious education, the rights to training of clergy, the rights to creation and distribution of religiously educational literature, and the like.

The content of education is regulated by the Law on Education, adopted in 1998. Articles 32–35 of this law state that the content of subjects (lessons) is regulated by the standards of the subjects. According to the generally approved order, such subjects as religion, history of culture, Christian lessons, ethics, and Christian ethics are considered as value-educational and help to form the paradigm of education.

The principle of the freedom of religion was settled as the purpose of the Law on Religious Organizations from September 7, 1995. The purpose of the law in accordance with Article 2 is to grant the inhabitants of Latvia the right to freedom of religion, including the right to freely state one's attitude towards religion, to adhere to some religion, individually or in community with others, or not to adhere to any religion, and to change freely one's religion in conformity with the existing legislative acts. The Law on Religious Organizations, in compliance with the Constitution, as well as international agreements concerning human rights in the sphere of religion, regulates social relations established through exercising the right to freedom of consciousness and through engaging in the activities of the religious organizations. The state protects the legal rights of religious organizations as prescribed by the law. The state, municipalities, and other organizations shall not be authorized to interfere with the religious activities of religious organizations.

Under Article 6 of the Law "On Religious Organizations," the Christian religion may be taught in state and municipal schools to persons who have requested it in writing. Applications by minors to be taught the Christian religion must be approved by parents or guardians. If the minor is under 14 years of age, the minor's parents or guardians submit the application.¹⁵ The concept of Christian religious instruction does not include and cannot include the Jewish faith or Islam. Owing to the very small number of Muslim and Jewish students, neither the parochial management of the Muslim nor the Jewish parish has been interested in teaching their faith in schools. The Christian religion, in accordance with the curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, may be taught by teachers of the Evangelical Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Old Believers, or Baptist denominations, if not less than 10 students of the same school have expressed their wish to study the religious teaching of the relevant denomination. The teachers must be selected by the denomination leaders and be approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. Ethics is offered as an alternative to religious instruction. Students at state-supported national minority schools may also receive education in the religion "characteristic of the national minority" on a voluntary basis. Other denominations may provide religious education in private schools only. Those organizations that have no rights to teach religion in schools put their emphasis on Sunday schools. For example, on Sundays parents go to mass while children aged 3–10 years are taught in Sunday school.¹⁶ Many denominations have developed a comprehensive system of Sunday schools. For example, the Baptist congregations in Latvia, embracing more than 6,200 members, have Sunday schools attended by approximately 5,000 children.¹⁷

According to the law, everyone, individually or in groups, has the right to religious instruction in the educational establishments of religious organizations. In national minority schools supervised by the state or municipalities, if such is the wish of the students and their parents or

guardians, the religion appropriate to the particular national minority may be taught in compliance with procedures prescribed by the Ministry of Education and Science. Thus, for example, the Orthodox, whose religion is not mentioned in the Law "On Religious Organizations," can ensure that there are religious classes for their children.

Agreements and special laws

In Latvia, there are two types of legal agreements between the church and the state: international and national. The international agreement (and in the Latvian case there is only one, signed with the Holy See in 2000), unlike national agreements that were signed with local churches in 2004, has higher rank (legal status) than laws.

The Latvian Parliament on September 12, 2002 ratified the agreement with the Holy See. Accordingly, the teaching of the Catholic religion shall be conducted exclusively on the basis of a program approved by the Bishops' Conference of Latvia, in agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science, and must be undertaken only by qualified teachers who possess a certificate of competence issued by the Bishops' Conference of Latvia; the revocation of the certificate carries with it the immediate loss of the right to teach the Catholic religion. In accordance with Article 9(a) of this agreement, "With respect to the laws of the Republic of Latvia and in view of its legitimate pastoral undertakings," the Catholic Church is guaranteed freedom of access to the media and freedom of speech, including the establishment of its own means of social communication and access to those of the state, in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Latvia. The Catholic Church has the right to establish and manage schools at every level, in conformity with the laws of the Republic of Latvia and the norms of canon law. The foundation of Catholic schools shall be requested by the Bishops' Conference of Latvia, the latter acting on behalf of the local Ordinary. Catholic schools, as well as institutions of higher formation, shall observe the laws of the Republic of Latvia concerning the general norms relating to the national curriculum. Catholic schools are entitled to financial support, in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Latvia. Teachers and other employees in officially recognized Catholic schools, as well as students and their parents, shall enjoy the same rights and have the same obligations as their counterparts in state and local government schools.¹⁸

Agreements were made in 2004 between the Cabinet of Ministers and churches owing to the discontentment of the traditional churches regarding the exclusiveness of Roman Catholics that stemmed from the 2000 agreement with the Holy See. Each of these agreements has a preamble recognizing the special role of the Christian faith in the existence of the legal system of the country and system of values of society, as well as its significant contribution to the morale and process of socialization of the society.¹⁹ In every agreement there was also implemented the right to teach religion in schools run by the state and local government. For example, according to the agreement signed on June 8, 2004, between the Republic of Latvia and the Evangelic Lutheran Church of Latvia (Article 14, Religious lessons), the Evangelic Lutheran Church of Latvia has the right to teach religious lessons in line with the regulatory enactments of the Republic of Latvia according to a curriculum jointly approved by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Evangelic Lutheran Church of Latvia. Although the agreements were made based on the experience of Spain, Italy, Hungary, and Poland in this sphere,²⁰ agreements had to be implemented in laws so that, in accordance with the demands of the Latvian legal system, they would acquire legal power. On the basis of the request from the Parliament (Saeima) Legal Office, under the leadership of the author of this chapter, the Ministry of Justice prepared seven special laws which were accepted in parliament in 2007-08.²¹ The primary reason for draft laws was to strengthen the relationship included in the agreements of 2004 between the Republic of Latvia

and its traditional churches. After long and difficult negotiations that took place between the representatives of church, deputies, and legal service of the parliament it was broadly accomplished. In the end, questions regarding Sabbath were not included in the laws of Seventh-day Adventists and Jewish groups and the Lutheran Church did not succeed in including tax breaks in their laws.

Finally, when comparing the rights of traditional churches that have been established by the law, it can be seen that the Roman Catholic Church has the largest number of issues mentioned in the law regarding education, despite the fact that it does not have a special law.

Requirements for teachers of religion

In order to be able to teach Christianity, the teacher must have a degree in pedagogy as well as have graduated from or be enrolled in one of the aforementioned schools. Since 2004, more than 700 teachers have received the certificate to teach Christianity. Until 2009, the teacher had to receive a permit from the higher leadership of their denomination under the responsibility of the parish priest (with the aim of not letting representatives of different sects into the schools). When starting work, the teachers are not asked about their religious leaning or beliefs.

Religion taught in the framework of literature, history, philosophy, arts, and language courses

The teaching of religion, fully or partially, in the context of the Latvian system of education, is included in the elective subjects "Christianity" or "Teaching of Christian Faith." Other subjects with state-approved syllabi do not include religious themes, so, according to the Ministry of Education and Science, one cannot determine the share of religion in them.²² By coordinating with the administration of each school, the teacher determines the order of themes to be taught within each subject as well as the number of hours to be spent on specific themes.

The standard high school syllabus of Biology determines the body of knowledge and skills to be taught at the secondary level of education. In Appendix 12, point 16.8 of the provisions by the Cabinet of Ministers of September 2, 2008, Number 715 ("Provisions concerning the standard of comprehensive standard of secondary education and the standards of subjects of comprehensive secondary education"), it is said that the student, having learned biology, has become acquainted with the main laws of the origin of life and evolution. In public, opinions have been voiced about the hegemony of Darwinism in schools and the need to teach the so-called theory of intelligent origin, but they have not gained much ground and may be considered merely as exercising one's rights to an opinion. According to the adherents of this theory, life is so complex that only an outside force could have created it, hence there must be some "intelligent designer."

In the subject of Culture, which is also an elective, religion is treated as a form of culture, and is an integral part of it. In History (compulsory), the syllabus includes a short survey of the history of religion. Philosophy, similarly, includes religion in the context of the main subject.

In conclusion, creationism dominates in the electives, whereas in the compulsory subjects like Physics, Biology, and History, Darwinism is stronger. According to experts, this way it is possible to ensure parity between the two.

Religiously motivated behavior in public schools

Disposition of religious signs and symbols is up to the administration of each school. The same rule applies also to Christian public schools, private schools, and Jewish private schools.²³ Prayers

are performed every morning in schools with religious specialization and during the holidays students are welcome to visit a church according to their discretion.

Religious ceremonies and rituals in comprehensive schools can be performed with the consent of parents, and, without their permission, no actions of religious nature can be conducted in schools.

Such issues, which are currently on the agenda in Scandinavia, as, for example, Coeducational Swimming Instruction for Muslim Girls, are still uncommon in Latvia. According to the Ministry of Education and Science, it had not received requests up until May 2010²⁴ from Muslims to organize separate groups for boys and girls in Sports.²⁵ Obviously, the Baltic states have different problems regarding the issues concerning Muslims, given the low number of Muslim believers in these countries.

Religious symbols at school

The Ministry of Education and Science admits²⁶ that it is not legally able to determine the norms of behavior of students in comprehensive schools, their internal regulations, special requirements regarding teachers' or students' clothing, or times of festivities or meetings. The code of conduct, adhering to laws and regulations, can be determined by the founders of each school; the local governments or private bodies (for private schools) confirm the internal regulations of each specific school. The use of religious symbols is up to the administration of each religiously oriented school, both in Christian public and private schools, and minority schools, for example, the Jewish private school. These norms can be determined in greater detail by the principal of each school.²⁷

Prayer is a part of every religion, thus, it is one of the practical actions to be learned by the student. Therefore, religiously oriented schools include morning prayers and, on religious holidays, students are welcome to go to church on a voluntary basis.

Latvian laws and regulations do not include requirements regarding clothing or the use of symbols by academic personnel; these, including norms of behavior, can be included in the internal regulations of each school by the founders of the institution of higher education or its main administrative bodies.

Sabbath and religious holidays

The school year and holidays, according to Article 4, Paragraph 16 of the Law "On Comprehensive Education," are determined by the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers regarding the start and end date of each specific school year and semester. In Paragraph 11 of the February 2, 2010 Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers Number 96 ("Regulations of the 2009/2010 school year and semester start and end dates"), it is said that the local government, after a suggestion by a principal of an educational institution, can independently make a decision on extending the winter break by one or two days, noting the dates for substituting those days in the school year 2010–11. This norm has been included after taking into consideration the suggestion by many educational experts and local governments regarding Orthodox Christmas, which is celebrated by many families, often also by visiting relatives outside of Latvia. On Sundays, schools are closed in Latvia; no graduation examinations or tests are organized on those days. Issues concerning graduation examinations that take place during a holiday of a religious minority are dealt with on an individual basis, with both sides seeking a compromise solution.

It must be noted that at the June 4, 2010²⁸ meeting of the Council of Spiritual Affairs,²⁹ chaired by the Prime Minister, the agenda included ensuring the teaching of Christian faith in schools. Discussing teaching of Christian values in comprehensive secondary schools, the representatives

of religious denominations praised the cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science on developing the syllabus for the teaching of Christianity. At the end of the discussion, the Council of Spiritual Affairs agreed on appealing to the schools to find extra opportunities for the representatives of the traditional religious denominations to organize guest lectures several times during the school year, including at Christmas and Easter.³⁰

Religiously motivated home schooling and teaching religion in the institutions of higher education

The opportunities for home schooling under the responsibility of the student's parents are set in the November 1, 2005 Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers Number 811 ("Regulations on the compulsory requirements for the admittance and advancement to the next grade of students in comprehensive schools (excluding boarding schools and special educational institutions)"). According to Paragraph 14 of these regulations, home schooling is allowed from grades 1–4, on the basis of a written petition by the student's parents, coordinated with the local government. The permission is given by the principal of the school, issuing a decree. The parents and the administration of the educational institution have to agree on the procedure of consulting the parents and the procedure on assessing the student's achievements during the year by the teachers in order to give their decision on advancing the student to the next grade.³¹ Religious affiliation of the family to a religious organization registered according to the provisions of the Law on Religious Organizations cannot be a basis for denying the parents their right to educate their child at home. However, if the teachers note that the student's knowledge does not conform to the standard of comprehensive education set by the state, the principal can lift the permission to educate the student at home under the authority of his or her parents.³²

Part 3 of Article 4 of the Law "On Institutions of Higher Education" states that each institution can independently determine the content and standards of its study programs. Study programs are regulated by the description of their content and realization, which, according to the type and level of education, includes the aim of each program, planned results, the content of offered education, compulsory subjects and electives, the division of time among them, and the means of control and their regulations. According to Article 55 of the Law "On Institutions of Higher Education," one-fourth of the total study program is determined by the senate of the highest council of the institution. Hence, it is under the authority of the founders and the highest organs of administration of each institution to include religious themes in their study programs, determining their content, extent, and order of teaching. Therefore, specific institutions should be consulted to find the share of religious themes in the total body of all study programs.

Notes

- 1 R. Balodis, "Latvia," in *Encyclopedia of World Constitutions*, vol. II, ed. G. Robbers, U.S. Facts on File, 2007 pp. 513–19.
- 2 By comparison, in the academic year 1998/99 there were 1,074 schools in the state.
- 3 Baltinava Christian special boarding elementary school, Riga Christian high school, Bauska city Christian elementary school, Talsu Christian high school, Dobele Christian elementary school, Rezekne Catholic high school, Kalnezeru Catholic elementary school, Liepaja Catholic elementary school, Riga Catholic gymnasium, Aglona Catholic gymnasium, Ogre St. Meinard's Catholic elementary school, Graveru elementary school of Riga, and Latvia Metropolitan Aleksander (Kudrjasov).
- 4 <www.priekavests.lv/lv/izglitiba/privatskola_harmonija?read=131>.
- 5 According to the Agreement between the Republic of Latvia and the Holy See, Article 15, the teaching of the Catholic religion shall be conducted exclusively on the basis of a programme approved by the Bishops' Conference of Latvia, in agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science, and

- shall be undertaken only by qualified teachers who possess a certificate of competence issued by the Bishops' Conference of Latvia, the revocation of which signifies the immediate loss of the right to teach the Catholic religion.
- 6 <www.lalb.lv/lv/?ct=skolas>.
 - 7 Ibid.
 - 8 <<http://visc.gov.lv/saturs/vispizgl/standarti.shtml>>; <<http://visc.gov.lv/saturs/vispizgl/programmas.shtml>>.
 - 9 Declaration of the Supreme Council of the LSSR "On the renewal of the independence of the Republic of Latvia." Latvijas Republikas Saeimas un Valdības Ziņotājs, May 17, 1990, no. 20.
 - 10 Constitutional Law "Human and Citizen Rights and Liability: Law of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia." LR Saeimas un MK Ziņotājs. January 30, 1992, no.4
 - 11 The Law "On Religious Organizations," LR likums. Latvijas Vēstnesis, September 9, 1995, no. 146 (429).
 - 12 Article 14 of Law on Latvian Association of Seventh-day Adventist Communities, LR likums. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2007. 12.jūnijs nr. 93 (3669).
 - 13 Article 12 of Latvian Joint Methodist Church Law, LR likums. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2007. 6.jūlijs 91 (3667.)
 - 14 Latvia has no state religion. The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia (*Satversme*) does not mention any specific religion. The Latvian legislative norms (unlike Lithuanian) have no such concept as "traditional" denominations. "Traditional" and "non-traditional" organizations are not regulated by the Law "On Religious Organizations" and the Law does not list religions or religious denominations that are regarded as traditional. Confessions included in Article 51 of the Civil Law are called "traditional." These are Lutheran, Catholic, Orthodox, Old Believer, Methodist, Baptist, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jewish religious communities. Although the issue of traditional churches in Latvia has been discussed for more than ten years, it was included in all the special church laws. In this aspect please see Article 2 of the special church laws that recognizes the prevalence of the respective traditional religious organization in the territory of Latvia.
 - 15 According to the Agreement between the Republic of Latvia and the Holy See, Article 14, the Republic of Latvia recognizes the right of parents and their legal representatives, and, in the cases provided for by law, of children themselves, to ensure for children an adequate religious education in institutes of education through religion classes in state and municipal schools, and the Catholic Sunday schools. The state guarantees this right within the terms established by law and the international treaties binding upon the Republic of Latvia.
 - 16 <www.priekavests.lv/lv/izglitiba/svetdienaskola?read=3730>.
 - 17 R. Balodis, "Religion Relations: Republic of Latvia, Revue," in *Européenne de Droit Public*, vol. 17 (1) Spring (2005): 397-408.
 - 18 Ibid.
 - 19 General presentation: Latvia: Sociological and legal data on religions in Europe, <www.eurel.info/EN/index.php?pais=59&rubrique=662>.
 - 20 R. Balodis, "The Recent Developments of Latvian Model of Church and State Relationship: Constitutional Changes without Revising of Constitution," in *Jurisprudencija* 3 (117) (2009): 19.
 - 21 Law on Latvian Association of Seventh-day Adventist Communities: LR likums. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2007, 12.jūnijs nr. 93 (3669); Latvian Baptist Community Association Law: LR likums. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2007, 30.maijs nr. 86 (3662); Riga Jewish Religious Community Law: LR likums. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2007, 20.jūnijs 98 (3674); Latvian Joint Methodist Church Law: LR likums. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2007, 6.jūlijs 91 (3667); Latvian Old-Believers Pomor Church Law: LR likums. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2007, 20.jūnijs 98 (3674); Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Law: LR likums. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2008, 20.novembris 188 (3972); Latvian Orthodox Church Law: LR likums. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2008, 13.novembris 188 (3972).
 - 22 Letter number 1.-12/3426 of May 18, 2010 from M. Gruskevics, the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Education and Science, to R. Balodis, the Chair of the State Law Department of the Faculty of Law of the University of Latvia.
 - 23 Education: Latvia: Sociological and legal data on religions in Europe, <www.eurel.info/EN/index.php?pais=59&rubrique=658>.
 - 24 Letter number 1.-12/3426 of May 18, 2010 from M. Gruskevics, the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Education and Science, to R. Balodis, the Chair of the State Law Department of the Faculty of Law of the University of Latvia.
 - 25 It must be noted that the current laws and regulations allow dividing students into groups during lessons, including divisions of gender. The division into groups, given the funding allocated to each institution, is each founder's responsibility.

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- 26 Letter number 1.-12/3426 of 18 May 2010 from M. Gruskevics, the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Education and Science, to R. Balodis, the Chair of the State Law Department of the Faculty of Law of the University of Latvia.
- 27 This takes into consideration that the standard syllabus of each subject has to be coordinated with the Ministry of Education and Science.
- 28 Prime Minister: Attending the meeting of the Council of Spiritual Affairs/Latvijas Vēstnesis, June 6, 2010.
- 29 The Council of Spiritual Affairs is an independent, consultative institution for coordinating cooperation between the state and the church, with the aim of promoting harmony and understanding among the followers of different religious denominations and beliefs in Latvian society.
- 30 Prime Minister: Attending the meeting of the Council of Spiritual Affairs/Latvijas Vēstnesis, June 6, 2010.
- 31 Letter number 1-17/923 of April 6, 2006 from K. Jarinovsk, the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Education and Science, to the Authority of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Latvia.
- 32 Ibid.

Religious education in the European Union

Silvio Ferrari

Religious education in the European Union has become a topic of great relevance as a result of the transformation of Europe into a multi-faith continent, and several studies have been recently devoted to this subject.¹ The chapters in this book covering various European nations show that the teaching of religion in European public schools is imparted according to three different patterns.

Models of religious education

First, there are some countries where no teaching of religion is offered. A good example is France, with the exception of Alsace-Moselle. French public schools do not offer a specific course where the teaching of one or more religions is provided: references to religion are part of the teaching of other school subjects like history, geography, languages, the arts, and philosophy, and are made by the teachers of these disciplines. In secondary schools, parents or students can ask for the creation of a chaplaincy and, with the authorization of the school authorities, the chaplain can teach religion on the school premises to the students who want to receive this teaching; however religious education is not given during school time and is not part of the normal school curriculum. Hungary and the Czech Republic follow a similar model: in both countries no teaching of or about religion is part of the school curriculum, although denominational teaching of religion is sometimes provided.

A second pattern is provided by the countries that offer "non-denominational" teaching about religion. This expression indicates the provision of knowledge and information about a number of different religions from a point of view that is external to each of them. Teaching about religions is organized, managed, and controlled by the state. In particular, state institutions are in charge of the training, selection, appointment, dismissal, and remuneration of teachers, who do not need any authorization issued by religious authorities; the definition of the curriculum and the syllabus; and the approval of textbooks. Some of these activities are performed in cooperation with the religious communities (for example in the U.K.). With a few exceptions (Estonia and Slovenia, among others), this non-denominational teaching is compulsory; in some countries students have the right to opt out. No alternative education is provided to them. The non-denominational character of this teaching does not exclude the possibility of paying special attention to Christianity (as is the case in Denmark and the U.K.).

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Finally, there are countries with denominational teaching of religion, that is, teaching of a specific religion. Generally speaking, this teaching is organized, managed, and controlled by the concerned religious community (frequently in cooperation with the state), but the scope of its powers is different from country to country.² In most cases, religious authorities have the power to select the teachers. Even when the teacher is appointed and paid by the state, he/she cannot teach without the authorization of the religious community, and the revocation of the authorization obliges the teacher to stop teaching (this is the case, for example, in Portugal, the Netherlands, Poland, Austria, Belgium, Spain, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Italy). Religious communities also play a role (that is different from country to country) in the definition of both curriculum and syllabus and in the adoption of textbooks.

Frequently, states assume an obligation to offer denominational teaching of religion (for example, the Netherlands, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria and, in relation to the Catholic religion only, Portugal, Spain and Italy), but students (or their parents) have the right to choose whether to attend or not; in some cases, the teaching is compulsory, and students have only the right to opt out. In a few countries, students who do not follow the teaching of religion are required to attend an alternative lesson. Denominational religious instruction is generally supported, from an economic and logistic point of view, by the state, which pays the teachers (this is the case, for example, in Belgium, Finland, Poland, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Spain, Italy, Luxembourg, and Romania) and makes available the facilities and the school time. However, not all religions can be taught at school. In some states this right is granted only to recognized or registered religious communities and almost everywhere a minimum number of students applying for the teaching of a specific religion is required. In some cases these restrictions limit the number of minority religions that can be taught in the public schools; in other cases, minority religious communities, although having the right to teach their religion, prefer not to make use of this opportunity.

Recently, some changes have occurred in the countries where denominational teaching of religion is imparted. In particular, in some countries where, until 20–30 years ago, just one religion could be taught, it is now possible to teach a number of religions (for example, in Italy, Spain, and Portugal); in other countries (e.g. Germany) there are increasing ecumenical and inter-denominational openings (however, such a development—and this is its main limitation—can take place only in religiously plural countries: it is hard to imagine it in countries with a dominant religion, like Poland or Italy); denominational teaching of religion is less and less limited to the knowledge of a single religion and frequently includes elements of general religious culture and ethical issues (this is the case, for example, in Italy and Spain, and, in France, in Alsace-Moselle). However, the approach to these issues cannot be neutral (as it should be in the case of non-denominational teaching), as it reflects the point of view of the religion that is being taught. As a consequence of these changes, the subject matter of denominational and non-denominational teaching of religion has become more similar, while the distance between the two models remains unaltered insofar as concerns the authority in charge of organizing and controlling that education (the religious communities in one case, the state in the other).

Future challenges

None of these three models is able, alone, to meet the challenge posed by the growing religious plurality of Europe. Therefore it is necessary to combine them in ways that answer the needs of the different cultural traditions of the European states. That being said, it is undeniable that, in countries with denominational religious education, where just one religion is taught at school, the problem of learning about the different religions that exist in Europe has become acute. If the

religious communities are not able to develop interdenominational and inter-religious education (and they are still far from that), the only viable alternative would be non-denominational education about a plurality of religions. A model for such instruction has been indicated in the recommendation, *Religion and Democracy*, of the 1999 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: this directive promotes better knowledge of different religions through the teaching of comparative history of religions and of the history and philosophy of religion.³ In this perspective non-denominational teaching about religions and non-religious conceptions of life and the world would become mandatory and would be organized and delivered according to the standards of other school teachings (that is, without any control by religious authorities over teachers, programs, books, etc.), although some kind of cooperation and consultation with the different stakeholders (families, religious communities, associations of teachers, etc.) would be advisable.⁴

At the same time it is equally undeniable that denominational teaching of religion is part of the legal tradition of many European countries where the school is conceived of as an institution responding to the various requests coming from civil society. Moreover, even if non-denominational education about religions is introduced or if the knowledge of religions is embedded within various school disciplines (according to the French model), denominational religious teaching has a role to play in the process of students' education. But it might need to be seriously reformed: in particular, it is necessary to make it fully voluntary, to give the right to impart this teaching to several religions and to ensure that the support provided by the state is not selectively granted to only some of them; according to different national situations, this teaching could be placed inside or outside school hours and the teachers could be paid or not by the state.

Once these conditions are met, the two systems of religious teaching can coexist and offer, through their integration, a contribution to students' education that is equal to the challenges posed by the religious transformation of Europe.

Notes

- 1 See Robert Jackson, Siebren Miedema, Wolfram Weisse, Jean-Paul Willaime, eds., *Religion and Education in Europe* (Münster, Waxmann, 2007); Elza Kuyk, Roger Jensen, David Lankshear, Elizabeth Löh Manna, Peter Schreiner, eds., *Religious Education in Europe* (Oslo, IKO, 2007). The European Consortium for Church and State Research devoted its 2010 meeting (Trier, November 11–14, 2010) to "Religion in Public Education." See Gerhard Robbers, ed., *Religion in Public Education* (Trier, Gy.: European Consortium for Church and State Research, 2011).
- 2 This control is justified by the religious communities on the basis of the need to grant the orthodoxy of the teaching. See, for example, Congregation for Catholic Education, *Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops Conferences on Religious Education in Schools*, May 5, 2009, no. 13–14: "it is for the Church to establish the authentic contents of Catholic religious education in schools. This guarantees, for both parents and the pupils themselves, that the education presented as Catholic is indeed authentic. [...] The Church identifies this task as its own, *ratione materiae*, and claims it for its own competence, regardless of the nature of the school (State-run or non-State-run, Catholic or non-Catholic) in which such teaching is given."
- 3 Council of Europe, Recommendation 1396 of Parliamentary Assembly (1999) *Religion and Democracy*: "13. The Assembly consequently recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the governments of the member states: [...] ii. to promote education about religions and, in particular, to: a. step up the teaching about religions as sets of values towards which young people must develop a discerning approach, within the framework of education on ethics and democratic citizenship; b. promote the teaching in schools of the comparative history of different religions, stressing their origins, the similarities in some of their values and the diversity of their customs, traditions, festivals, and so on; c. encourage the study of the history and philosophy of religions and research into those subjects at university, in parallel with theological studies; d. co-operate with religious educational institutions in order to introduce or reinforce, in their curricula, aspects relating to human rights, history, philosophy and science; e. avoid—in the case of children—any conflict between the state-promoted education about

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religion and the religious faith of the families, in order to respect the free decision of the families in this very sensitive matter. [...]]. 14. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers: i. lay down, as part of its projects on education for democratic citizenship and history teaching, guidelines for the introduction of educational syllabuses relevant to points 13.ii.a, b and c of this recommendation.”

⁴ The opportunity to include different stakeholders in the organization of the non-denominational teaching of religion is strongly underlined in the recommendations of the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* (Warsaw, OSCE/ODIHR, 2007), 15. The arrangements for producing agreed-upon syllabi for religious education that are in force in England can offer interesting clues (see Luce Pépin, *Teaching about Religions in European School Systems: Policy Issues and Trends* (London, Alliance Publishing Trust, 2009), 65).