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**Religious culture and education
in 20th and 21st century Europe**

Maria Giuseppina Meloni and Anna Maria Oliva (eds.)

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Special Issue

Religious culture and education in 20th and 21st century Europe

Maria Giuseppina Meloni and Anna Maria Oliva (eds.)

RiMe 5/I n.s. (December 2019)

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Preface

Marcello Verga

WP7 Leader

(CNR - Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea)

A workshop on the topic "The presence and the quality of the religious history in the school texts for the high school and in the most important texts of general history edited in the last three decades " took place in Rome, on January 10th and 11th, 2019 organized by CNR-Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea.

The workshop was part of the activities carried out within the European project *ReIReS - Research Infrastructures on Religious Studies* (Horizon 2020 INFRAIA), led by the Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose Giovanni XXIII (FSCIRE) of Bologna (Coordinator prof. Alberto Melloni) and whose partners are: Sofiiski Universitet Sveti Kliment Ohridski (Uni Sofia, Bulgaria); Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven, Belgium); Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche-Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea (CNR-ISEM, Italia); Universitaet Hamburg (UHAM, Germany); Uniwersytet Warszawski (UNIWARSAW, Poland); Johannes Gutenberg-Universitat Mainz (JGU Mainz, Germany); École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE, France); Leibniz-Institut Fur Europaische Geschichte (IEG, Germany); Brepols Publishers (Belgium); Stichting Refo500 (Refo500, Netherlands); Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn (TUA, Netherlands).

ReIReS's aim is to create a unique and groundbreaking research infrastructure on religious studies within the European Research Area. It joints the major European research institutions working in the domain to improve the access of scholars from all over the world to the data, information and sources concerning the study of the historical and cultural influence of the plural religious heritage in the European history. Furthermore, *ReIReS* joints research activities of the partners, integrating complementary scientific skills and capabilities, and it organizes networking activities for fostering a culture of co-operation among national research facilities, scientific communities, and other stakeholders including policy makers. *ReIReS* creates a synergy between the partners, offering a transnational and virtual access to the most significant tools and sources in the field of religious studies for advancing knowledge and

innovation in the understanding of a complex, multicultural and inter-religious society.

On the project website, <https://reires.eu>, you can follow the evolution of the project, past and future activities and events and gradually achieved results.

The workshop was the first task of the activities of WP7 (*History of Religious Studies in the Age of Big-Data: Developing New Methodologies*) coordinated by CNR-ISEM. The task focused on the relevance of the education in the building of a common European cultural space and, in particular, on the relevance of a proper and correct knowledge of European religious history to understand the long-term development of the cultural pillars of the current European framework.

The workshop aimed to analyze the state-of-the-art of the relations between the development of historical religious studies and the educational programs in Europe, focusing on the role that school and school textbooks have in the knowledge of religious history. The scholars discussed how far the progress in understanding of religious history, which comes from the possibilities granted by *ReIReS*, could have an impact in reframing the education programs and enriching education as a process of knowledge transferred from academia to a larger audience.

A careful attention to religious history in educational programs is a necessary basis for a full understanding of the plurality and variety of European culture and for the assumption of this variety as a common cultural background. For this reason, the dissemination of a proper knowledge of European religious history in schoolbooks could contribute to alleviate the religious illiteracy in our society.

The papers, held by scholars and policy makers, covered various topics related to religious history and how it is dealt with by teaching and historical communication in the different European Union countries. All this was analysed not only with regard to textbooks, but also in relation to museums, websites, ongoing debates and the relationship between religious and political history.

The papers on specific national case-studies outlined two different lines and perspectives of research. Some of them addressed issues related to the organization of school programs and their impact with the “religious illiteracy”. Other ones analysed the history textbooks in use in the high schools in recent decades.

The conference ended with a round table with the participation of Silvia Costa (member of the European Parliament). It was an opportunity to open up a wide debate among all the participants of the conference, many of whom external to the *ReIReS* project. Above all, the speech by Silvia Costa represented a significant contribution to connecting the two approaches emerged in the workshop, in the broader context of a precise analysis of religious issues in Europe and of the European Union's policy.

The results of the workshop confirmed the “religious illiteracy” of contemporary European society. This consideration shows the urgency of a European public debate that pays attention to religious history and to the dialogue between Churches as a necessary premise for a mutual understanding among the peoples. Specifically, the results of the colloquium suggest the importance of a closer relationship between historians of religions and publishers engaged in the schoolbooks production.

With the consent of the Executive Board of the *ReIReS* project, some of the papers presented at the workshop are here published, in order to give wider dissemination and visibility to texts concerning a very topical subject.

**Fighting Religious Illiteracy with Knowledge
Presentation of *PARS*, Portale di formazione e informazione
per il contrasto dell'analfabetismo religioso**

Francesca Cadeddu

(Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose "Giovanni XXIII")

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Abstract

The paper presents the research which brought to the development of *Portale di formazione e informazione per il contrasto dell'analfabetismo religioso* (*PARS* – www.pars-edu.it). *PARS* is the outcome of a synergy which arose between the Education Department of UNIMORE and fscire.it (Bologna). It is a platform that allows the collection, use and sharing of already-existing, scientific materials related to religious issues. Its intention is to provide the public with a set of high-quality digital resources and tools for self-understanding on religious matters.

Keywords

Religious Literacy; Platform; Education; Learning Kit.

Riassunto

L'articolo presenta la ricerca che ha condotto alla creazione del *Portale di formazione e informazione per il contrasto dell'analfabetismo religioso* (*PARS* – www.pars-edu.it). *PARS* è il frutto di un lavoro sinergico realizzato dal Dipartimento di Educazione di UNIMORE e da fscire.it (Bologna). È una piattaforma di raccolta, fruizione e condivisione di materiali specifici sul tema delle religioni e intende mettere a disposizione del pubblico un insieme di strumenti e di risorse digitali di alta qualità scientifica che favoriscano l'auto-comprensione e formazione sul tema delle religioni.

Parole chiave

Analfabetismo religioso; piattaforma; educazione; kit formativo.

1. *Bibliography*. - 2. *Curriculum vitae*.

In the last twenty years, the issue of religious illiteracy in western countries has garnered the attention of scholars and policy-makers. Most of the literature regarding this topic lays out the attempt to understand the lack of critical awareness of histories, laws, theologies, doctrines, creeds and cultures that make up the religious and spiritual landscape of what we call "The West" (Melloni - Cadeddu, 2018).

Studies on these issues have produced works and policies from which two tendencies emerge: one focuses on Religious Education as a subject of study, research and teaching, and the other stresses on religious literacy and the production of knowledge, meaning the acquisition of knowledge about religions and systems of belief as an inter- and transdisciplinary issue.

The most recent project that marked the initial step in the first tendency is *REDCo* (Religion in Education: A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European Countries), which has produced to date a 36-volume series that enlists among the authors the most renowned scholars in Religious Education. It covers a variety of issues and case studies from philosophy, geography, to pedagogy and anthropology, analysing literature, current trends and designing a frontier for the future.

On the contrary, if we turn to literature pertaining religious literacy, publications aim at contextualizing it in the time and space of specific nations. On a European and North Atlantic scale, however, we have recently witnessed a growing necessity to work on a complete, global reading on these topics.

Within this second group of publications, I mention here *Rapporto sull'analfabetismo religioso in Italia* (Melloni, 2014), which was a first approach to the issue of religious illiteracy in Italy. Other publications within the same group are *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice* (Dinham - Francis, 2015), which came out one year after the Report on Italy and is mainly focused on the English context; *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – And Doesn't* (Prothero, 2007) and *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy* (Moore, 2007), both of which concerned the American context.

As it regards the Italian context, the work conducted for the publication of the Italian Report and the feedback we received during the book presentations, convinced the research group at the Foundation for Religious Studies in Bologna of two needs. The first was to broaden the perspective on a European scale, moving beyond the case studies and paving the way for a research that reflects on history, legal structures, systems of thought and the challenges of European religious pluralism as such. We wanted the work to take place within a Europe conceived of as a cultural space anchored to the countries of the European Union, but which at times also extends into the outlying areas of the Mediterranean, the Balkans, the Middle East, Asia and North America.

Four main questions guided our reflection. We asked ourselves what the historical origins of religious literacy might be and if they may be connected to the institutional systems of modern Europe. Wherever possible – and indeed, it was – to identify common causes, we then investigated when and why different definitions of this phenomenon emerged and whether we should, in fact, consider more than one religious alphabet. In the last ten years, a wide variety

of “religious codes” have emerged from the literature (e.g. schools, social work, business, privileged majorities and creative minorities) and from the debate set in motion by study groups (including informal ones) on religious literacy.

This analysis has led us to believe in the need for greater contextualization for individual state scenarios and specific social and educational systems. Consequently, the question arises as to whether the religious and institutional diversity that marks Europe today is a bearer of different forms of religious literacy and is therefore in need of different educational, instructional and institutional approaches. For this reason, we sought contributions that could frame the role of Religious Education on a historical-juridical level in the context of the guaranteed rights and freedoms in Europe. The goal was to understand to what degree the recognition of religious rights is passed on through the understanding – acknowledged, taught or produced – for religious people and for the religiously literate.

The issue has been, and remains, controversial. This is not only due to the problems it raises in countries where secularism has become a standard-bearer or in countries characterized by a religious culture that predominates. The question of Religious Education also poses an epistemological problem inasmuch as there is competition among forms of knowledge that are termed ‘neutral’ (and are they?), forms presented as ‘validated’ (and they are) and forms that derive their solidity from disciplinary statutes.

The use of one approach or another in the fight against religious illiteracy has brought scholars and policy-makers to (a) underestimate the responsibilities that other fields of knowledge have in the construction of religious literacy in Europe; (b) pay little attention to the biases that each of these fields has produced in public discourse and (c) neglect an inter-sectorial or inter-hermeneutic approach: religious literacy cannot be passed on solely through the school, social workers, the media or any other sector, if only done exclusively.

The outcome of these reflections is concentrated in the book *Religious Literacy, Law and History. Perspectives on European Pluralist Societies* (Melloni - Cadeddu, 2018). The volume is an attempt to stimulate politicians, teachers and other interested parties to grasp the true value of knowledge as the only tool for facing the complexity of what we define as ‘religion in the public space’ and to answer the questions that naturally arise when discussing such issues, like ‘Are religions violent?’ or ‘Why do we have to teach them at school?’

We all know how current events regularly remind us of the disconnect between a reality that is increasingly religiously diversified and ‘another reality’, made of the tools, notions and methods that could have supported the understanding of such a diversified society: every Christmas, every act of fundamentalism and every woman with a veil generates hours of discussion

concerning the role that religion should have in public spaces, and this is without counting the regular media stereotypes and counter-stereotypes, clichés and counter-clichés. The great limit of these debates is that they fail to create any honest reflection on the significances and real consequences of the choices that policy-makers, educators (both formal and informal) and scholars make whenever they dwell in that same area of disconnect.

To this end, it is crucial to look at the presence of religions in school and in the formation of language passed on through mass media: formal educators (teachers) and non-formal ones (such as media actors) are responsible in the process of conveying knowledge about religions (their theologies, their internal and external diversities and their newfound proximity in public spaces). Publishers of school texts are here somehow in the middle, as they produce a medium which is used by students and teachers in the individual and mutual learning process.

Thus, if on the one side, we sought a broader contextualisation, on the other side we wanted to be operative. The Italian Report basically taught us that among the many instruments that teachers and educators have at their own disposal to teach about religion at school, most of them was prescriptive, many of them were biased and none of them was meant to be adapted to different disciplines from the one of Religious education.

In order to understand this outcome, a brief sketch of the Italian historical context of the analysis could be helpful. Italy has a significant problem in understanding how to improve its religious literacy because, among other reasons, there has always been a process of memory construction which is the memory of a Catholic, Italian-born majority. Moreover, the process of secularization in Italy – from the point of view of the study of religions – has been characterised by a sort of late process of forced confessionalization; the exclusion of theology from the public schools (1873); the “scientification” of religion, which meant that a) theology, as it was a subject of study in pontifical universities, never acquired a full status of discipline and b) religious education at school, since it was not taught by scholars or professionals, but by teachers nominated by the ecclesiastical authority, was not based necessarily on the “scientific” teaching of religion.

The Concordat between the Italian Republic and the Holy See, originally signed by Benito Mussolini and Pietro Cardinal Gasparri in 1929 was reviewed in 1984, and in article 9 which regards the role of religious education, it establishes that religious education is optional, not mandatory (thus students should opt-in and not opt-out) and is guaranteed also to all the faith communities that sign an agreement with the state (which was not possible before).

The result of this changes is basically that the egalitarian approach extended privileges, but did not change the outcome: “the hour” of Catholic Education maintained a symbolic value, but not a real educational value. Nonetheless, changing the characteristics of such “hour” means to change an international treaty. Therefore, when we first approached the topic our main aim was to understand why religious illiteracy is so widespread in the country notwithstanding “the hour” and looking at how to find solutions not discussing the existence of that “hour”.

What could be done in such an educational framework? As scholars studying religion, we are not afraid to talk about sensitive topics, even if we realise that religion *is* a very sensitive topic for teachers as well as for public servants and they are afraid to address it because they are afraid to be misinterpreted or to offend others.

We addressed such fear by offering two-day workshops with school teachers and to think about their needs. We presented general topics such as nature, rights and liberties or religions in the Mediterranean with very specific papers which could help teachers in facing the issue. At that point we realized that there was a significant distance between scholars (very much committed to the need to find a new identity for “the hour”) and teachers (very confused as about the ways they could teach *about* religion), and that religious education had to be changed bottom-up, reversing a common approach according to which when some aspects of the educational process do not work, we believe it is necessary to change the school from the first grade on.

At that point we realized that researchers and scholars could be a new pillar supporting the old “Trinity” school, family, faith community. This could be possible first, allowing those who graduate in religious sciences to have access to school teaching just like their colleagues who studied liberal arts. Secondly, it could be done through the reinforcement of the status of religious studies in Italy by contributing to the cooperation among the many fields involved in the study of religion, teaching about religion to the university students even if they are not enrolled in a religious studies course of study, and creating doctoral schools in Islamic and Jewish studies. Lastly, it would be important to support existing doctoral schools that want to offer posts to students interested in studying religions.

Among the many actions that could be taken in the same direction, whose implementation’s main obstacle is usually funds and political commitment, we thought of the opportunity to realise a web portal. The research group coordinated by Alberto Melloni from the Department of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, together with the Foundation for religious sciences in Bologna participated to the national project

“The Educating City: teaching and learning processes in cross-media ecosystem” (PON 2007-2013). Within such project, we have created Portale di formazione e informazione per il contrasto dell’analfabetismo religioso (Education and Information Portal to Contrast Religious Illiteracy, *PARS* – www.pars-edu.it)¹.

PARS is an unprecedented tool on the Italian landscape². It is a platform that has been created for the collection, use, and sharing of materials related to religious issues. According to the findings above-mentioned, it adopts a bottom-up approach to religious literacy: its intention is to provide the public with a set of digital resources and tools for self-understanding on religious matters. We take teachers and learners very seriously: we believe that if we are able to offer them good tools and sources, they can find out a way to approach religious diversity in their programs and within the school classes.

When we started in 2013, while 93% of young Italians used the Internet daily and 92.1% of students (circa. 9 million) used a computer, only 16% made use of digital resources and content at school³. In the context of school and of lifelong learning, novel practices of access to and management of knowledge and teaching represented for us a unique opportunity to stimulate education and learning on matters such as religious pluralism in a more dynamic and interactive way through the enhancement of easy-to-use and established technologies (social networks, apps, the web).

PARS aims to facilitate the understanding of the fabric of contemporary religion and religious illiteracy. It proposes core notions – historical, theological, doctrinal, scriptural, ritual, social, and experiential – that make up different religious and spiritual traditions. These notions are useful for the understanding of the complexity of religious identity and the intersections among religion, history and culture. On the home page, users can find self-learning kits, news and the glossary – which are the sections that we propose as major tools – but we also offer an encyclopedia, infographics, library, videos and maps.

¹ There are two disclaimers about the portal: the first is that it is in Italian, because it is mainly directed to Italians (mostly teachers, but also media actors, policy makers and the public opinion in general) even if we uploaded many sources in other languages as well – mainly in English. The second disclaimer is that this is a beta version and it will need to be constantly updated.

² There has been a European project, IERS – Intercultural Education through Religious Studies) which offers digital modules to teachers, but we find the way it is constructed too prescriptive. IERS is now developing its mission and objectives with SORAPS - Study of Religions Against Prejudices and Stereotypes.

³ Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico, Agenda Digitale Italiana 2014-2020.

Where do we take this material from and how do we select them? *PARS* is made of a selection of contents already available online, and adds *scientific* publications which are open access or whose rights have been conceded to us. We started building self-learning kits by 10-stops tours through different topics of study, which include introductory and more in-depth readings, documentary videos, video-lessons and maps. Some of the kits present basic notions, some others are for advanced learners. Thanks to these starting sparks, we were able to begin nourishing all other sections. As we are mostly historians, the portal reflects our approach and we believe this is a strength.

Browsing the topics and items, the user finds a first definition of the topic, then you have lessons, texts, suggested readings. When possible, each reading is presented with a readable and downloadable file (otherwise we only offer abstracts and the exact reference), and when needed the text is accompanied by a short presentation. Within that presentation we highlight keywords or add tags, which add upon the glossary. The glossary definition is taken from the online dictionary and encyclopedia entries published by the Institute for the Italian Encyclopedia, and we offer additional suggestions about how to deepen the meaning. Not all the glossary entries correspond to the *PARS* encyclopedia entries, which are instead only made of the cross-references and tags of the contents that we propose. This is meant to avoid prescription and to encourage curiosity in the reader.

Last, but not least, we added two options: register and send materials. With the registration, you have access to the file browser, where you can upload materials and make use of some of those that we upload, while with the chance to send materials we aim at collecting teaching modules descriptions or other teaching materials which have already been used by teachers and therefore exploit as much as possible all materials that have been already proposed in classes.

We are testing the portal with teachers. There is a lot of enthusiasm, but we see at least two problems. The main problem is the methodology: teachers are not used to ask for what they need and just take what they find. That makes much complicated to understand if what we are offering corresponds to their needs or not. The second problem is the language. Many good contents are written in English, but not all the teachers are able to at least read it easily. That reduces the chances that we have to build high-quality self-learning kits.

Surprisingly or not, the main point of strength is the use of many materials on history: Italian school programs are made of histories: history of events, history of literature and languages, history of mathematics and physics, history of biology, etc. Therefore, by offering contents with a strong historical perspective, we found a way to communicate with the different disciplines. In

the future, our aim is to make this source available on a European scale, but we are still reviewing what is already on the ground and reasoning on the opportunity to use the same method or not.

Religious illiteracy is a phenomenon that needs more than one strategy to be reverted. Scholars can take a large part in such a process, as they can offer sources which could be adapted to different methods and contexts. The quality of what scholars, and historians in our case, do is critical for the construction of a common chain of memory where diversities are included, and differences accepted. The use of integrated internet tools such as this portal can be a valuable source to make our work better and find an effective way to approach society at large and present religious history not as a static, boring, threatening subject, but as a tool to successfully help European society in the years to come.

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2. *Curriculum vitae*

Francesca Cadeddu is a researcher at the Foundation for Religious Sciences since 2011, where she deals with religious illiteracy in Italy and Europe and European research infrastructures. Member of the European Academy of Religion since 2016, she was elected Secretary General on 6 March 2018. Among her latest publications: Melloni, Alberto - Cadeddu, Francesca (eds.) *Religious Literacy, Law and History: Perspectives on European Pluralist Societies*. London: Routledge.

Lost Christianities in textbooks. A case study of the grammar high schools in Rome

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Abstract

Religion today represents a field of interest that is extensively analysed in line with a variety of different approaches and methodologies. The teaching and educational sectors covering religion and the history of religions have also been invested by this renewed climate of interest, although they still today represent an object of peripheral inquiry. The spread of stereotypes and the distortion and partial interpretation of sources, erroneous knowledge and interpretations extraneous to the historical data, are topics on the agenda not only in the debate in civil society itself but also in university lecture halls. This presentation is the result of an investigation concerning the history of Christianity and conducted on the history textbooks most commonly used in the twenty-five grammar schools in Rome. It is the intention of the working group to extend the analysis to other secondary schools. The contribution intends to launch a reflection on the way in which secondary school textbooks present Christianity, starting from three key themes, which are for various reasons significant:

- 1) the emergence of Christianity from its Jewish origins;
- 2) the existence of various forms of

Riassunto

La religione rappresenta oggi un campo di interesse ampiamente scandagliato secondo approcci e metodologie diversificati. Anche i settori dell'insegnamento e della didattica correlati alle religioni e alla storia delle religioni sono stati investiti da questo rinnovato clima di interesse, sebbene, com'è stato già adeguatamente messo in luce, essi ancora oggi rappresentino un oggetto di indagine periferico e, in larga parte, inesplorato.

La diffusione di stereotipi, la pervasività di facili e grossolane generalizzazioni, la distorsione e la parziale interpretazione delle fonti, per non parlare della diffusione di conoscenze erranee ed estranee al dato storico, rappresentano uno dei temi all'ordine del giorno non solo nel dibattito della società civile ma anche tra i banchi delle aule universitarie.

Il presente contributo è frutto di un'indagine inerente la storia del cristianesimo e condotta sui libri di testo di storia più adottati nei 25 licei classici statali di Roma, benché sia intenzione del gruppo di lavoro estendere l'analisi anche ad altre scuole secondarie.

L'articolo intende avviare una riflessione sul modo in cui i manuali scolastici delle scuole superiori presentano il fenomeno

Christianity since ancient times;
3) the structuring of an ecclesiastical hierarchy and, in particular, the constitution of the papacy.

della religione cristiana a partire da tre temi-chiave, considerati per varie ragioni significativi: 1) L'emergere del cristianesimo dalla sua matrice giudaica 2) L'esistenza di più cristianesimi fin dall'epoca antica 3) Lo strutturarsi di una gerarchia ecclesiastica e, in particolare, il costituirsi del papato.

Keywords

Religions; Stereotypes; School Textbooks; Christianity.

Parole chiave

Religioni; stereotipi; libri di testo; Cristianità.

Methodological preface. - 1. The emergence of Christianity from its Jewish origins. - 2. Christianities. - 3. Papal primacy and the Reform of the Church. Problems of periodization. - 4. Analysed Textbooks. - 5. Bibliography. - 6. Curriculum vitae.

Methodological preface¹

In view of the unprecedented situations resulting from the multiculturalism and religious pluralism that have swept Europe in recent decades and which, more and more often, fill the front pages of our newspapers – thanks in part to a determined and steered propaganda echoed by the mainstream media and social networks – religion today represents a field of interest that is extensively analysed in line with a variety of different approaches and methodologies.

The teaching and educational sectors covering religion and the history of religions have also been invested by this renewed climate of interest, although, as has already been clearly pointed out (Giorda, 2014, pp. 209–230)², they still

* The authors decided to translate into English the quotations of the studies and the school textbooks. The reasons are twofold: ensure that the text has a substantial homogeneity and make it easier to read for non-Italian-speaking users.

¹ This paper is divided into the following paragraphs: *Methodological preface* (Candido - Loré - Noce); *The emergence of Christianity from its Jewish origins* (Noce); *Christianities* (Candido); *Papal primacy and the Reform of the Church. Problems of periodisation* (Loré); *The questionnaires* (Candido - Loré - Noce).

² Giorda refers to a series of specific studies dedicated to the analysis of educational courses related to religions and to the treatment of religious subjects in schoolbooks: some conferences of the 1970s promoted by the Volkswagen Stiftung and supported by the Council of Europe (Bendiscioli, 1975; Conseil de l'Europe, 1974); a research project dedicated to the stereotypes of Islam in textbooks promoted by the Georg Eckert Institut of

today represent an object of peripheral inquiry and in large part remain unexplored³.

The spread of stereotypes, the pervasiveness of facile and rough-and-ready generalisations, and the distortion and partial interpretation of sources, not to mention the dissemination of erroneous knowledge and interpretations extraneous to the historical data, are topics on the agenda not only in the debate in civil society itself but also in university lecture halls.

As Brusa suggests, “stereotypes should be studied not so much with the stern frown of the teacher inveighing against newspapers, television documentaries, films and manuals, offended by the ignorance of the crowd (educated badly – and this is another stereotype – by television and by a malfunctioning educational system) but rather with the seriousness and patience of the researcher, who senses, beneath the skin of a mass phenomenon, a crisis or deep malfunctions of the relationship between the community of historians and society, between university and school, and who discerns unresolved problems within the same academic context” (Brusa, 2004). It is

Braunschweig (*No Chance of Belonging? Islam and Modern Europe Remain Segregated in European Textbooks*) and, on the same topic, Otterbeck 2005, a study conducted on eight textbooks. Even though the literature dedicated to the link between “education–textbooks–religions” is still not very abundant, however, there is clearly a need for teachers and school staff to have reliable tools and materials to deal adequately with issues relating to religion. See, in this regard, *SORAPS*, the interesting project funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission, coordinated by the Department of Studies on Asia and Mediterranean Africa of Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, coordinated by Massimo Raveri and Giovanni Lapis. *SORAPS* (Study of Religions Against Prejudices & Stereotypes), a continuation of *IERS* (Intercultural Education through Religious Studies), is a project that encompasses European universities and three schools, and the aim is to make information and scientific and professional training materials available to secondary school teachers in order to combat prejudices and intolerance through the study of religions. <<https://soraps.unive.it>>. The need to provide teachers with tools is also tackled in *PARS* <<https://www.pars-edu.it>>, a training and information portal for the fight against religious illiteracy, a project promoted by *FSCIRE* (Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose Giovanni XXIII).

³ The urgency of providing adequate answers has given rise to countless resolutions from the Council of Europe (for example, to the *Conference of European Education Ministers on Intercultural Education: Managing Diversity, Strengthening Democracy*, Athens 2003) and other international bodies. Indeed, in Toledo (Spain) in March 2007 (to cite one of the most important examples for us), the panel of experts of the *Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)*, which focus on the freedom of religion and belief stressed that “Knowledge about religions and beliefs is an essential part of a quality education. It is required to understand much of history, literature, and art, and can be helpful in broadening one’s cultural horizons and in deepening one’s insight into the complexities of past and present.” (*Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*: <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/29154>>.

with this spirit that we have tried to undertake our investigation, fully aware, on the other hand, that the interaction between academy and school, as well as the dialogue between teachers constitutes an essential prerequisite.

This presentation is the result of an investigation – that is still in its initial phase – concerning the history of Christianity and conducted on the history textbooks most commonly used in the twenty-five secondary schools in Rome⁴ specialising in classical studies. It is the intention of the working group to extend the analysis to other secondary schools: in this context, therefore, we offer only our first reflections resulting from the examination of a limited sample (the first six in the ranking)⁵.

We have chosen to start with the books most widely used in secondary schools specialising in the classics because it is from these schools in Rome that the highest number of students enrolled in our degree courses in Literature and History comes from: as a starting point, therefore, this study provides a sort of check conducted on the main texts with which our students were schooled, despite the awareness that, nowadays, school is no longer the only place disseminating complex superior knowledge. Indeed, there is no doubt that it “competes with a wide range of means and channels of formation and information endowed with greater flexibility and often greater appeal in the eyes of young people. If this were not enough, the pervasiveness of the mass media and the general phenomenon of globalisation have accentuated the degree of uniformity in mentalities and cultures. We live, that is, in a universe of shared knowledge that conforms to a single model; in a word, one that is standardised” (Panciera - Zannini, 2009, p. 110). Having said that, however, we are of the opinion that in order to probe the origins of this “religious illiteracy”, to discover the state of health of history teaching in Italian secondary schools and to deepen the relationship between historiography and widespread knowledge, between science and a “shared historical sense⁶, it is difficult to leave out a careful and precise analysis of the schoolbooks⁷.

⁴ This is the list of secondary schools examined: Visconti, Anco Marzio, Augusto, Benedetto da Norcia, Lucio Anneo Seneca, Copernico, Amaldi, Dante Alighieri, Vivona, Giulio Cesare, Manara, Orazio. Albertelli, Socrate, Tasso, Convitto nazionale Vittorio Emanuele I, Aristofane, Plauto, Tacito, Mamiani, Virgilio, Montale, Lucrezio Caro, Pirandello, Russel.

⁵ The texts investigated so far in our study are as follows: Cantarella and Guidorizzi, 2015a, 1–2, (28) 10.52%; Marisaldi, 2014, 1–2, (22) 8.27%; Amerini and Zanette, Tincati, 2017, (20) 7.51%; Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016, 1-2, (19) 7.14%; Cantarella and Guidorizzi, 2015b, (15) 5.6%; Bettini, Lentano, Puliga, 2013, (13) 4.9%.

⁶ “Historical common sense” is the subject dealt with by Grendi, 1979 and in the replies in the following issues of the journal *Quaderni storici* up to issue 46 in 1981.

⁷ On the textbook definition cf. Guarracino, 2011, p. 11. The criticalities concerning the use of textbooks as tools in the teaching of history – and of any other subject, we might add – have

Our limited contribution, referred to a specific segment of the Italian school system, intends to launch a reflection on the way in which secondary school textbooks present Christianity, starting from three key themes, which are for various reasons significant: 1) the emergence of Christianity from its Jewish origins; 2) the existence of various forms of Christianity since ancient times; 3) the structuring of an ecclesiastical hierarchy and, in particular, the constitution of the papacy.

From a methodological point of view, the cataloguing of each textbook was carried out on the basis of the following grid⁸:

1. Textbook, author, and publisher.
2. Quantitative analysis of the pages and paragraphs dedicated to the selected topics; position within the layout of the volume; arrangement and scanning of contents.
3. Key words highlighted.
4. Analysis of any iconographic references or maps.
5. Analysis of any documents, anthologies, and sources included.
6. Content analysis: correctness of information, degree of updating with respect to current research, and identification of ideological orientations.

1. *The emergence of Christianity from its Jewish origins*

Defining the date of birth of Christianity in relation to Judaism is the first problem that historians of Christianity have posed themselves. When did the two religions constitute two autonomous groups, two different religious systems, endowed with specific beliefs, rites, and practices? This is an important theme, and it has been deeply investigated by scholars in recent decades⁹. The traditional representation, which traced the birth of Christianity and the foundation of the Christian religion back to Jesus, has been radically questioned and with good reason in studies undertaken over the past few decades. Even if the *Book of Acts* tells us that “the disciples [of Jesus] were called Christians first in Antioch.” (Acts 11, 26; see also 26, 28) this does not mean that

been addressed by many studies: here it is enough to quote Brusa, 1985 and 1991; Guarracino and Ragazzini, 1980, then republished, with some modifications, in two volumes (1990 and 1991); Mattozzi, 1978.

⁸ In the elaboration of the grid and in the determination of the criteria we have been guided by: Giorda, 2014; Giorda, 2012; Gualtierio - Melandri- Monducci - Morando *et al.*, 2010, pp. 48–50; 95 and 101; Ragazzini, 1978.

⁹ See. the monographic issue of ASE 21/2 (2004), on the theme *How Christianity Was Born*, one part of which is dedicated to an analytical examination of the main publications on the topic between the 1990s and the early 2000s; Mimouni - Maraval, 2006; Brent, 2009; Aguirre, 2010; Simonetti, 2010; Penna, 2011; Pesce, 2011; Norelli, 2014; Destro - Pesce, 2017.

the followers of Jesus in early times did not continue to consider themselves Jewish. In short, although it cannot disregard the historical figure of Jesus, Christianity as a complete and autonomous religious system does not begin with Jesus nor with the first men and women who adhered to his movement: the very term 'Christianity' does not exist before the second century, being documented for the first time in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch¹⁰. The most recent historiography has proposed various dates for this act of birth, indicating variously as topical moments the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70CE, or the revolt of Bar Kochba of 132-135¹¹, or indeed suggesting the fourth century as the era in which the separation process was finally concluded, when the Christianisation of the Empire was effected by the intervention of the imperial authority in favour of Christianity.¹² Whether we want to adopt this last hypothesis or the generally more widely accepted hypothesis – which in my opinion more correctly identifies important aspects of the distinction between the two religious worlds in the second century – historiography agrees that “the birth of Christianity” was not the rapid exit into the light of a more or less already formed body, but an intricate and long complex series of developments, experiments, meetings, clashes, cultural negotiations, synergies, ideological operations, and affirmations of power.” (Norelli, 2014, p. 11). Boyarin in particular has suggested we rethink the traditional image, also used in the field of linguistics, of a common genealogical tree (*Stammbaum*) at the origin of the differentiation between the two religions, in favour instead of another model in vogue among the linguists, that of the wave theory, according to which innovations generated at one point can be propagated just as waves are created when a stone is thrown into a pond, intersecting with others formed elsewhere. The new dialect and, therefore, the new religion, could have originated from the aggregation of elements generated in different but contiguous environments, all within the galaxy of the Judaisms of the Second Temple¹³.

¹⁰ Cf. Ign. *Epistle to the Magnesians* 10,1 and 10,3; *Epistle to the Romans* 3,3; *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 6,1: in some of these passages Christianity is contrasted with Judaism. On the theme of the definition and classifications of the religions of the Roman world in the Christian authors of the II-IV century see Massa, 2017.

¹¹ The indication of the period between the two Jewish wars as marking the era of separation between the two developments was promoted above all by Dunn, 1991. For a discussion on this concept of division and the influence exerted on contemporary criticism, cf. Guijarro Oporto and Miquel Pericás 2004, above all p. 475.

¹² Regarding the latter suggested date see Radford Ruether, 1972; Lieu, 2003 and 2004; Boyarin 2004.

¹³ Cf. Boyarin, 2004, pp. 18-19. The two theories are emblematic of two ways of conceiving the genesis of differences, including in the historical-religious context: “The older theory, the *Stammbaum* model, presumed that all similarity between languages and dialects is the

Elsewhere, studies have also highlighted how the very concept of religion that is indiscriminately applied to very different realities such as paganism, Judaism, and Christianity, is actually the product of a cultural and ideological construct within Christianity, the evolution of which is traceable in the Christian literature of the early centuries¹⁴. The classification of the religions of the Empire into three radically distinct and separate groups responded, according to some recent interpretative proposals, to the rhetorical strategy put in place by the Christian authors of the second and third century to carve out a space within the Roman religious system (Massa, 2017). These are fundamental acquisitions that historical and religious university textbooks and various books¹⁵ aimed at the general public have tried to spread in recent years and which can provide significant critical insights for the observation of contemporary religious phenomena, as they deal with the themes of religious identity, as well as with pluralism and the perception of the other, helping us to think of religions as realities that are diverse and dynamic, complex and not easily circumscribed.

product of a shared origin, while differentiation is produced after the languages no longer have contact with each other. It will be seen that the older model corresponds with descriptions of the history of Judaism and Christianity that talk of a "parting of the ways" and assume that all that is shared between the two is a product of their common origins, while the wave theory model leads us to think of much more fluid and not strictly defined borders on the ground, with partitioning taking place well above the ground." On this question cf. also Mimouni and Pouderon, 2012. Regarding the suggestion of D. Boyarin, see Lanfranchi, 2015.

¹⁴ On this regard, see, at least Sachot, 1999 and 2016; Filoramo, 2004, especially pp. 75-88.

¹⁵ By way of example, see: Filoramo and Menozzi, 1997: the contributions in the first part, by Edmondo Lupieri and Giovanni Filoramo, deal extensively with the question of the process of distinction between Christians and Jews, identifying in the period between the two great Jewish revolts of 70 and 132–135 the formation phase of two autonomous religious entities; Corbin, 2007 (pp. 18–31) summarily deals with the emergence of Christianity in the second century; Prinzivalli, 2015: Gianotto's contribution, on the passage from Jewish followers of Jesus to antagonism between Christians and Jews (pp. 69–96), explains the two different conceptions of the origin of Judaism: 1) one that sees in the revolt of Bar Kochba the moment from which the "parting of the ways" between the two religions occurs; and 2) the other promoted by Boyarin, who sees the conclusion of the separation process only in the fourth century; he opts for the wave theory model, according to which the identification of a single moment for the separation should not be considered as useful. Boyarin maintains that Christianity originated from precise choices of identity-forming elements, operated by different groups, and from their consequent aggregation and diffusion, until forming a new 'dialectal' agglomeration within that vast range of spoken word with blurred contours that constituted the Judaism of the time and also included the followers of Jesus (p. 70). Among the recent general interest books on the subject, see Augias - Cacitti, 2008 and Norelli, 2014, who addresses an audience of non-specialists.

Starting, therefore, from an observation of the enormous potential that lies in adopting a perspective such as this, both in terms of the development of historical and critical skills and educational values in general, we have sought to probe how many of these acquisitions have landed in school history books, since in the university classrooms we have perceived that little has percolated through to the students.

Our analysis shows that a non-dynamic and non-plural concept of the birth of Christianity still continues, and the fundamental results of historical and religious research are not taken into account.

A varying number of pages (from four to seventeen) is dedicated to the topic, usually coinciding with a chapter in the second volume of the first two-year educational programme¹⁶. Jesus of Nazareth and early Christianity are, as is obvious, inserted into the contemporary Jewish world; indeed, the affirmation is often repeated that Christianity was originally one of several Jewish sects that had spread through Palestine. At times, an attempt is made to distinguish between a historical framework, able at this chronological level to identify a substantial closeness between Judaism and Christianity, and a religious one, which already provides a clear distinction between the two religions, or presupposes self-awareness on the part of Christians, of being of a religion distinct from the Jewish one. In line with the portrait provided by the Gospels, Jesus is sometimes unhesitatingly presented as he who proclaimed himself the Son of God and the Messiah¹⁷ awaited by the Jewish religion, and at other times

¹⁶ See, for example: Cantarella - Guidorizzi, 2015a, (ch. 19, "Le origini del cristianesimo e della Chiesa", pp. 72-88); Marisaldi, 2014 (par. 3.2. "Gli inizi della predicazione cristiana", pp. 41-44); Amerini -Zanette - Tincati, 2017 (Lesson 7, "La rivoluzione cristiana", pp. 116-123); Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016 (ch. 18, "Il cristianesimo e le origini della Chiesa", pp. 54-67); Bettini -, Lentano - Puliga, 2013 (Unit 17, ch. 3, "L'infanzia del cristianesimo", pp. 527-531).

¹⁷ Cf. Marisaldi, 2014, p. 42: "He preached love for one's neighbour and the importance of forgiveness, proclaiming that the value of the weak and the suffering was great in the eyes of God; he declared that his followers belonged to a celestial kingdom beyond time, where those who had lived justly would rejoin the creator. He claimed to be the son of God, sent by him to earth to stipulate a new covenant (the New Testament), as announced by the prophets, and to redeem, with his own death on the cross, humanity from original sin (...)" Cantarella - Guidorizzi, 2015a, p. 74, after having affirmed that the figure of Jesus is in many ways part of the tradition of the unjustly persecuted Old Testament prophets while in the eyes of many might appear as a political guide, adds: "Jesus, for his part, while rejecting the political role that many wanted to attribute to him, gave his preaching a radical religious content: he claimed to be not a simple prophet, but the Messiah always awaited by the Jewish people, the Son of God whose coming meant the advent of the Father's kingdom. From the historical and non-religious point of view, however, it is certain that originally Christianity was only one of several Jewish sects that appeared in Palestine"; Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016(pp. 58-59), instead, more correctly, attribute to the followers of Jesus – not to him – the belief that he was the Messiah, the Christ sent by God.

as one of the many prophets who predicted the advent of the kingdom of God (Bettini - Lentano - Puliga, 2013, p. 528). However, the textbooks do not make the slightest reference to the fact that, for example, the title of 'Son of God' and 'Messiah' – just two of the divine titles borrowed from the biblical context – are most probably definitions elaborated by the early communities of believers to describe Jesus, rather than words used by Jesus himself. What is generally missing is any indication of the historical process that led from the oral nature of Jesus's preaching to the establishment of a written memory, or better, of several memories corresponding to different traditions and recorded in various texts¹⁸. What is missing above all is the indication that the texts that present us with the history, or story, of Jesus – be they canonical, apocryphal, or other early Christian works – should, when considered as historical sources or literary works, be investigated like any other text, regardless of the fact that the Church regards them as inspired books. The application of a historical-critical method in the study of these texts, evaluated for the purpose as historical sources and examined according to the criteria brought to play by any textual analysis, has led scholars to formulate various hypotheses about the steps that led believers to recognise a more than human figure in Christ. Today, therefore, there exists a certain consensus about the fact that all the events in Jesus's life have been reread by later traditions in the light of the resurrection: according to many testimonies, the first followers of Jesus experienced this through a series of apparitions. These experiences, which are difficult to comprehend for a modern man, are generally identified by critics as the turning point, the one that led to the identification of Jesus as the Messiah and the Lord, the Son of God as well as the Son of man, understood clearly as a messianic figure who has already obtained glory and kingdom through the resurrection¹⁹.

As for the explanation of the separation between Judaism and Christianity, this is often left to the aforementioned passage in *Acts 11.26 ff.*²⁰, although in

¹⁸ Marisaldi, 2014, p. 42, illustrating (in the text and in a separate detailed box in the margin) what the Gospels are, underlines how they were written on the basis of collections of facts and sayings and oral traditions partly dating back to the early followers of Jesus, maintaining a trace of the cultural environment of the time; on the other hand, the presentation of the contents of the preaching of Jesus is uncritical: see note 18 above.

¹⁹ For a concise introduction to the consolidated issues and perspectives of different studies, see Iossa, 2000.

²⁰ Cf. Marisaldi, 2014, p. 43 (document); Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016, p. 60 (document): then, further on ("Anti-Judaism" section, p. 65) it is stated that "initially the followers of Jesus preached in the temple of Jerusalem, and on his travels Paul carried out his missionary activity starting from the synagogues; the contrast with the Jews was not felt so radically and intolerably. But, after the Jewish revolt of 66CE and the destruction of the Temple of 70CE, the need arose to distinguish themselves from the Jews, considered dangerous rebels and

almost all the textbooks examined the shift from movement to religion is attributed to Paul, who supposedly was the first to implement the break with Judaism (Bettini - Lentano - Puliga, 2013, p. 530) and create a religion of a universalistic nature; only in one case is reference made to the mid-second century as being the moment from which we may speak of two diversified entities²¹. To strengthen the idea of a very early separation between the two religious systems there is an iconographic framework that resorts to symbols that can only be found as of the latter half of the second century and in some cases only in the fourth, to mark the distinct identity even more, leaving the reader to suppose that the new-born religion had its own complex and mature symbolic universe from the very outset. Archaeological studies have instead shown how the material Christian culture does not become visible and recognisable before the latter half of the second century, a period to which is also attributed an architectural shift as regards Christian housing and rooms used for worship²². The notion that derives from this is, overall, that of a Christianity as an entity detached from the historical, cultural, and social context from which it takes its start, a crystallised phenomenon eternally equal to itself and ultimately ahistorical. The formation of the scriptural canon, the development of a hierarchical structure, and the debate that underlies the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy are moments of crucial importance to understand the vitality of the Christian religious phenomenon of the origins, but they are often treated only marginally.

Contrary to what we might have initially expected, the problem with the textbooks examined does not lie in the limited number of pages given to the subjects, but in the way these are treated and, in the vast majority of cases, in the absence of a scientific approach to the argument: the respect for what is sacred, indeed, often seems to lead the authors to limit themselves to a confessional presentation. What is missing in these illustrations of Jesus and the

enemies of Rome. Theological opposition increased: the Christians accused the Jews of not having been able to decipher the divine plan, refusing to see in Jesus the Messiah announced by the prophets (it was therefore the Christians who were the “true Israel”, not the Jewish people), and of “deicide” (for having condemned the Son of God to death). The situation worsened in the fourth century when Christianity became the official religion of the Empire. From the fifth century onwards the Jews were subjected to heavy discrimination sanctioned by law: they were excluded from public, military, political, and administrative offices; they could not practise as lawyers, buy Christian slaves, or build new synagogues”.

²¹ See Amerini - Zanette - Tincati, 2017, p. 120, in which reference is also made to the use of the term ‘Christianity’, which took place for the first time in the second century [ed. note: this was Ignatius of Antioch].

²² Concerning which, see Guijarro Oporto - Miquel Pericás, 2004, p. 477, note 23 and 24, with reference to the works of Snyder, 1985, and White, 1990.

early Christian communities is a historical sense and a historical-religious perspective²³. There seems to be almost no trace of the application of a historical-critical method with regard to the sources concerning Jesus, and to the centuries-old debate about the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith: the great clamour – and the defensive reactions by some sectors of the Catholic world – caused by the publication in 2006 of *Inchiesta su Gesù*, a book by Corrado Augias and Mauro Pesce that did nothing but make accessible a series of details accrued by historians concerning the figure and message of Jesus to the general public²⁴, says much about the embarrassment that a part of the Italian ecclesiastical and Catholic world feels with regard to the application of historical methods to the figure of Jesus, and it is evidently still influencing the surrounding cultural world. Such is not the case in other cultural contexts²⁵.

2. Christianities

For the purposes of a correct understanding of the historical development of phenomena relating to Christianity, it will be useful to start with the premise that the initially wholly Jewish movement born following the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, then developed into a variety of divergent interpretations that the progressive institutionalisation of the Great Church attempted to reduce to unity²⁶.

To account for this heterogeneity – that is, to underline how the complexity of not only modern but also ancient Christianity is more than simply the history of the Roman Catholic Church, but includes a variety of expressions in the field of doctrines, practices, and rites – the use of the plural ‘Christianities’ instead of the singular ‘Christianity’ is now widespread among scholars of the history of

²³ Regarding the distinction between ‘history’ and ‘memory’ concerning the study of the figure of Jesus, see Norelli, 2008 with reference to Halbwachs, 1997 (critical edition); Assmann, 1997, with critical observations with regard to Dunn, 2006.

²⁴ To gain an idea of the debate, see the article by Enrico Norelli in *La Repubblica*, 2 January 2007, diffused in a more extensive form in Mauro Pesce’s blog: <<http://www.mauropesce.net/IT/index.php/inchiesta-su-gesu/27-articoli-inchiesta-su-gesu/27-enrico-norelli-su-repubblica.html>>.

²⁵ The literature on the historical Jesus is seemingly endless: for an initial introduction, see Bertalotto, 2010.

²⁶ I wish to thank Professor Enrico Norelli for having suggested the work of Alkier, 1993, to me, in which a history is presented of the concept of “primitive Christianity” as a historiographic category that, in the course of history, has been manipulated and bent to the demands of ecclesial polemics or of cultural politics on the basis of different cultural periods and contexts.

Christianity and religions²⁷. This term is not a mere affectation, but rather a clear choice, made in the historiographical context, not to exclude, on the one hand, people, individuals, or groups from the historical narrative who, on the basis of judgements expressed by contemporaries or posterity, have been considered heretical or schismatic and, on the other, sources, texts, and documents that have been considered doctrinally heterodox or have been expelled from the canon, being defined as apocryphal.

In opposition to a history of Christianity written in the past with apologetic intent, especially in the context of the confessional debate between Catholics and Protestants, modern criticism endeavours to study Christianity in its jagged articulation, made up of very different beliefs and practices held by men and women who recognise their saviour in Jesus. It is thus easy to note that from the very beginning different conceptions of Christ, the world, and the Scriptures have coexisted and that the process of homogenisation and formation of the scriptural canon, the definition of orthodoxy/heresy and a hierarchical structuring only developed over time and never completely anyway, given that persistent cultural and sometimes deep divisions continue to survive between one Church and the next.

A careful reading of the textbooks examined overwhelmingly reveals an approach that visibly comes into conflict with the attitude of prudence referred to above. Indeed, our textbooks tend to present the history of Christianity in like manner to all stories about the victorious, as a “history of domination”: of Christianity over rabbinic Judaism, of Christianity over pagan religions, of the Christianity of the “Great Church” over the Christianities which were absorbed by it or were expelled from the orthodoxy²⁸. However, there can be little doubt that the expulsion of many movements founded in the first three centuries and the merciless struggle against their founders and their followers is a historical fact that cannot be circumvented (not even by the school history books from

²⁷ The use of the plural is now also in vogue for other religious phenomena (for Judaism, for example, cf. Boccaccini, 2008). By way of example, see some studies pertinent to the history of Christianity: Rinaldi, 2008; Prinzivalli, 2012; Dell’Osso, 2012; Riedweg, 2012.

²⁸ Usually the textbooks dedicate one or two special chapters to the emergence and development of Christianity with titles that are eloquent in identifying the key to the interpretation of the proposed historical outline, that is to say, one in which Christianity, presented as a monolithic phenomenon uniform over the centuries, after an initial phase of persecution under the Empire, underwent no change and, having remained unchanged since the dawn of its existence, emerged in the fourth century as a state religion. From this point of view, for example, there is a range to choose from: Marisaldi, 2014, “Gli inizi della predicazione cristiana” (p. 41), “L’impero cristiano del IV secolo” (p. 160); Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016, “Il cristianesimo e le origini della Chiesa” (p. 54), “La cristianizzazione dell’Impero romano. (IV secolo)” (p. 148).

which we cannot expect this issue to be dealt with in detail, but we would ought to be able to expect at least a hint of its complexity).

Interesting critical aspects about very topical issues such as power relations between different groups, the emergence of a single authority, the manipulation of information for propaganda purposes are offered us, in our opinion, by the way the orthodoxy–heresy dialectic is presented in the textbooks.

Indeed, while during the fourth century the concepts of heresy and schism became progressively clearer and heretics were the recipients of a legislative corpus dedicated to them, in the early centuries the boundaries between orthodoxy and heresy did not appear so clear-cut. Contrasting with a traditional presentation, which saw heresy as a deviation from orthodoxy, which came chronologically later, a capital study of 1934 by Walter Bauer (Bauer, 1934) provocatively suggested reformulating the concepts of orthodoxy and heresy, in particular with regard to Christian origins. He pointed out how in reality, in some areas, heresy preceded orthodoxy, but even though Bauer's theory – which I do not set out here in detail – caused some violent reactions, it laid the groundwork for a new vision of the relationship between heresy and orthodoxy. After the pioneering study of Bauer, in 1985 Alain Le Boulluec (Le Boulluec, 1985) re-analysed the topic in a systematic way with regard to the documents of the first three centuries, proposing a revision of the terminology in use. It was he who introduced the expression 'heresiological representations' with the aim of underlining how, far from representing stable categories, *heresy* and *orthodoxy* are instead contingent constructions and products of the "historical process". In most cases, the news we have about heretical groups are far from objective, as they are actually the representation of those groups given us by their adversaries, be these representatives of the hierarchy or heresiologists. For example, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, as pointed out by Le Boulluec (Le Boulluec, 2000), use the term *hairesis* as a rhetorical strategy in order to decree the exclusion of certain types of beliefs and practices on the basis of presumed genealogies of masters and disciples.

Heresiological literature, indeed, aims above all at the denigration of the adversary and, in doing so, often resorts to sophisticated rhetorical strategies and the use of platitudes: these are therefore sources that must be considered critically by the historian and not taken as gospel truth.

The theme of heresy (and its consequent relationship with orthodoxy) is usually dealt with in school textbooks exclusively when discussing Constantine's religious policy and the condemnation of Arius by the Council of Nicaea: the heresy–orthodoxy issue is usually dismissed in a few lines, very often in the form of a lexical marginal note to the text. In the textbooks analysed, the term 'heresy' – which it is worth recalling was originally a neutral term in

Greek – corresponds to a meaning of deviance from the truth of the faith taught by the Church. In this regard, we should note the definition by which Marisaldi bridles Gnosticism, understood as a “philosophical doctrine” whose doctrines “which questioned one of the foundations of the Christian religion, namely that of being a religion that was considered to be revealed by God”, proved a “hard test” for Christian thinkers²⁹.

Our work, although limited to a sample of texts that needs to be expanded, leads us to conclude for now that in principle a form of interpretation prevails that does not take into account the existence of a process, the outcome of which was the result of clashes and debates: the most trite heresiological representation is used, on the basis of which at the beginning there was a single unanimously shared doctrine, from which the rotten branch of heresy subsequently split³⁰. Only in one case, in no more than one or two lines of text, is it stated that in the early centuries the Christian communities were in a state of flux as regards beliefs and practices³¹.

²⁹ Cf. Marisaldi, 2014, p. 155. This is the only textbook that mentions the Gnostic doctrines and Montanism, albeit in an unclear and at times misleading way.

³⁰ Cf. the explanation of ‘heresy’ in the following glossaries: 1) Marisaldi, 2014, p. 163, “Doctrine in contrast with a truth of the faith as taught by the Church. The rise of heresies in the early period of Christianity prompted the Church to clarify precisely its own truth of faith, often through the comparison of different positions in a council. In the second and third centuries some heresies arose from contact with pagan philosophy or other religions, such as Zoroastrianism. In the fourth and fifth centuries, heresies such as Arianism formed around the interpretation of the figure of Christ and the relationship between God and the world”: the derivation of the heresies from Greek philosophy is a *topos* of heresiological literature; 2) Cantarella - Guidorizzi, 2015a, p. 120: “The term heresy (which in Greek means “choice” indicates a different opinion to the official one. It is mainly used in reference to religious matters and contrasts with orthodoxy (the “right opinion”), i.e. the total acceptance of the doctrine of the Church”; 3) Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016, p. 152: “The Greek *hairesis* originally had a neutral meaning (“choice”) and was used to indicate the different philosophical “schools”. With the advent of Christianity it was used to designate the religious currents within Judaism and then Christianity, and finally to define in a negative sense those that were ‘deviant’ with respect to the official doctrine of the Church”.

³¹ Cf. Amerini - Zanette - Tincati, 2017, p. 186, who on the subject of religious controversies state: “We must understand, in fact, that in those first centuries, Christian doctrine was not yet defined and stabilised as we know it today. The Christian world was marked by different interpretations of fundamental aspects of conduct and faith, which fed sometimes harsh contrasts within the Church and caused great disputes among the bishops of the various communities”; Bettini - Lentano - Puliga, 2013, pp. 536–538: “In the fourth century the Christian doctrine was still in a fluid state and many clashing and sometimes irreconcilable positions existed within the Church. An orthodoxy (from the Greek *orthós* ‘right’ and *doxa* ‘opinion’) had not yet been defined; that is, an official doctrine of the Church, with its dogmas”.

Marisaldi's textbook is the only one to refer to Montanism³², a charismatic Christian movement established between 151 and 171 in Phrygia, by Montanus, Prisca (or Priscilla), and Maximilla. Through ecstatic visions, these three figures claimed that the Paraclete spoke through them, as prophesied in *John* 14. Although Montanus's approach was extremely different from the contemporary Gnosticism, Montanism embodied a real conflict of authority, causing a crisis in the nascent organisational structure of the Church and thus accelerating the process of formation of the canon and that of the creation of the mono-episcopate. In our text, instead, Montanism is labelled as a "fundamentalist and fanatical movement" that "forbade the participation of Christians in public life and in the service of the army". It is difficult to understand then why the author contrasts the Montanists with the martyrs, almost suggesting a distinction between good Christians and bad Christians.

The textbooks we investigated devote too little space altogether to the existence of different facets and variants (historical, geographical, doctrinal, theological, and others) of early Christianity, thus sweeping away the possibility of appreciating the idea of a process that included clashes, debates, compromises between groups in power, a skilled use of the means of communication of the time, and manipulation of reality for propaganda purpose; themes, in other words, that if adequately addressed, could provide elements for reflection and tools for the observation of contemporary realities.

Similar considerations also concern the establishment of the ecclesiastical hierarchy; the books reviewed, in fact, omit the existence of different structures of ministries and authorities in the various churches in the early centuries (Cattaneo, 1997; Schöllgen, 1998), but in the paragraphs immediately following those dedicated to Jesus's preaching and the very early missions of the apostles (in most cases the reference is exclusively to Paul³³) they simply speak of "bishops" and "presbyters" and nothing else.

³² Marisaldi, 2014, p. 100, states that following the persecutions (parallel to the emergence of the figure of the martyrs) "fundamentalist and fanatical movements such as Montanism spread, which prohibited the participation of Christians in public life and in the army".

³³ Cf. for example: Marisaldi, 2014, p. 100: "The churches had already begun to organise themselves in precise hierarchies: the presbyters ('elders', in Greek, from which 'priests') were ministers of the worship and the bishop ('episcopos', 'overseer' in Greek) was the head of the local community and often enjoyed high prestige in the city"; Cantarella and Guidorizzi, 2015a, p. 76: "The Christian Church (from the Greek 'ekklesia', assembly) was at its origins numerically significant and in continuous expansion: it was an institution that had no comparisons in antiquity [...]. The Christian communities were under the direction of people esteemed for their faith called 'presbyters' (from the Greek, 'older') and the local communities were placed under the authority of a bishop (from the Greek for 'overseer') elected by the faithful who controlled a territory comprising the diocese".

The idea that the episcopal role was an apostolic institution began to dominate only from the second century, when there was a move from a collegial structure (in which the bishop was a *primus inter pares*), to the mono-episcopate: at the end of the second century Irenaeus of Lyon affirmed that the Twelve and the Apostle Paul preached the Gospel and founded the churches to entrust them subsequently to the bishops, successors and depositaries of their own teaching³⁴. In reality, the transition from the collegial structure to the mono-episcopate did not take place at the same time in all the churches: it was only during the third century (and not without difficulty) that the mono-episcopate acquired universal recognition.

All this complex process, in which every community constitutes a case in itself, finds almost no coverage in our textbooks. With the exception of *Ambiente storia* by Bettini - Lentano - Puliga (2013, p. 536)³⁵, in the other texts analysed, the notion proffered seems to be that of a rather undefined ecclesiastical hierarchy (at the top of which there is the bishop) having always been operative in the early Christian communities³⁶.

A similar invisible hand also seems to have directed the pen of the authors of our textbooks when they should have addressed (or at least mentioned) the issue of the primacy of some Churches over others in the context of the governance of the Christian world: Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and, from the second half of the fourth century, Constantinople.

³⁴ According to Irenaeus, the truth of the Catholic Church is guaranteed by the uninterrupted succession of the apostolic teaching through the bishops (*Against Heresies* 3,3,1-4) and, for this reason, according to the Christian heresiologist and writer, it becomes necessary to note the list of bishops. It is worth recalling that Irenaeus refers to the list of the bishops of Rome, although there the mono-episcopate was not established before the second half of the second century. It is presumed, therefore, that in this list, drawn up not before the first half of the second century, the presbyters of the College of the Church of Rome were designated as bishops.

³⁵ The textbook distinguishes between the hierarchical organisation before and after the "Constantinian milestone": while from the third century onwards there is the formation of "an increasingly complex hierarchy in which the key figure was represented by the bishop (overseer) to whom was entrusted the evangelisation and the administration of the Christian community in a given territory, the diocese", in the "Church of the origins" there was a substantial "equal relationship" between the faithful and the ministers of the cult".

³⁶ Cf. for example Marisaldi, 2014, p. 157: "At the time of Marcus Aurelius the structure of the Church was already well established and corresponded generally to that of the provinces of the Empire. The territory was divided into dioceses, each led by a bishop (...). The dioceses referred to the local churches, which were under the responsibility of a priest (or 'presbyter', adopting a word derived from the Greek), assisted by collaborators called deacons".

In our textbooks, instead, the only Apostolic See able to boast a supremacy over all of Christendom is Rome³⁷. Once again, the decision to simplify, the need for synthesis, the editorial requirements established in accordance with ministerial directives and, probably, an interpretation vitiated by cultural biases which it is difficult to resist because of *force majeure*, provide our students with a mere outline in which the complexity and myriad historical vicissitudes are substituted by a pre-packaged collection of definitions and superficial knowledge that adhere little (and sometimes not at all) to historical truth.

3. *Papal primacy and the Reform of the Church. Problems of periodization*

The framework of the secondary schools educational programmes provides a – rather infelicitous, in our opinion – partition between the early Middle Ages, studied in the second year, and the later Middle Ages, explored in the first part of the third year, and *de facto* as a premise to the modern age. The theme of the civil power of the bishops of Rome over the Lazio area is done with by the end of the two-year period and liquidated – in the schoolbooks we looked at – within a timeframe that is no longer acceptable: a single episode (the donation of the castle of Sutri by King Liutprand to Pope Gregory II) continues to be identified, in two of our three textbooks, as a turning point, as the origin of the

³⁷ Cf. Marisaldi, 2014, p. 157: “The bishop of Rome was considered the most important because the church there was founded by the apostle Peter, who had been chosen first by Jesus at the beginning of his preaching and who died in Rome. From the fourth century onwards, the bishop of Rome had the title of pope (father, from the Greek)”; Cantarella - Guidorizzi, 2015a, p. 76: “The various Christian communities dispersed in the world were in contact with each other; among the various bishops, the Christian community of Rome, the capital of the Empire, assumed particular authority, as it was here that the two major apostles, Peter and Paul, had suffered martyrdom. The origin of the papacy must also be associated with the importance of this city”; Amerini - Zanette - Tincati, 2017, pp. 229-236: “While the bishops were rooted in the territory, the Church was transformed into a unitary and centralised organism thanks to the authority of the bishop of Rome over the ecclesiastical hierarchy. (...) At the time of the Council of Nicaea only an ‘honorific’ primacy was accorded the bishop of Rome; it was the bishop Siricius (384–399) who was the first officially to bear the title of pope, to emphasise his superiority over the other bishops. (...) The primacy of the bishop of Rome was strengthened with the pontificate of Leo I, the pope who according to legend had stopped Attila at Mantua. Leo inherited the title of supreme pontiff from the Roman tradition and affirmed the principle of the primacy of Peter, according to which the bishop of Rome had full power over the Church as the successor of Peter, the apostle to whom Jesus had entrusted his community of the faithful. Peter was by tradition considered the first bishop of Rome; here he had preached and suffered martyrdom”; Bettini - Lentano - Puliga, 2013, p. 536: “The seat of Rome in the West enjoyed great prestige, of course, and it was here that the bishop acquired the particular significance that would make him the head of Christian West, the pope, in the fifth century”.

“temporal power” of the popes; or that origin is identified with the control – which was undoubtedly powerful – of a pope like Gregory the Great³⁸. This simplistic and entrenched need for sharply divided periods is a common trait of many Italian schoolbooks³⁹; in our opinion, it paints a radical, often undue simplification of the picture, as we have already seen in part regarding the distinction between Judaism and Christianity. In this specific case, the promotion of the Sutri Donation to milestone event makes it possible, in fact, to exclude a much more complex and blurred scenario from the visual field of the students: the transformation of the properties of the bishops of Rome, to a political domination on a vast area surrounding the city. It was only from the late twelfth century that their slow evolution in a jurisdictional sense led to the establishment of a coherent government structure, in line with the general evolution of the royal powers in Western Europe⁴⁰. On the other hand, the books for the third class in secondary schools retain a distinct and more important question, on which we will focus our attention: the way in which the papacy rebuilt, or rather built, its authority over the Western bishops.

Beyond substantially different views of a complex phenomenon such as the Reform of the Church, scholars have long been in general agreement on two points. 1. It was only between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in the conflict that opposed the Germanic empire and the bishops of Rome, that the foundations were laid for an effective distinction between the royal power and the episcopal institution. Indeed, the involvement of bishops in the exercise of power at a local level, especially in the areas of Frankish tradition, dates back to the early centuries of the Middle Ages and, in some respects, to late antiquity; and it was a structural fact, not perceived as ‘corruption’, or as decadence by the society of the time. The bishops often had government prerogatives, which integrated or supplemented those of the royal representatives. 2. It was precisely in the context of that conflict between the bishops of Rome and the Empire that the conditions were created for a factual hegemony of the papacy over the bishops of Western Christianity. Until the beginning of the eleventh

³⁸ Pepe - Novembri - Galimberti, 2016, pp. 24-25; Amerini -Zanette - Tincati, 2016, pp. 354-355, in a more nuanced way (on p. 254, regarding the *Patrimonium Sancti Petri* at the time of Gregory the Great, an evolution over centuries is suggested, which led to “a real territorial and political entity submitted to the authority of the pontiff, the embryo of the future Church State”). Cantarella - Guidorizzi, 2015a, pp. 172-173, instead attribute the birth of the “temporal power” of the Roman Church to Gregory the Great. See the effective remarks on the establishment of a papal government in the late Middle Ages in Giardina - Sabbatucci - Vidotto, 2018, pp. 30-32.

³⁹ On this point, cf. Loré - Rao, 2017, pp. 309-312.

⁴⁰ Recent analyses and summary with bibliography in Marazzi, 2012; Carocci, 2014. Concerning the early medieval phase, Arnaldi, 1987, remains fundamental.

century, the episcopal institutions, and the ecclesiastical ones in general, operated within regional frameworks, coordinated – often weakly – by bishops of particularly prestigious seats; thus the definition of ‘Christianities’ in the plural is wholly suited to defining the early medieval situation also as regards the ecclesiastical institutions⁴¹.

In this area, the periodisation that is deeply rooted in the schoolbooks therefore finds fertile ground; and instead, paradoxically, the scope of the Reform is diminished, for different but converging motivations. The schoolbooks systematically evoke examples of the Roman reformers, pauperisms like the Milanese *pataria* and, finally, the new monasticism, putting them all in the same basket, with particular emphasis given to the case of Cluny (Desideri - Codovini, 2015, pp. 14-19; Gentile, Ronga, Rossi, 2016, pp. 44-48; Giardina - Sabbatucci - Vidotto, 2018, pp. 17-22). The relationship between these phenomena was complex and is in reality interpreted in a very diversified way by historiography⁴²; after all, Cluny did not expand in contrast but in symbiosis with the royal, princely, or noble powers of the time. The fact is, however, that the ‘amalgamation’ of the new monasticism, paupers’ movements, and the Reform of the Church suggests the idea of a linear process, from the beginning of the tenth century to the Concordat of Worms, with the gradual overcoming of a situation characterised by an “*église au pouvoir des laïques*”⁴³, enslaved to the needs of princes and local powers, which proliferated with the collapse of the Carolingian empire. It should be said that the way the issue is tackled by Giardina, Sabbatucci, and Vidotto is much richer in nuances than the others, and the origin of the conflict between the papacy and the Empire in the eleventh century is presented in a coherent manner (on the basis of Capitani’s studies), as the result of a reform instigated by Henry III, and by the ecclesiastical circles close to him, then rooted in Rome and left to get out of hand by the emperor⁴⁴, Desideri and Codovini, on the other hand, give a rather nuanced overview of the early medieval papacy as a “universal power”, but it is the overall construction of the story that ensures that wherever the Reform is mentioned, explicitly or not, as a reaction to a robust period of loss of

⁴¹ Recent synthesis with bibliography in Artifoni, 2007. Among the textbooks we have examined, Amerini - Zanette - Tincati, 2016, p. 230, explicitly proposes that papal primacy was already clear and defined in late antiquity.

⁴² See different readings of the question in the following classic studies: Miccoli, 1974, pp. 464-608; Violante, 1975; Capitani, 1992³, pp. 237-360. Effective summary in Cantarella, 1998.

⁴³ This is the title of the celebrated volume by Amann and Dumas, 2007.

⁴⁴ Giardina - Sabbatucci - Vidotto, 2018, p. 20: “But his initiative [of Henry III] turned out to be a mixed blessing: the new pope [Clement II] and even more his successor Leo IX, deeply committed themselves to the reform and raised the prestige of the papacy, bringing back the theme of the supremacy of the pontiff over all the exponents of temporal power.”

ecclesiastical autonomy⁴⁵, it is presented as relatively brief. The civil powers of the bishops are always presented as an effect of the Ottonian policy, in the short period between the tenth and eleventh centuries (the so-called bishop-counts⁴⁶), and in connection with Imperial control, which the Ottonians reaffirmed and formalised on the election of the bishop of Rome.

These distorted perspectives weigh not so much on the narration of the conflict between papacy and Empire, nor on the description of late-medieval ecclesiastical structures, which overall are presented correctly albeit in an inevitably summary fashion, but in the evaluation of the modalities of that shift and above all retrospectively, on the characterisation of Christianity and of ecclesiastical institutions in the centuries before the year 1000. The building up of the papal primacy is the dramatic outcome, and not the only possible one, resulting from the dissolution of a long-term ambiguity: the bishops as shepherds of souls and, at the same time, as an essential part of the network of royal powers. The paradoxical reduction in scope of this change expresses the attachment that is widespread in the textbooks for the idea of a late-medieval and early medieval Christianity that unrealistically is too hierarchical and homogeneous, both in the practice of social relations and in the consciousness of the players themselves of the time.

The questionnaires:

We accompanied the analysis of the textbooks with a questionnaire, prepared in collaboration with our colleague Mariachiara Giorda, addressed to university students, to try to understand if and how they dealt with historical-religious subjects during their secondary school years.

The students were asked the following simple questions:

1. What school did you attend?

⁴⁵ Desideri - Codovini, 2015, pp. 14–15; see in particular on p. 15 the reference to the tenth century as the “papacy’s iron age”.

⁴⁶ Desideri - Codovini, 2015, p. 6: “The control of the high clergy through the granting of benefits and offices to the bishops and abbots who, in exchange, had to swear loyalty to the sovereign”, with reference to Otto I; Gentile - Ronga - Rossi, 2016, p. 44: “With regard instead to the lower grades of the Church, the creation of bishop-counts had increased corruption. To obtain this title – but also, more simply, that of a priest – there was no hesitation in resorting to simony: the investment would then be recovered by imposing rates on religious celebrations or on the sacraments”; Giardina - Sabbatucci - Vidotto, 2018, p. 11: “Otto gave rise to a network of powerful feudal lordships entrusted not to the secular aristocracy but to bishops (the so-called bishop-counts). It was he himself who invested these with both temporal and spiritual powers”. For a concise explanation of the temporal powers of the bishops and the inappropriateness of the expression ‘bishop-counts’, see Sergi, 2001.

2. Do you remember if time was made for the study of the history of religion? Do you remember anything in particular in this regard?
3. In which subject did you deal with these issues?
4. Are there any historical-religious topics that you would have liked to study or explore further?
5. What history books did you study in secondary school? Do you remember if there were parts dedicated to the history of religion?
6. Is your perception of these topics studied in the history classes as being important or secondary themes?

Fifty-two completed questionnaires have arrived so far: it is only a small sample, which does not allow us to elaborate a general consideration, but it does nevertheless provide us with some interesting data that deserve to be considered at a later date.

There was an almost wholly unanimous perception of historical-religious themes in the textbooks used in secondary school and, more generally, in school history programmes as being accorded minor importance, and the question as to whether there were any historical-religious topics that the students would have liked to study or explore further in this period of school education saw a high number of positive responses (41 for, 11 against). Among the requests cited most insistently was that of a great focus on the historical aspect of religions, highlighting their influence on politics in the ancient as in the contemporary world. It is, after all, to history as a subject that this type of teaching is fundamentally entrusted in secondary schools. To the question "In which subject did you deal with these issues?", history appears 38 times, followed some way behind by religious education (also abbreviated as IRC, in Italian *insegnamento della religione cattolica*) with 13, Italian literature (11), philosophy (11), and foreign literature (6). The crucial role of the history textbooks in the transmission of historical-religious knowledge emerges clearly and it is from here that we must surely begin to work patiently to construct texts that are more up-to-date and more attuned to the requirements emerging from a multicultural and multireligious society.

4. *Analysed Textbooks*

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6. Curriculum vitae

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Religious history of France and public debate: The 'eternal return' of a polemic issue

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Abstract

Religious history of France and public debate: The 'eternal return' of a polemic issue. It is well known that religious history has long been a controversial topic in France, due to long-standing polemics about secularism and the relationship between the Churches and the State. But a consensus had finally emerged around two possible stories, one of liberal inspiration and the other marked by a Catholicism that was more critical of modernity. Since the end of the twentieth century, the conditions for this balance have changed, due to the emergence of Islam as the second religious denomination, and the resulting conflict over religious pluralism. Over the past twenty years, some Catholics, minority but visible, have also committed themselves against the new family and life policies. Debates on Islam, on the one hand, and gender policies, on the other, have thus revived controversies over France's religious history and its teaching in middle and high schools.

Keywords

Religious history; Church and State; Secularism; Public Education; Religious Pluralism.

Resumé

L'histoire religieuse en France et le débat public: l'"éternel retour" d'un enjeu polémique. On sait que l'histoire religieuse a longtemps fait l'objet de controverses en France, du fait de polémiques anciennes autour de la laïcité et de la relation entre les Eglises et l'Etat. Mais un consensus avait fini par se faire autour de deux histoires possibles, l'une d'inspiration libérale et l'autre marquée par un catholicisme plus critique à l'égard de la modernité. Depuis la fin du vingtième siècle, les conditions de cet équilibre ont changé, du fait de l'émergence de l'islam comme seconde confession religieuse, et du conflit sur le pluralisme religieux qui en a résulté. Durant les vingt dernières années, une partie des catholiques, minoritaires mais visibles, se sont par ailleurs engagés contre les nouvelles politiques de la famille et de la vie. Les débats sur l'islam, d'une part, et sur les politiques du genre, d'autre part, ont ainsi ravivé les controverses sur du l'histoire religieuse de la France et sur son enseignement dans les collèges et les lycées.

Mots-clés

Histoire religieuse; Eglise et Etat; Laïcité; Enseignement; Pluralisme religieux.

1. Bibliography. - 2. Curriculum vitae.

This contribution concerns the relationship between the French conception of Religious history, and the public debate about Religions and Politics. I will not directly speak about teaching the history of religion in French Public School, because Isabelle Saint-Martin proposes a contribution on this subject in the proceedings of this same conference. But I would like to propose some reflections about the political and cultural conditions in which teaching religious history is possible or not in France.

1. Before going any further, I must present one important issue of this debate, which is the question of secularism (in French: *laïcité*) as it arises in France (Mayeur, 1997; Baubérot, 2015; Portier, 2016). For a contemporary French historian, there is a basic distinction between secularism and secularization. Secularization is the process by which the different sectors of social activity, take their autonomy from the religious sphere that originally founded them. Secularization is therefore a social, cultural, anthropological phenomenon, and a plurisecular one, by which the religions comes to be less and less relevant for explaining collective behaviors and social attitudes. Secularism is a political and a legal process, in which we strictly separate the religious sphere and the political one, since the 1905 Law about separation of Church and State. Secularization started in the Middle Ages, while secularism is a consequence of the Revolution of 1789.

So, secularism and secularization are two different things, even if we can understand how French secularism reinforced the process of secularization. Practically, regarding the public education system and the teaching of religious history, the combination of both has important consequences. For a long time, pupils, children, young persons acquired a religious culture in their family, or in their Church, with catechism and religious education. This religious culture was a background for understanding certain parts of general history, like history of the Reformation, history of arts, history of the Enlightenment movement, etc. Due to the secularization, this background gradually disappeared during the second half of the twentieth century, and it has become necessary for secondary school teachers to form their pupils to 'religious facts'. But, due to the secularism, it is very difficult for them to define how they can go "teaching about the religions", and about religious history, without doing a properly "religious teaching" (Béraud - Willaime, 2009).

In the late 1980s a second issue went in the public debate, related to the fact that Islam had become the second religious denomination in France. The famous "case of the Islamic veil" came in 1989 in a secondary school seated in

Creil, a medium-sized city in the Paris region. This case should conduct to the Act of 15 March 2004 prohibiting the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in State schools (Pelletier, 2005, pp. 159-176). In this perspective, for secondary school teachers, the issue became to understand how it was still possible to promote a secular teaching of religion history in schools where the question of religious belonging began to create difficulties and tensions. On February 2002, a few months after the September 11 attacks, Regis Debray published an official report about teaching religious facts in public education schools (Debray, 2002). A few months later, Regis Debray created the European Institute for Religious sciences (IESR), with the official support of president Chirac.

All these facts explain the role of several French scholars, and several French academics, strongly engaged both in religious sciences and in the public debate about Religion and Politics. And it also explains the importance of certain books, certain synthesis about religious French history, which are written by academics, but which 'cross the border' between the Academic World and the Public sphere of free debate, as would say Jürgen Habermas.

These books, not so plentiful, are my main topic in this paper. What I want to analyze now is the fact that these books, since a couple of decades, are no more historical books. We have in France philosophers and anthropologists who 'cross the border', as Marcel Gauchet, Michel Onfray, Rémy Brague or Regis Debray himself. But no more historians, and this is the main issue I want to develop now.

The last great synthesis about French religious history have been published during the eighties and the nineties of 20th Century. We can quote two main publications. First is: Rémond - le Goff, 1988-1992. René Rémond (1918-2007) was a very well-known French scholar (Mercier, 2018). He was an academic historian of Catholicism, and a specialist of Political Sciences. He also was known as a Catholic scholar, with a strong engagement in the public debate about Religions and Politics. Jacques Le Goff (1924-2014) was a medievalist, a member of the *École des Annales*, and the founder of the *École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences sociales* in 1974 (Pelletier, 2018, pp. 117-124). He was not really a specialist of religious history, but rather a social historian. But, as a medievalist, he worked on a Christian society and a Christian conception of politics.

The four volumes of *Histoire de la France religieuse* were a publishing success, with a pocket edition published at the end of the nineties. They proposed to a broad public a liberal history of religion, and an academic one, really 'secular', that means that the different authors (there were about 12 authors for the four volumes) presented religious history of France, but without taking any personal position concerning the debates and discussions internal to the Catholic church,

or Protestant churches, or Jewish world. Nevertheless, maybe should we say that they adopted a political position: Le Goff was a secularist scholar, and René Rémond a liberal Catholic, and so we can see that the French model of Secularism coincides with a liberal position, promoting individual freedom and promoting a conception of Religion which highlights the primacy of individual consciousness over religious obligations.

The second great synthesis is a little different from the former one: Cholvy - Hilaire, 1986-1988. It counts three volumes, for a contemporaneous history of religions in France (since the French Revolution), written by two academics: Gerard Cholvy (1932-2017) was a professor at the University of Montpellier, and Yves-Marie Hilaire (1927-2014) a professor at the University of Lille. The three volumes were also a publishing success – with a semi-pocket edition – and a series of books which was well known among catholic activists, catholic militants. But, unlike previous authors, Cholvy and Hilaire were adopting positions about internal religious debates. For taking some examples: they were critic about the French model of secularism and about the strict separation between Church and State. They were also critic about the French model of Catholic Action, and about the French experience of worker-priests and Workers Mission. And they were very critic about the way in which the second Council of Vatican has been implemented in France.

Stated bluntly, the history of René Rémond and Jacques Le Goff was a little more leftist than the history of Cholvy and Hilaire. But the difference between both synthesis was interesting for each reader, because, in a certain way, it reflected something of the French debate about the place of Christianity in Modern France, and about the internal discussion between catholic believers. And so, there was something as a *consensus* concerning these two ways of telling the history of Religious France. French readers could not agree about all the details of one or the other synthesis, but they agreed about the general framework. And this consensus was sufficient to fuel and alimnt the public debate about religion and politics, religions and democracy.

We have no more history like this one since 2000. I mean that we have no more historical synthesis able to cross the frontier between Academic world and the public sphere, and able to make a consensus about a general framework. This is the main topic of the second part of my article.

2. In fact, the alone popular synthesis, published since 2000, about religious history of France, has been the book edited by Corbin (2007), which really was a publishing success. Alain Corbin was born in 1936. He is a social historian, very well known in France for his seminar researches in history of sensibility, history of senses (sense of vision, sense of hearing, sense of smell, sense of taste), and history of mentalities. He received a catholic education and his book, which is

subtitled *Pour comprendre l'histoire de notre temps* (To understand our present history) is carried along by a nostalgic conception of ancient Catholicism. Something as “the world we have lost”, for paraphrasing the title of the famous book of the English historian Peter Laslett in 1965 (Laslett, 1965). Such a book (which is a very interesting book, there is no doubt about this) makes a consensus, but a consensus without any real contemporaneous issue, except the nostalgia of the past.

Yet, of course, we have in France some debates, and strong debates, about the relationship between religions and politics, between religions and democracy, between religions and individual freedom, in a double context: 1. International terrorism, the terrorist attacks of 2015 against Charlie Hebdo and against the Bataclan Concert Hall, and their consequences (Pelletier, 2018b); and 2. The polemics about the 2013 “Mariage pour tous” Act, that is the marriage for persons of the same sex and question of LGBT parenting. One French singularity, compared to our European neighbors, has been the strength, the intensity of the polemics about the “mariage pour tous”, and, more generally, about all that concerns politics of gender and politics of life (euthanasia, medically assisted procreation, bioethics more generally) (Béraud -Portier, 2015; Raison du Cleuziou, 2019). And of course the Catholic culture, and the Catholic Church, plays a central role in all these controversies. But in these debates, Religious history has no more place. In such debates, we mainly listen to political activist, religious believers, sociologists, philosophers and lawyers. But it has become hard to make the voice of historians heard, just as if the passing of religious history would make it no relevant for understanding the present issue about the relationship between religion and democracy, religion and modernity.

In order to explain this fact, I would like to focus on what I have called, in a recent paper, “the paradoxical religious pluralism of the French society” (Pelletier, 2017, pp. 395-410). As you know, historically, France is a Catholic country. In 1962, 85% of French interviewed persons still declared that they were Catholics. This past heritage had an impact on the way in which we considered the religious history of France. This history is primarily a history of Catholicism. Judaism and Protestantism appear as two little minorities, and two persecuted minorities: persecutions against protestants during the 17th century; persecutions against Jews, and antisemitism, with the Dreyfus affair and, of course, with the Vichy Regime (1940-1944) and its responsibility in Holocaust. And Islam just appears as a religion of colonized peoples, in Saharan and sub-saharan Africa.

Everything changed during the last decades. When you read newspapers today, when you go on the digital medias, you can see that the French society

now defines itself as a multi faith and multidenominational society, with a second religious denomination which is, nowadays and since the eighties, Islam. As historians or sociologists, we can confirm this fact. However, this situation needs to be analyzed thoroughly.

On one hand, during the last years, the persons who define themselves as Catholics still represent about 50% of French population: between 45 and 55%, depending on the way in which the question is asked. And persons who define themselves as unbelievers, or undenominational, represent about 40% (between 35 and 45%). In fact, statistically, our religious diversity concerns only 10% of the population (Muslims, Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, Orthodox persons). That means that French society remains massively dominated by the past heritage of a face-to-face between Catholics and Unbelievers, which is the historical basis of our contemporaneous history.

But, on the other hand, when you asked people if they have a religious practice, the situation is different. Only 8% of Catholic people regularly go to Mass (regularly, that is one time a month): 8% of 50%, which is 4% of the French population. But 40% of Muslim persons pray each day and regularly frequent Mosque: 40% of 6% is a little less than 3% of the French population. 4% on one hand, 3% on the other hand: figures are comparable, almost similar.

What is important, in order to understand the French situation regarding the religious diversity, is the fact that our current religious diversity concerns religious practice more than religious belonging. A majority denomination, Catholicism, with a low level of practice, coexists with a minority denomination, Islam, with a high level of practice.

As historians of Religious facts, we can explain this difference. We can explain that modern Catholicism and modern Islam do not give the same place to collective practices. In the same order of ideas, we know that more than 70% of Muslim believers observe the Ramadan, while less of 10% of Christian believers observe the Christian Lent. We can also understand that religious practices, for a minority, and a socially dominated minority, can be a way to get included in common society. But as a historian of politics, we must also observe that religious practices are visible, and that religions belonging is not.

Indeed, we live in societies of visibility: modern, or post-modern societies, are societies of visibility, societies where the question of visibility, and mainly the visibility of minorities, has become a central political issue. And, indeed, the recent French Religious crises are crises of visibility: the case of Islamic veil is an issue of visibility; the question of Muslim prayers in the street is a question of visibility, in a society which is secularized, but a society which, in the same time, considers that Catholicism is an important part of its historical heritage, of its historical identity (Dumons - Gugelot, 2017).

A short tale will illustrate this topic. In June 2015, Dalil Boubakeur, the Rector of the Paris Mosque, declared on a radio that, due to the fact that in many places it was difficult for Muslim believers to have a building for collective prayer, and due to the fact that in many places Churches were empty, maybe the Catholic Church could lend some church buildings to Muslims. In the following hours, he declared that it was not a specific demand; he apologized for such a reckless declaration; he explained that it was idle talk. But it was too late. He had launched a polemic. And, in July, the magazine *Valeurs actuelles*, which is politically situated between right and extreme right, started an online petition, for “saving the French steeples” (“Ne touchez pas à nos Eglises”, 2015). Several thousands of persons signed the petition, and of course not only, not firstly, practicing Catholics or even Catholics by belonging. In fact, this was not a religious issue, but an identity issue, just as if the French society should have needed Catholic steeples, Catholic churches, not for praying, but because they are a part the identity landscape of a society which however defines itself as a secular and secularized society.

We can now come back to our first topic: how writing synthesis about Religion history in France has become difficult and maybe impossible for several years? I will conclude this short paper with three answers.

1. For a long time, since the beginning of the twentieth century, Religious history could be controversial, but always on the basis of a consensual background and within a sort of consensual framework. This is not anymore the case today. This relative consensus has disappeared. Traditionally, the discussion between Catholics and Secularists about this history concerned the way in which we had built a modern and secularized democracy. As French Catholicism has always been pluralist, there were different ways for telling the same history, but it was with the same global framework: something that we called “la guerre des deux France”, the war between two France, the catholic one and the secularist one.

2. During the two last decades, when Islam became the second French religious denomination, and when politics of life, politics of gender, became a huge issue of controversies and polemics, a second split line, a second dividing line has come to complicate the first one. This second front line separates, on one hand, persons, Catholics and non-Catholics, believers and unbelievers, who have a liberal conception of politics, who accept the new role of Islam in the French society and who agree with the new politics of life, and, on the other hand, persons, Catholics and non-Catholics, who consider that the Catholic heritage of moral and political values is part of our collective identity. These persons, believers or non-believers, think that the politics of life, and the rise of Islam as the second French religious denomination (and for them, maybe one

day the first one) are a danger. Their conception of the religious past of France has become a patrimonial conception, and not only an historical one.

3. In such a situation, it becomes more difficult for academic historians to propose a common framework for Religious history of France. It becomes more and more difficult for teachers, in secondary public school, to speak about history of religions. I am not sure that this situation would be specific to France. But I am sure that a program like *REIRES*, for all the reasons that I have just mentioned and explained, can play a civic role in Europa today, and not only a scientific one, by crossing scientific research in Religion studies and history with a strong reflection about the relationship between religious diversity and European citizenship.

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2. Curriculum vitae

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The religious fact between society and politics in the Italian Modern and Contemporary history textbooks

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Abstract

This contribution analyses the approach of the Italian Modern and Contemporary history textbooks, adopted within university programs, toward the religious fact, considered through its bonds with political, social and cultural phenomena. In this bonds is set up the base for the religious fact's resilience in 'modernity': in the legitimacy that religious fact provides both to the principle of authority and to the resistance to any political and cultural power; in the aggregating or disruptive effect generated by religious identity and allegiance both in global and local politics.

Keywords

Religious fact; History textbooks; Modern history; Contemporary history.

Riassunto

L'intervento analizza l'approccio della manualistica universitaria di argomento storico moderno e contemporaneo al fatto religioso, considerato soprattutto nel suo intreccio con fenomeni di lunga durata, politici, sociali, culturali. Proprio attraverso l'inscindibile legame con tali fenomeni il fatto religioso pone le basi della sua resilienza nella modernità: attraverso cioè la legittimazione che esso conferisce al principio di autorità così come alla resistenza ad ogni potere, politico o culturale, quale fattore di unità o movente al conflitto nella politica, in senso lato, locale e globale.

Parole chiave

Fatto religioso; Manuali di storia; Storia moderna; Storia contemporanea.

1. Bibliography. - 2. Curriculum vitae

In my contribution I will examine some of the textbooks currently in use within the programs of Modern and Contemporary history in Italian universities, as a limited but representative sample of the relationship between academic research and history teaching between 1998 and 2018. A time frame that registers a renewed interest in a wider and deeper comprehension of the

religious fact – as a tool for building a society that is actually and not only theoretically pluralist –, under the impulse coming both from the radicalization of conflicts with a confessional background, and from current migratory pressures on Western Europe.

It is well known indeed that any history textbook – especially those conceived for and adopted by primary, secondary, or high schools, and by universities as well to some extent – is the outcome of different factors, only partly concerning historical research or methodology. Among them: ministerial guidelines, especially those regarding a shared approach to religious fact, and more generally the inputs provided by general political orientations¹; the main textbooks publishers' marketing policies; the research background of the authors, of course. As a part of a research in progress, this contribution's aim is to provide a general analysis of the considered textbooks' contents regarding religious fact in history, in order to elaborate some guidelines by which further sources could be analysed and interpreted in the future.

Accordingly to consolidated guidelines² in Italian scientific historiography, all the considered textbooks seem to take note of the link between the more or less widespread diffusion of religious doctrines and the ability of these to satisfy individual need for spiritual values, but also to provide or defend collective identities (Casula, 1997, p. 554): as a consequence, the religious fact is above all considered in its mutual refractions with the political and cultural data³.

In Modern history textbooks such a tendency is marked even by the time frame considered by this academic discipline – opening with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, the discovery of the Americas (with its strong religious repercussions) and the Protestant Reformation (Bizzocchi, 1998, p. 4) – and is reflected by the evidence given to some thematic lines: from a political point of view, the religious foundation of the contrast between the principle of

¹ About this matter, the case of France has certainly been the most studied in detail and from many points of view, as documented by the contributions collected in Avon - Saint-Martin - Tolan, 2018.

² About Modern age historiography's methodology with respect to religious fact, Giuseppe Galasso (2008, p. 54) has observed that "Accanto ai fattori politici, economici, etc. (...), altri fattori intervennero ugualmente nel determinare il panorama storico da tenere presente nel discutere degli inizi dell'età moderna: fattori che potrebbero essere definiti immateriali per la loro specifica natura, ma che, comunque, nel contesto del quale parliamo, agirono in stretta connessione con tutti gli altri, a cominciare da quelli politici, sicché è in tale connessione che bisogna considerarli. In prima linea tra questi fattori fu certamente quello religioso".

³ Girolamo Imbruglia (1998, p. 26) has observed that "il nesso strettissimo tra religione, politica ed economia è al cuore di tutte le trasformazioni del Cinquecento europeo".

authority and the right to resist oppression⁴; from a cultural point of view, the equally religious foundation of antagonism between tradition and free thought, which in the considered texts appears to be one of the distinguishing features of 'modernity' as a great 'conceptual container' (Bizzocchi 1998, p. 6).

It is worth pointing out that, at least in Modern history textbooks, the distinction between the Christian religiosity of elites more or less mobilized by ideological afflatus, the religiosity of the popular masses, and the voices of the 'institutions', in the broadest sense (from the Catholic Church to the great reformers), is often made explicit (Musi, 2003, p. 81; Rosa - Verga, 2003, p. 181; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, pp. 91-94): in fact this distinction is barely mentioned in the Contemporary history textbooks and is hardly ever explicit in reference to other faiths, and in particular to Islam.

The main, although certainly not unique, touchstone for evaluating a Modern history textbook's attitude toward the religious fact is the way it deals with events and phenomena included in the long time frame which, from the late 15th century aspirations to the Church's *renovatio* (Peyronel Rambaldi, 1998, p. 49) – passing through the breakdown of the confessional unity in Europe in the mid-sixteenth century and the religious conflicts in Germany, France, Holland and England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries –, ended with the peace of Westphalia in the European Continent and, in Great Britain, with the Glorious revolution.

In the considered textbooks, ritual and cultic contents of the Christian religious fact in the sixteenth and seventeenth century are normally overlooked. Exceptions: the synthetic but effective overview, contained in the volume by Mario Rosa and Marcello Verga, on the correlation between demographic cataclysms and crisis of the fourteenth century, on the one hand, and the sense of prayer and rituals as instruments of protection, on the other⁵; the detailed explanation, in the volume by Renata Ago and Vittorio Vidotto, of the linkages between late medieval financial business and the perception of the "Tesoro della Chiesa" (Treasury of the Church) as the credit acquired by Christ before the Father through crucifixion: a credit transferred to a suffering and sinful mankind by will of Christ himself and administered, as it were, by the Catholic Church through the granting of indulgences⁶.

⁴ Peyronel Rambaldi, 1998, pp. 56-57, 60-61, 67 and 75; Musi, 2003, pp. 61-62 and 103-104; Rosa - Verga, 2003, pp. 4 and 17; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, pp. 81-82 and 87, 177; Benigno, 2009, pp. 26-27, 34 and 113-116; Capra, 2016, pp. 47, 55-56 and 121, 270.

⁵ Rosa - Verga, 2003, p. 166. On the same issue, see also Peyronel Rambaldi, 1998, p. 51.

⁶ Ago - Vidotto, 2005, p. 36; on the same issue, see also Rosa - Verga, 2003, pp. 168-169; Benigno, 2009, pp. 69-70.

Regardless of the ecclesiological and theological contents within the dispute between reformers and the Catholic Church (generally explained in detail), the sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century religious fact – and in particular the impact of the spread of Calvinist creed and even more radical forms of religious non-conformism – is nevertheless considered above all as a factor of mobilization to political participation, acting as a catalyst in contexts of political, indeed, and social conflict, engendered however by circumstances of a different nature: the widespread discontentment resulting from the proletarianization of the peasant masses in Germany at the end of the fifteenth and in early sixteenth centuries; the frictions between the papal Curia's fiscal claims and the ambitions to the centralization of imperial authority, on the one hand, and the aspirations for autonomy and expansion of the German princes, on the other; the resistances to the progress of power's centralization in France and in the Habsburg Netherlands, along with unfavourable economic conjunctures⁷.

A special case is the presentation of the Reformation in England, from Henry VIII Tudor's schism up to the Glorious revolution. Here, facts and phenomena's exposition appears deeply influenced by a centuries-old tradition of studies, within which the religious element acquires an autonomous role, but always in the indissoluble link to the main themes of the 'great' government policy and the micro-politics of non-conformists groups, in which religious instances overlap with the social ones, transmitting to the faithful the sense of a personal election that invests the political participation with an ethical, messianic, revolutionary function. The aftermaths of this political and indeed religious struggle in the social setting and political life of the Anglo-Saxon colonies in America are often underlined. It is important to point it out, also because in the considered Modern and Contemporary history textbooks, references to the religious fact in North America and to its overwhelming influence on US politics and society are limited to these and a few other indications⁸.

⁷ Benigno, 1998, pp. 278-284; Fasano, 1998, p. 329; Fragnito, 1998, pp. 125-126, 140-141, 145 and 147; Peyronel Rambaldi, 1998, pp. 53, 58, 62-64 and 66-67; Musi, 2003, pp. 68, 82, 90-96, 101, 129-131 and 147; Rosa - Verga, 2003, pp. 171 and 174; Ago - Vidotto, 2005, pp. 42 and 89-90; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, pp. 22, 71-73, 74-76, 83-84 and 180-181; Benigno, 2009, pp. 71-72, 74-79, 111 and 118-119; Capra, 2016, pp. 115, 118-119, 148-149 and 152-153.

⁸ Soldani, 1997, p. 59; Abbattista, 1998, pp. 528 and 533; Benigno, 1998, pp. 286, 287, 289-292, 295-297, 299-300 and 302-305; Peyronel Rambaldi, 1998, pp. 68-70; Della Peruta, 2000a, p. 54; Musi, 2003, pp. 103, 223-225, 233 and 381-384; Ago - Vidotto, 2005, pp. 267, 115, 116, 117-118 and 122; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, pp. 84-86, 273-275, 279, 280, 281, 284 and 288; Benigno, 2009, pp. 80-81, 109, 175-176, 178, 179, 180-181, 185-187 and 306; Capra, 2016, pp. 107, 122, 179-180, 183, 185, 187, 239-240 and 329-332; Caracciolo - Rocucci, 2017, p. 35.

Some broad views on the reformed groups in Italy – often elitist circles of intellectuals – seem to confirm the centrality of powers’ setting in determining new doctrines’ success or failure: in the absence of favourable economic and political conditions, ‘heresy’ can be easily eradicated, despite the moral strength and depth of the message by reformers such as Gasparo Contarini, Bernardino Ochino, Lelio and Fausto Sozzini, whose influences on Western thought – respect for all faiths, rejection of dogmatism and affirmation of free will – are remarked in several texts⁹. Also highlighted are the political dynamics conditioning the Council of Trent’s sessions and also the application of the resulting deliberations¹⁰.

From a cultural point of view, the late XV and XVI century aspiration to both Church and Christian life’s renewal through the return to the origins leads to the recourse to philological science, as a tool for a critical approach to sacred texts by humanists such as Erasmus from Rotterdam. His Greek edition of the New Testament is considered by textbooks in the framework of a project of regeneration of Christianity, through a rediscovered – and above all interior – spirituality, experiencing tolerance, respect for diversity, temperance in outward manifestations of the cult, moralization of the priestly life and a ‘natural’ religiosity, nourished by a ‘systematic doubt’, which eventually proved to be fatal for the tradition of the *auctoritas*¹¹.

On the whole, the religious fact’s pervasive influence on the mentality and on the representations of reality (Capra, 2016, p. 53) is remarked by grasping its ambivalent outcomes. The religious fact therefore appears to be an unavoidable source of inspiration for the predatory claims of the Christian West toward the rest of the world, as well as for the defence of the ‘other’ from a cultural and political point of view, for an open minded approach to the ‘other’ and sometimes even for the assimilation of his customs; to impose the divine origin of sovereignty, as well as to set limits to public authority, or to claim the contractual nature of political power; for increasing female subordination, as well as for the free choice in marriage unions and mutual agreement within relations between spouses; for the passive acceptance of Revelation, as well as for the development of critical conscience and free thought; for the defence of the tradition feeding the mass devotion through the sumptuousness of the cult,

⁹ Fragnito, 1998, p. 134; Peyronel Rambaldi, 1998, pp. 70-74; Musi, 2003, pp. 104-105 and 173; Rosa - Verga, 2003, pp. 176-177; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, pp. 78, 82, 89-91 and 200; Benigno, 2009, pp. 67-68 and 227-228; Capra, 2016, pp. 132 and 135.

¹⁰ Fragnito, 1998, pp. 127 and 129; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, pp. 201-207; Benigno, 2009, pp. 93-97 and 101-102.

¹¹ Bizzocchi, 1998, pp. 10-12; Peyronel Rambaldi, 1998, pp. 51-52; Musi, 2003, pp. 82 and 89-90; Rosa - Verga, 2003, pp. 167-168; Ago - Vidotto, 2005, pp. 142-143; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, pp. 59 and 62-63; Benigno, 2009, pp. 55-56 and 68; Capra, 2016, pp. 111-112.

as well as for the reconciliation between faith and 'reason' that achieves a more conscious and internalized spirituality. Accordingly, Jansenist movement's contribution to the Enlightenment thought is quiet often remarked, as well as the influence of Muratori's Catholicism on Italian Enlightenment: this secular effort for a renewal from inside – setting religion in synchrony with society and overcoming the confessional fractures – will eventually fill with religious content the anti-curial reforms of the enlightened despots, from the emperor Joseph II to Pietro Leopoldo of Tuscany¹².

But the considered textbooks clarify also the elitist character of these claims, compared to the mass of the faithful's sentimental and heavily exteriorized approach to devotion, as widely spread by the Counter-reformation: the very mass of the faithful that answered with a revolt to the deliberations – inspired by Jansenism – of the synod of Pistoia in 1786, and that greeted with sympathy Pope Pius VI, traveling to Vienna in 1782 in order to halt emperor Joseph II of Habsburg's reformation projects. In this regard, several of the textbooks considered underline the discontent of the French peasant populations engendered by revolutionary de-Christianization and the importance of the Concordat with the Holy See (1801) in enlarging the basis of consensus to the Napoleonic regime. Clear evidence is therefore given to the resilience of the French lower classes' adherence to Catholicism, even in the most radical phase of the revolutionary process, and in spite of the progressive secularization of the French elites¹³.

Given the recognition of the pervasive nature of the religious fact in the Catholic and Protestant West (including North of America) societies, it grows even more evident – in Modern history as well as in Contemporary history textbooks – the lack of interest in the rest of the Christian world and in all polytheistic confessions¹⁴: rarely remarked are, for instance, the influences on Latin American societies of a unique syncretistic Catholicism – characterized by

¹² Bizzocchi, 1998, p. 15; Chiosi, 1998, pp. 461, 469 and 479; Fasano, 1998, pp. 316, 317 and 319-321; Fragnito, 1998, p. 139; Imbruglia, 1998, pp. 35-36; Pagano, 1998, pp. 430 and 434-437; Pasta, 1998, pp. 489, 493, 511 and 516-517; Ortu, 1998, p. 391; Della Peruta, 2000a, p. 141; Musi, 2003, pp. 7-8, 15, 20-21, 23-24, 248-249, 272-273, 281-282 and 285; Rosa - Verga, 2003, pp. 23, 42, 183, 185-187 and 189; Ago - Vidotto, 2005, pp. 46-47, 136, 148, 179-180 and 235; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, pp. 50, 51, 52, 54-55, 87-88, 151-152, 154, 224 and 326-327; Benigno, 2009, pp. 50, 144-145 and 224, 232; Capra, 2016, pp. 41-42, 103-105, 232, 274-275, 296, 305, 317, 323, 430 and 433-435.

¹³ Bizzocchi, 1998, pp. 17 and 21; Caffiero, 1998, pp. 583-600; Musi, 2003, pp. 90, 426; Rosa - Verga, 2003, pp. 189-190; Ago - Vidotto, 2005, pp. 210-211 and 246; Benigno, 2009, p. 332; Capra, 2016, pp. 325, 343, 353, 362-363, 379 and 384.

¹⁴ Some observations about European contemporary Buddhism are available in Pace, 2009, pp. 340-341.

the resilience of pre-Columbian cults¹⁵ –, or the bond between religion and national or political identity in eastern Europe¹⁶, while the most of references about Judaism are functional to describe mainly the relationship between Jewish communities (sometimes tolerated and sometimes persecuted) and Christian majority¹⁷.

About Muslim world, a quite remarkable role is acknowledged to Ottoman Empire (whose political leadership was also recognized as the supreme authority of the Sunni Muslim religion, Musi, 2003, p. 39) and to its military aggressiveness in setting the path of a European self-consciousness that moves its first steps also through the negative ‘us-against-them’ dialectics¹⁸. Such a role appears to be the main motive of some articulated panoramas on the Ottoman government, able to co-opt those Christian elites willing to convert and to obtain consensus among the subjects of other faiths, through a tolerant attitude, a good administration of justice and a well-balanced fiscal regime. Very punctual are also the references to Shia Persia, to the complex religious geography of the tolerant Moghul empire and to the peaceful expansion of Islam in Africa and Asia along the routes of land and sea trade¹⁹. Usually overshadowed appears nonetheless the permeability of the religious and military frontier between the Christian and the Ottoman Mediterranean in the 16th and 17th centuries, with its huge cultural implications²⁰. Furthermore the references to multi-confessional realities such as the Polish-Lithuanian Confederation or the Moghul Empire usually seem to imply religious diversity as the main reason of political weakness²¹.

¹⁵ Quiet unique exception, the interest shown by Mario Rosa and Marcello Verga about this aspect of Catholic evangelization in Latin America “che, da una parte, ebbe la capacità di imporsi alle preesistenti credenze, ma, dall'altra, mantenne al proprio interno valori e culti autoctoni. Si svilupparono in tal modo devozioni e culti molto intensi, ma pieni di significati ambigui”, Rosa - Verga, 2003, p. 35. On the same issue, see also Imbruglia, 1998, p. 36.

¹⁶ Casula, 1997, pp. 563-564; Graziosi, 1997, pp. 204-205; Chiosi, 1998, pp. 474-475; Ago - Vidotto, 2005, pp. 157-158; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, p. 43; Capra, 2016, pp. 46, 156, 246 and 306-307.

¹⁷ Rosa - Verga, 2003, p. 182; Capra, 2016, p. 209; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 35-36.

¹⁸ Niccoli, 1998, pp. 107-108; Musi, 2003, pp. 125, 128-129, 156 and 158; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, p. 31; Benigno, 2009, pp. 22-23; Capra, 2016, p. 89.

¹⁹ Casula, 1997, p. 554; Pagano, 1998, p. 435; Musi, 2003, pp. 39 and 177-182; Ago - Vidotto, 2005, pp. 167-168; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, pp. 125-130 and 144-145; Benigno, 2009, p. 90; Capra, 2016, pp. 80-81 and 215-216; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, p. 28.

²⁰ Knapton, 1998, pp. 162-164; Musi, 2003, pp. 177 and 182; Pace, 2009, p. 340; Capra, 2016, p. 147; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 26-27.

²¹ Graziosi, 1997, pp. 207-208; Benigno, 1998, p. 287; Musi, 2003, pp. 127, 129, 224-225 and 359-360; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, pp. 42, 196; Benigno, 2009, pp. 108, 176; Capra, 2016, pp. 145, 155-156 and 241-242.

Considered Contemporary history textbooks also emphasize relationship between religious fact and politics. Despite some significant exceptions, the forms and contents of religious practice are normally marginalized²², while the references to the Christian faith, and especially to Catholic confession and its institutions, are overwhelmingly predominant (Casula, 1997, p. 549) according to two main thematic lines:

1) The mutual feedback and competition between Christianity and contemporary ideologies. 2) The attitude of the Catholic Church toward international politics – as well as to State regimes and global or local political movements – especially the Italian ones. This attitude is normally considered as the approach adopted by its top institutions, on the one hand, and by the people of the faithful, on the other²³.

About the first thematic line, the recourse to terms normally referring to the religious fact, in order to define the ideological systems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is quiet common. In the glossary of the collective volume published by Donzelli in 1997, the definition of “secolarizzazione” (secularization) associates religious faiths and political ideologies, marginalized by the disenchantment of modern life. More than that, political ideologies are depicted as “visioni del mondo, quasi delle fedi, che implicavano rigorose scelte di vita e anche rituali forme di appartenenza”²⁴ (*Storia contemporanea*, p. 651). Quiet remarkable is the frequent use of terms like “guerre di religione” (religious wars), to represent the ideological competition between opposing nationalisms and political views in the two world wars and during the post-war years (1919-1925 and 1945-1948) of the Italian political life: even Catholic Church’s anti-communist activity before 1948 political election is portrayed as a “crociata” (crusade)²⁵.

From the language of historiography to the forms and concepts of politics, the ideologies striving to inspire the masses – from the *Risorgimento* patriotism to the European and American protest movements in the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century – must borrow the fitting words from the language of faith and also propose their own rituals and sacred places for pilgrimages, their own catechism and martyrology: they also must imitate confessional groups in inspiring faith in the historical necessity of the revelation’s accomplishment, in presenting self-sacrifice as a path to eternity, and militancy as a source for

²² Remarkable exceptions in Casula, 1997, pp. 555-557, 559-561 and 565-568 and Pace, 2009, pp. 324-327, 331-333 and 338.

²³ Della Peruta, 2000b, p. 324; Banti, 2009, pp. 422-423; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, pp. 274-275 and 302; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 558, 559 and 653-656.

²⁴ About the same issue, see also Lanaro, 1997, p. 613.

²⁵ Mangiameli, 1997, p. 429; Colarizi, 2010, pp. 39-41; Barbagallo, 2016, pp. 167, 222 and 247.

moral regeneration, as a service requested to 'chosen' individuals in order to achieve a universal ideal of justice²⁶.

Thus if in the considered Modern history textbooks the Catholic Church's organization and ascendant exercised on the faithful appear as a model for the dynastic autocracies aiming to centralize government, the secular ideologies as described by Contemporary history textbooks seem to reproduce intent and forms of – and also placing itself often in competition with – religious confessions²⁷.

Concern about this matter is particularly evident in the textbook by Alberto Mario Banti – pointing out the sacralization of Stalin's power through the almost religious cult dedicated to Lenin²⁸ –, but also in Francesco Barbagallo's observations about political parties' organization between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Barbagallo, 2016, pp. 105, 107, 109). Referring to the relationship between religious faith and national identity, Lucio Caracciolo and Adriano Roccucci underline that the sense of belonging to a national community was

in grado di mobilitare sentimenti e passioni, di suscitare nella popolazione un senso di appartenenza, un'adesione non imposta o subita, ma partecipe, convinta. La nazione si prestava a sostituire efficacemente il legittimismo dinastico e le dottrine religiose dell'autorità al fine di rispondere all'esigenza del potere politico di trovare nuove forme di sacralizzazione²⁹.

These secular religions, starting from the positivist 'belief in progress', soon assume the same role already exercised by Christian faith – alongside it, however, but not substituting it – of a collective ideal way to utopia, and of a conceptual tool to justify the repression of non-conformism and the imposition of political domination on the 'other' from a cultural point of view, giving the

²⁶ Casula, 1997, p. 548; Graziosi, 1997, pp. 201-202, 211 and 215; Soldani, 1997, p. 60; Caffiero, 1998, p. 586; Della Peruta, 2000a, pp. 143-144, 288-289, 336 and 431; 2000b, p. 126; Rosa - Verga, 2003, pp. 213-214; Banti, 2009, pp. 9, 11-12, 99-100, 114-116 and 347; Pace, 2009, pp. 334 and 342; Colarizi, 2010, p. 89; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, pp. 89-90 and 144-145; Capra, 2016, pp. 409 and 449; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 313, 333-335, 422, 458 and 461. See also Romanelli, 1997, pp. 186-187; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 24 and 32.

²⁷ Caravale, 1998, pp. 82-83 and 90; Fasano, 1998, pp. 325-327; Fragnito, 1998, p. 134; Niccoli, 1998, p. 122; Verga, 1998, p. 361; Rosa - Verga, 2003, p. 165; Ago - Vidotto, 2005, p. 147; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, pp. 25, 29-30, 60, 122 and 313-314; Benigno, 2009, pp. 6-7, 36-37 and 222; Capra, 2016, pp. 46 and 231-232.

²⁸ Banti, 2009, pp. 59-63. About Bolshevism as a "versione deformata dell'antica idea messianica radicata nella cultura russa reinterpretata dal partito comunista", see also Banti, 1997, pp. 162 and 164-165; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 393-394.

²⁹ Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, p. 23; see also Soldani, 1997, p. 59.

white and Western man that new sense of his election to civilization of the planet that unfortunately also survives in current events³⁰.

About the second thematic line, it is confirmed the ambivalent outcomes resulting from Catholic Church's attitude toward modernity. This attitude's analysis necessarily takes into account the relationship, sometimes dichotomous, between an increasingly central and pre-eminent leading figure, the pope³¹ – proclaimed infallible in theological matter since 1870 – and a people of the faithful inevitably conditioned by elitist and mass cultural, social and political phenomena. Among these, particular evidence is granted to Liberalism³², target of the irrevocable condemnation in the encyclical *Mirari vos* (1832), but soon assumed by wide sectors of the Catholic upper classes in their own political culture, and in particular by those intellectual circles inspired by the Gioberti's *neo-guelfismo*, urging for an alliance between the Church and Liberalism itself³³.

Furthermore, the very refusal of modernity by catholic radicals is also pointed out as an impulse to correct the imbalances of modernity itself – especially those affecting lower classes (up to today's "scelta preferenziale per i poveri" (Casula, 1997, p. 557; Della Peruta, 2000b, p. 32) – and as a conceptual base for that privileged relationship between the Catholic Church and the masses whose importance and resilience are already evident in Modern history textbooks³⁴: a wide perspective that allows us to interpret, even in this case, the conceptual journey of Lamennais towards Christian liberalism – or socialism –, as well as the defense of the tradition by de Maistre; the *Syllabus of Errors* as well as the social contents of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*; the conservative corporatism as well as Romolo Murri's Catholic syndicalism; the condemnation of the Modernism movement's critical approach to Bible as well as the deep renewal expressed in the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council; the resilience of a strongly critical attitude towards socialist demands as well as the

³⁰ Bodei, 1997, p. 302; Casula, 1997, p. 558; Fumian - Lupo, 1997, pp. 22-23; Imbruglia, 1998, p. 46; Della Peruta, 2000a, pp. 315-319, 322-323, 325-326 and 434; Rosa - Verga, 2003, p. 216; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, pp. 80 and 398; Barbagallo, 2016, pp. 21-23 and 292-293; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 213, 242 and 402.

³¹ Della Peruta, 2000b, p. 325; Rosa - Verga, 2003, p. 191; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 36-37 and 214.

³² A far consequence of the Reformation, according to Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, p. 16, and Capra, 2016, p. 402.

³³ Fumian - Lupo, 1997, pp. 24-25; Romanelli, 1997, p. 185; Soldani, 1997, pp. 58-60; Della Peruta, 2000a, pp. 127, 147-148 and 151-153; Rosa - Verga, 2003, p. 191; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, p. 273; Capra, 2016, p. 446; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 94-95.

³⁴ Romanelli, 1997, pp. 185-186; Della Peruta, 2000a, pp. 53-54, 267-268, 370, 404-405 and 422-423; Barbagallo, 2016, pp. 68-69 and 80; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 252-253 and 255.

Cattolicesimo del dissenso, merged in the Italian experience of “preti operai” (workmen priests) in 1960s and 1970s and in the Latin American Liberation Theology³⁵.

In other situations the dialectic between the top and the base of the Catholic world takes on even more complex connotations. That is the case of the Great War – condemned as “inutile strage” (useless slaughter) by the head of a Church whose most eminent ministers blessed their own countries’ armies³⁶ – and the controversial Catholic relationship with the fascist regime: a relationship certainly well expressed by the Lateran Pacts, but also by the stubborn resistance to the assimilation in the cult of the Duce and the Party opposed by those sectors of associated Catholics (mainly the Catholic Action) that will provide a substantial part of the future Italian Republic’s political staff, granting Catholicism a significant influence on the Italian institutions and society of the twentieth century³⁷.

Among the main consequences of this influence considered textbooks mention: traces in the constitutional charter of the basic principles of Christian Personalism; the social influence of Christian associations not directly involved in government or electoral competitions, further increased after the breakdown of Catholics’ political unity, with the dissolution of the *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democracy Party) in 1994; a welfare setting – mainly focused on the redistributive and supportive role of the family – which strongly penalizes any individual who is not male and head of the family, in fact. Influence that has nevertheless found a limit in the fairly liquid character of the adhesions of Christians, more believers than faithful, to the directives from above, within an ‘international market of faiths’ now strongly liberalized and open to a strong competition³⁸.

Thus we can assume that a long tradition of studies about the history of Christianity has consolidated the due ability to highlight nuances, even within

³⁵ Crainz, 1997, pp. 513-516; Fumian - Lupo, 1997, pp. 30-32; Romanelli, 1997, p. 192; Soldani, 1997, pp. 46, 55, 56 and 58-59; Della Peruta, 2000a, pp. 8-9, 106 281-283 and 448-449; 2000b, pp. 68-69 and 325; Rosa - Verga, 2003, p. 215; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, pp. 14-16, 273 and 276; Barbagallo, 2016, pp. 110-111; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 162-166.

³⁶ Isnenghi, 1997, pp. 325, 334 and 337; Della Peruta, 2000b, pp. 28-29; Banti, 2009, pp. 9 and 13-14.

³⁷ Crainz, 1997, pp. 501-502; Lupo, 1997, pp. 370, 379 and 381; Della Peruta, 2000b, pp. 56-57, 86-87, 90 and 323; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, pp. 145-147; Barbagallo, 2016, p. 211; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 419-421.

³⁸ Casula, 1997, pp. 548 and 568; Gribaudo, 1997, p. 582; Soldani, 1997, p. 59; Della Peruta, 2000b, pp. 324-325, 380, 383-384 and 439-440; Banti, 2009, pp. 274, 421 and 424; Pace, 2009, pp. 328 and 335-336; Colarizi, 2010, pp. 120, 154, 182-183 and 222-223; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, p. 284; Barbagallo, 2016, pp. 220-221; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, p. 34.

an exposition of fundamentals that must be general, although not generic: the outcomes of this path will have to be exploited in our interpretation of the history of Islam and other religions, to build a truly pluralist perspective on the social and religious components of our present and future society.

In the considered textbooks, in fact, Muslim religion unquestionably appears to be a strong element of political cohesion well before the twentieth century – starting from the Islamic expansion in West Africa during the early nineteenth century, with the creation of a strong State, the Sokoto Caliphate³⁹ – and later – often hybridized with or adapted to political ideologies imported from the West (Della Peruta, 2000b, p. 450; Banti, 2009, pp. 119, 280, 287) – a powerful unifying factor of the varied resistance to colonial penetration and to economic and cultural globalization⁴⁰.

Islam, like Christianity, also provides languages and ways of expression to basically social and national claims, such as the Palestinian cause⁴¹. Even Muslim societies appear to be engaged in a problematic dialogue with ‘modernity’ and with the offspring of a Western-based secularization. But the dynamics of this ‘dialogue’ and its influences on interior and foreign politics are analyzed in detail almost exclusively in the case of the Ottoman Empire. Here, nineteenth century attempts to reform eventually opened the path to the secular and nationalist leadership of the Young Turks, and to their effort to level on a national basis a traditionally multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society: significantly, the considered textbooks usually charge these nationalist instance with inspiring those who planned the infamous Armenian genocide and the violent (and reciprocal) ethnic cleansing against the Greek-Anatolian communities (1919-1922)⁴².

With the fall of the Caliphate of Constantinople and the end of Sunni world’s united leadership, the identity problem of Muslims rises to a global importance (Banti, 2009, p. 132), encouraging the popular struggle against the colonial invader in the name of faith – as in the case of Muslim India (Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, p. 576) – , or on the contrary, the friendly economic and political cooperation with Western powers, as in the case of the Sunni monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula.

³⁹ Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, p. 77; Capra, 2016, p. 430; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, p. 35.

⁴⁰ Bodei, 1997, pp. 303-305; Della Peruta, 2000b, p. 273; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, pp. 399-400; Barbagallo, 2016, p. 322.

⁴¹ Casula, 1997, p. 555; Di Nolfo, 1997, pp. 527-546: 545; Banti, 2009, pp. 139-140 and 290; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, p. 301; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 606-607.

⁴² Graziosi, 1997, pp. 204-206, 223 and 225-226; Della Peruta, 2000a, pp. 69 and 355-356; Ago - Vidotto, 2005, pp. 166-167; Banti, 2009, p. 36; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, pp. 58-59 and 125-127; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 179-182.

But the future of the new States – raising from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire and becoming independent from Western political, but not economic, control (Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, pp. 257, 314) – in the considered textbooks appears to be overwhelmingly conditioned by a rigidly dichotomous alternative: that between laical regimes ruled by the military – committed to a forced modernization, sometimes inspired by a vague sort of socialism, but always paternalistic and authoritarian – and fundamentalist regimes, hostages of those religious figures able to build a mass political front by welding discontent for the forced secularization of customs to popular protest against authoritarianism and widespread resentment about their own countries' economic and political dependence from the Western powers⁴³. From this very dichotomy the reader gets the impression that there is little space for intermediate solutions, barely mentioned as weak and pursued just by minorities⁴⁴.

Furthermore, terms like *ulama*, *imam*, *ayatollah*, Koranic schools etc. are used properly but in many cases without finding adequate and understandable determination⁴⁵: one wonders how could be interpreted, for example, the religious history of the Christian West and understood its reflections on society, culture and politics, without explaining the difference between the regular clergy and the secular clergy⁴⁶, the relationship between the charisma of the priest and that of the bishop, the debate about Pope's prerogatives opposite to those of ecumenical council (Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, p. 59). The absence within Islam of hierarchies similar to the Catholic ones and the substantial differences in matter of charisma between an *imam*, an *ulama*, or a *mufti*, on the one hand, and a catholic priest, on the other (Della Peruta, 2000b, p. 325), rather than simplifying, complicates the process of interpreting a reality uniting in different forms a wide base of believers.

About the theological and ecclesiological contents of the Muslim faith, as we have said, very little is explained: one would say that – within textbook expositions increasingly settled on specific issues and problems, rather than on chronological narration – focusing on Islam appears above all an answer to the urgent problems posed by the spread of Islamic fundamentalism (Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, pp. 394-395) (more or less consciously, in some texts, identified as quintessential fundamentalism (Di Nolfo, 1997, p. 545; Banti, 2009,

⁴³ Della Peruta, 2000b, pp. 280 and 291; Banti, 2009, pp. 136, 354 and 356-357; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, pp. 400-401; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 609-611.

⁴⁴ Banti, 2009, pp. 136-138, 284, 285, 287 and 351-358; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, p. 351; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 247, 611-613 and 731.

⁴⁵ Quite significant exception in Banti, 2009, p. 455, and in Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, p. 203.

⁴⁶ Rosa - Verga, 2003, pp. 14-15; Ricuperati - Ieva, 2006, p. 19; Benigno, 2009, pp. 27 and 102-103.

p. 144) and by the massive migratory waves of the last decades. But it is precisely for this reason that the composite nature of Muslim world and belief, in past and present, should be underlined – as recently done by Franco Cardini⁴⁷ –, also in relation to issues such as sexual non-conformism and the condition of women. It should be also pointed out that the radical and sometimes violent rejection of modernity and secularization marks a historically determined and specific doctrine (and religious movement) within Islam, the Wahhabism, whose current spreading is linked to the centuries-old association of its leaders with a powerful Arab family, the Saud⁴⁸.

In fact some considered textbooks underline the political link between Saudi monarchy and Sunni fundamentalist groups, especially in relation with its struggle against Iran and the proxy wars engendered in the Middle East by this local competition – combined with the global one between superpowers –, exploiting the rift between Sunni Islam and Shia Islam⁴⁹. But unfortunately the reformist trends within contemporary Islam still remain in the background in Italian textbooks, despite the significant effort of many Muslim scholars to shape a critical approach to the sacred texts, by verifying doctrinal sources' authenticity – as pointed out in several recent contributions by the scholar in Muslim history and doctrine Michel Cuypiers⁵⁰ –, and also following a path not so far from that opened in the West by Erasmus of Rotterdam and later by contemporary Modernism: trends not to be considered more elitist or more isolated than Erasmus's or Muratori's attempts to a self-reformation of Catholicism, normally described in detail by considered textbooks (Della Peruta, 2000a, pp. 282-283; 2000b, pp. 325-326; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 248-249).

Therefore, a long tradition of studies has taught us to consider religious practice as inseparably linked to the cultural and political context, as able to influence the context, and also as determined in its contents by the context itself. The reasons for faith and for practicing it in a certain way often come from outside the faith itself, which consequently can not necessarily be considered a fuel for the so-called 'clash of civilizations', nor on the contrary an instrument to encourage peaceful coexistence. A concept that has been assumed about Christian faith, whose ambivalent attitude – sometimes contrastive,

⁴⁷ Cardini, 1998 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IuZe8gwMx7Q>> (January 1st 2019).

⁴⁸ Della Peruta, 2000b, pp. 185-186; Barbagallo, 2016, pp. 295 and 329; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 34 and 32-733.

⁴⁹ Banti, 2009, pp. 132-134; Cammarano - Guazzaloca - Piretti, 2013, pp. 353-354 and 391-392; Barbagallo, 2016, pp. 319, 326 and 327-328; Caracciolo - Roccucci, 2017, pp. 733-735.

⁵⁰ <<http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1339925.html>> (January 1st 2019); <<http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1340634.html>> (January 1st 2019).

sometimes supportive, since the sixteenth century up to nowadays – toward the values of modernity is fully recognized by considered textbooks, as it should be regarding to other non-Christian faiths as well.

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2. *Curriculum vitae*

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Teaching about religion in France. The role of works of art and iconography

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Abstract

The lack of understanding of our cultural heritage was one of the major reasons raised twenty years ago to justify teaching about religions in schools. Though the issue went on to reach other subjects, works of art offer a privileged means by which to talk about how religion affects the lives of people in other civilisations, as they are as concrete as you can get. Taking a look, through examples, at how the place of art as a vector of teaching about religions evolved in the debate can shed some light on the assets and limits of this approach.

Keywords

Education and Religion, Public school and Religious Pluralism, Secularization, Art and Religion.

Résumé

La perte de compréhension du patrimoine culturel fut parmi les premiers motifs invoqués en faveur d'un enseignement des faits religieux à l'école laïque, il y a une vingtaine d'années. Si l'argumentation s'est par la suite appuyée sur d'autres aspects, les œuvres d'art offrent une perspective privilégiée pour aborder, par la médiation d'un support concret, diverses facettes de la dimension du religieux dans une civilisation. Examiner la place de cette référence dans les évolutions du débat, à travers quelques exemples, peut éclairer les atouts et les limites d'une telle approche.

Mots-clé

Education et religion, École et pluralité religieuse, Laïcité, art et religion.

Introduction. - 1. The role of artworks in "Teaching about religion".- 1.1. Relevant symptom. - 2. Tragic result. - 3. Potential remedy. - 4 Art and iconography in school textbooks. - 5. The "desire to see": illustrations in school textbooks. - 6. The illusion of the "illustration": form and meaning. - 7. The illusion of the "document": anachronism and historicity. - 8. Iconophilia and iconophobia: the status of artworks. - 9. The approach through art and the temptation of apologetics. - 10. Conclusion: Art as something not always universal...- 11. Bibliography. - 12. Curriculum vitae

Introduction

Teaching about religion (for non-denominational purposes) may appear, on the

surface, to have been given reduced importance in school curricula. Under French secularism (since the separation between Church and State in 1905) and to some recent laws, such as the 2004 Act on “ostentatious and religious signs” in school life, the French school system could be seen as completely closed to religions. France is indeed one of the very few European countries which do not dedicate a specific class to this question. It is not a subject in itself and there is no specific course about it. However, it would be misguided to think that religious aspects are completely absent from teaching in schools. Arguments supporting teaching about religion have been developed during the last twenty years and have led to the elaboration of new school syllabuses. The foundational report on this topic, Régis Debray’s Report (2002), drew a clear distinction between religion as an object of faith and religion as a cultural object. This report associates symbolic and patrimonial perspectives with the need to improve understanding of the contemporary world and to encourage an openness conducive to tolerance and living together in a pluralistic society. It recommends disseminating knowledge pertaining to the “religious fact” in all disciplines. Since then, the choice made in French education has been to approach religious phenomena through various existing subjects, and especially in History or Literature.

The value and limitations of this choice, which introduces a contextualized approach to religious facts yet is piecemeal and fragmented across programs, have been debated (Borne - Willaime, 2007; Estivalezes, 2005; Gaudin, 2014; Avon - Saint-Martin - Tolan, 2018). After already examining the possibilities offered by such teaching in relation with the issue of citizenship education (Saint-Martin, 2013), it would now be of interest to me, as part of this workshop centred on textbooks, to focus on how images and references to works of art have their place.

Covering this topic, as it relates to France, through iconography alone may seem too confined. But even if this method can only yield partial results (otherwise complemented by other means), the subject does however deserve to be analysed on its own, due to the symbolic value it acquired, time and again, in the debate on teaching about religion.

Indeed, the question of iconography, or rather of works of art in general, surfaces at two levels, recurring almost like a refrain. Firstly, it raises visibility about the ignorance of religious culture that our pupils, and fellow citizens alike, have come to generally. Secondly, one of most severe consequences of this ignorance being the loss of access to a shared cultural heritage, it also appears in measures intended to remedy the deficiency within a secular framework. A review of the arguments behind these levels of thought will shed light on what

is expected of the debate on teaching about religion, which in turn will make it possible to assess the role that textbooks could give to the iconography of these questions.

1. *The role of artworks in "Teaching about religion"*

1.1. *Relevant symptom*

The loss of access to artistic heritage in particular, which is connected with the lack of knowledge about religion in general, appears as the driving consideration in the arguments developed by the Teachers' League (*Ligue de l'Enseignement*) who, at the beginning of the 1980s¹, suggested that the deficiencies in this area be remedied by studying the texts and founding myths of the great religions. This consideration is invoked regularly in the forewords of books written at the time on this issue. The school principal of the *lycée Buffon*, where Danièle Hervieu-Léger developed a series of courses that led to her book *La Religion au Lycée* gave an example that has since become emblematic: a pupil in art class, seeing Mantegna's *Saint Sebastian pierced with arrows*, thought it was made by American Indians (Hervieu-Léger, 1990). In the preface of her book, *Lectures bibliques aux sources de la culture occidentale* (Biblical Readings at the source of Western Culture), Anne-Marie Pelletier (1995) mentions pupils in the galleries of the Louvre commenting about the "baby-sitter" they often see holding a child on her lap... In the classes on art history that I give to first-year university students, some of them, not having any knowledge of Christian culture, are clearly unable to see a dove as a representation of the Holy Spirit in an image of Christ's baptism and there are many other such anecdotes.

As amusing as these examples may be – examples which should not of course be the basis of ready generalisations – they are nonetheless the visible part of a phenomenon to be taken seriously, and are seen as a relatively reliable sign of a loss of religious culture. The objective nature of the inability to grasp the immediate meaning of an artwork (the pre-iconographic and the iconographic states as Panofsky would say, before even dealing with the iconology) (Panofsky, 1967) seems like a dependable measuring device for unequivocally presenting the break with a form of culture that was once shared by a large part of the population, without any special scholastic effort necessary beforehand (in other words, the ability to recognize the figures of Mary, Jesus, the dove of the Holy Spirit, or the martyrdom of a saint on any given painting

¹ This action by the League in 1982 was also an element of another debate, involving the relationship between the public school system and private institutions under contract with it.

used to come naturally). It is not possible to envision analysing a painting in a school environment from a catechistic point of view; that said, the lack of understanding in this area reveals a gap in cultural knowledge that is harder to discern in other areas.

2. *Tragic result*

Once the symptom is identified, its result may not seem that alarming. In a system ruled by *laïcité*, the loss of religious culture, undoubtedly related to waning attendance at catechism (and certainly also to the reduced content of catechism itself, but that is another issue), associated with the diminished influence of religion in families, is not a matter that the school curriculum needs to address directly. However, when taking the artistic dimension into account, these deficiencies, which are only one piece of the traditional humanist culture that is in decline everywhere, take on a universal value and therefore a tragic one. The inability to identify the subjects of a large part of Western art no longer just reflects failing the "final exam" for one's first communion; all of a sudden it means walking around in the Louvre in the same way that one would amble through the Museum of Asian Art (where most of our fellow citizens would be unfamiliar with the episodes of the life of Buddha or unable to recognize the meaning behind his various manifestations). In other words, it means living in a universe of forms and colours that may please the eye but whose themes or formal arrangement are incapable of bearing any sort of message to the spectator on the vision that the painter and his era had of man's place in the universe of relations between the celestial and the terrestrial. How can one then put the revolution of perspective, or that of the subject, into its proper context, if it is all just graphic play without any specific meaning?

It means being ignorant of one's own culture, or at least the formal expressions of Western culture. This break, this inability to see oneself in a "cultural lineage" – to put D. Hervieu-Léger's concept of "devotional lineage" (Hervieu-Léger, 1993) in a different context – is seen as an attainable objective, whereas in its most complete form, that culture was never anything other than the prerogative of a specific social category of pupils, far from the current objectives of 80% of pupils graduating in a given year. The all-encompassing aesthetic value of art becomes an argument free from the suspicion of being religiously motivated, one that collects under one roof a large number of concerns: from the decline in the quality of pupils' schoolwork to the break with their roots... With literature, press articles on teaching about religion resort to artistic examples, again for their value as symptoms and tragic results. The first pages of Régis Debray's 2002 report present their share of examples upfront in

the matter.

3. *Potential remedy*

Consequently, other approaches centre on this area as a means for coming up with a solution. As regards accessing Western art, clarifying the result and putting it into context allows for elements of religious culture to be presented in a mediated and disinterested way. In line with Malraux (1951), we must first remember that most historical artworks and artefacts in museums were not created with such locations in mind, but for religious, devotional purposes – this would include the majority of Egyptian or Greek statuary or altarpieces that are now scattered in several different places. The first museums even had their origins in the offerings left since ancient times by the faithful at pilgrimage sites. Every art history teacher is ultimately confronted by the objective necessity to take into account religious culture in the broad sense of the term, in order to explicate the relationship between aesthetics and faith in the art of the past. This affinity would favour the teaching of religious facts. Using works of art as the basis for one approach to this issue makes it possible to have a physical medium as a starting point. The act of bringing out its meaning allows for objective progress in the analysis of its context, interposing its materiality between the religious theory it represents and the observer's role in that theory. The artwork, this third party endowed with special aesthetic value, again offers a guarantee of secularism in the approach (that which is considered an almost natural fashion). This approach defuses the debate by basing theological concepts on the comprehension of externally observable forms (e.g., Christ in his glory, or dying on the cross, a dove placed precisely between the Father and the Son; whether the Prophet's figure is veiled or not; figurative elements in a Haggadah or pure ornamentation with geometric designs...), rather than within a denominational discourse. Through this mediation, the teaching of religious facts can get to the heart of belief systems and in this way examine how a symbolic system works. It is not enough to just be able to identify the main figures in a work, to notice a hand coming out of the clouds or a tongue of flame, or even to be familiar with the attributes of saints (there are excellent guides for that); what matters is grasping the meaning of the work and the relationship it has to a founding myth. A work like Fra' Angelico's *Annunciation* (1431-1435, Prado, Madrid), reproduced in a high-school textbook, portrays at the same time the Angel and Mary and, in the background, Adam and Eve being cast from the Garden of Eden. This altarpiece associates two scenes that do not seem to have any relationship to each other. Here, the teacher will be able to clarify the connection between abstract notions of Incarnation and

Redemption, and the way Christians see themselves as both having inherited the pages of Genesis and needing to reinterpret them, before a painting that renders the Virgin Mary's *fiat* both visible and intelligible. In the same way, presenting the absence of perspective in Persian miniatures, not as a mistake by the artist but as a refusal to compete with divine creation by giving form to life forces, or perceiving the graphic interactions of a Hebrew manuscript that cause forms to appear without explicitly depicting them, requires an understanding of the motivations underlying a certain style of formal expression.

Of course, a choice like this has its share of problems and some have been pointed out (Ponnau, 1997). Besides the risk of frequent partiality toward Catholicism, the approach via artworks also risks seeing religious systems only as museum pieces or elements of cultural heritage, frozen in an old-fashioned form of expression. Moreover, relying for the most part on fine art may mean neglecting the important role of religious expression in so-called popular culture. Despite these reservations, expressed most often by those who fervently defend the use of iconography in the teaching about religion, it must be recognised that this method is part of a perfectly legitimate line of thinking, which seems to be relatively well accepted by teachers as well as parents (despite the situation, limited in scope yet cited repeatedly, of some parents – strict atheists, Muslims or Jews – refusing to let their children visit religious buildings, usually Christian ones).

4. Art and iconography in school textbooks

Field trips (to museums, religious edifices, etc.) are certainly the best way to implement this teaching method, and this is especially true for studying religious architecture. Nevertheless, the medium used most often, the one available to teachers on a daily basis, remains the school textbook.

5. The "desire to see": illustrations in school textbooks

But this is precisely where one problem lies. Independently of any issues relating to religious topics, school textbooks have undergone an inflation of pictorial content over the past few decades, giving a much larger importance to images in course structure, sometimes to the detriment of the text. Composed in the form of double pages, illustrated for the most part, the presentation of ideas relies more and more on documents (texts or pictures); the book becomes a kind of directory that the teacher consults in order to support or illustrate what he or she says.

The history of textbook illustrations is not the main subject here, but an

historian's approach cannot completely ignore its role. In the long history of the development of the illustrated book, images for educational purposes take their place alongside the frontispieces of the *Lives of Famous Men* and the inset portraits displaying the heroes' features... In the 1890s, when the techniques of mechanical reproduction allowed for a significant increase in the number of illustrations in school textbooks, these illustrations were mainly pictures of kings, ministers and military commanders, giving life to a vision of history dominated mostly by leaders... These images were accompanied by cheap renditions of historical events, based on the paintings decorating the halls of Versailles.

Of course, the teaching of history, filtered through the Annales school, is no longer limited to the lives of individuals. Yet the desire to see images of heroes, a completely legitimate desire, still motivates many iconographic choices. Proof of this is the layout of one particular high-school textbook, where each section is prefaced by an inset portrait of some representative figure of the period studied. Apparently, the portraits of Cesar or King Louis XIV do not seem to pose the same problems as the choice of an inset portrait of Christ for the chapter on the origins of Christianity. Il est nécessaire de préciser les codes de représentations du portrait royal même si ces portraits se réfèrent bien à une personne physique et gardent la trace d'un visage précis. It is necessary to specify the codes used to represent a royal figure, even though the portrait is of an actual person and documents a specific face. But it is not possible to approach the representation of Christ in the catacombs of Callixtus, without knowing the meaning given to this figure flanked by the Alpha and the Omega. In the same way, the icon of the Christ illustrating the chapter on Byzantium supposes that the notion of incarnation be specified (Boespflug, 2008). And what can be said about the portrait of Averroes in a junior-high textbook accompanying an article on Arab philosophy? Only that this detail of a painting from the Florentine *Quattrocento* has only the slightest connection to the person represented. On the other hand, it has a great deal to say about how he is portrayed in Western culture... What the book doesn't show is that the work from which this face is taken is one of the many variations on the theme of Thomas Aquinas trampling heresies underfoot... ("Averroes" is one of the dejected figures at the bottom of the painting; it is in no way a portrait of him!)

6. *The illusion of the "illustration": form and meaning*

The previous example proves, if any proof is necessary, that teachers cannot simply let the pupil's immediate reaction decide how images should be used, and that what they say in class remains essential for putting images into context,

images that are never self-explanatory. Even a simple portrait, at first glance the easiest form of iconography to discuss, reveals more than just the hero's appearance... All image creation involves making choices and interpretations. Illustrations in textbooks cannot go without commentary from the teacher, any more than the stained-glass windows and sculptures in cathedrals could be left to the illiterate faithful to be treated as something like comic strips, despite generalisations of this kind still made by some junior-high school textbooks. To understand these artworks, both their artistic forms and the religious facts represented must be put into context, to provide a counterpoint to the medieval sermons and the orally transmitted religious culture that were once instilled in those who visited cathedrals.

Here, "understanding" works of visual art means understanding them from an artistic perspective – despite all the rhetoric applied to them, artworks do not "tell a story," they "show". This means not so much "reading" them as "seeing" them. But although the number of successful applications of this approach should not be underestimated, two things can undermine the use of artworks in the teaching of religious facts. Firstly, works are sometimes only considered from a formal perspective: one high-school textbook devotes a whole section to the Renaissance, including many works on religious subjects, but the only focus of analysis is the role perspective plays in them. Secondly, artworks may be reduced to their subject: a work is seen only for what it is supposed to represent, not for *how* it represents. Every painting of the Annunciation has something to say about the story of Luke and the Incarnation, but each one says it in an entirely different way. Reduced to a theme, to a pure equivalent of the text, the work becomes transparent, as though someone indifferent to its materiality were gazing upon it, someone who only saw it as an illusory "illustration".

7. The illusion of the "document": anachronism and historicity

Just as the notion of "illustration" is a complex one, and just as the connections between artworks, texts and dogmas of any religion are never direct, never pure visual translations, but often intertwine subtle references to whole networks of textual and visual traditions, the same is true of the notion of the "document". In the past decade, the training of teachers, particularly in history and French, has been enhanced with courses on the use of iconographic "documents". They know that the illusion of "evidence" is a great one, in the area of religious facts as elsewhere. But this illusion proves to be particularly damaging in courses on the history of religions when documents are used without any concern for their historical context. In the 90s, classes on early Christianity were often illustrated by paintings from the Renaissance, and there were still textbooks that used

works from the past (the Middle Ages for example) in chapters on modern-day Christianity. The image of religion as an unchanging whole that is behind such choices stands in the way of putting religious facts in their historical context, which is necessary in order to approach them from a secular perspective. There has been real progress made in this area, but the risk remains. A painting of the catacombs or a Byzantine mosaic are probably a more relevant choice for accompanying a text on the origins of Christianity than an artwork from the 17th century, but it should not obscure the fact that it is just as much a second-hand account of the biblical event itself as the later work.

What role does modern art play in these questions? Its lack of importance in the iconography of school textbooks is above all tied to the fact that religions are considered mainly in relation to their origins rather than their role in the modern world. When current events are discussed, religions are presented more often as causes for wars and division than as facts of culture. Is it necessary to stress that a large part of the money devoted to publicly commissioned artworks in France is still allocated to religious buildings? After all, Le Corbusier's architecture, Matisse's way of the Cross in Vence or, more recently, Buraglio's one at the Church of Saint-Germain des Près (Paris) are no less "true" than a cathedral or an early altarpiece. The relationships of distance and closeness that these works maintain with the religious community that commissions them and accepts them, independently of the artist's beliefs, also deserve to be put into context and analysed (Saint-Martin, 2003).

8. Iconophilia and iconophobia: the status of artworks

Finally, there is the main criticism levied at teaching religious facts through the use of art: the risk of favouring Christianity, more particularly post-Tridentine Catholicism. If we are referring to the bulk of Western art, the objection is valid, but it neglects many other aspects. Firstly, the reproductions in textbooks are not limited to paintings and drawings; much space is also devoted to the analysis of religious buildings and architecture, elements that concern all religious traditions. Secondly, this objection is often based upon confusing "the production of images with religious subjects" with "the use of images in different aspects of the religion". Of course, there is a connection between the two; it would be specious to deny it. That said, if too much is made of the association between iconophilia and iconolatry, or between religious iconophobia and rejection of figurative art, the result is summary judgments on the prohibition of images in the Jewish and Muslim worlds, even in

Protestantism², that a simple consultation of art history textbooks refutes outright!

How can we overcome this difficulty? Unfortunately, it does not need to be overcome for Judaism, whose art and iconography have almost no place in school textbooks. The reason for this is probably not just the cautious attitude of publishers, convinced that they would never be able to find artworks that do not violate the prohibition of graven images, but also the place of Judaism in the school curriculum. It is discussed in connection with Antiquity (the original Hebrews) and especially in relation to the Holocaust. Medieval and modern Jewish life is almost completely absent from historical overviews, and with it all the objects that it has produced: many manuscripts and household objects decorated with abstract forms but also with figures³. Alongside the views of the desert or the manuscripts of Qumran, the association made in several textbooks between a work of the 20th century (Marc Chagall: *Moses receiving the Tables of the Law*, 1966) and the chapter on the Hebrews is founded upon the commendable concern for identifying what remains of a culture in the present day, illustrating these pages by a work from an artist "of the Jewish faith," as the legend states. This example shows that in addition to the questions accompanying the "document," what the teacher could say is essential to give form to the density of history and make his or her pupils conscious of the distance between an inspired work from a Russian artist of the 20th century, who does not of course renounce his faith, but who nonetheless recognises that part of his style which comes from centuries of Western art and from the Jewish cultural traditions of Central Europe, which are quite separate from the ancient tale of Moses. The image is no more anachronistic than an illustrated medieval Hebrew manuscript would be, but it requires just as much complex work to put it into the right context regarding the Commandment prohibiting graven images, which has been interpreted differently depending on the period, despite the categorical nature of the prohibition on any image of God.

On the other hand, the chapter in the high-school textbook on Islam is typically full of illustrations, presenting some teachers with a dilemma. How can they talk about the origins of Islam using illustrations from Persian or Turkish manuscripts that were made several centuries later? The anachronism of such an image (which admittedly is almost never noticed) is not what

² Those episodes of iconoclasm that took place should not obscure the role of images and the arts in the Protestant world; see Reymond, 1999, and Cottin, 1994.

³ Even though the prohibition on representing God is still respected, this is not true of the prohibition on images of faces, whose enforcement varies depending on the era and the place. See for example Sed-Rajna, 1995 and Jarassé, 2006.

presents the greatest hindrance to how pupils may see it; the main problem is the status of the work. Here, we confront an essential part of any teaching method involving visual art. Before it is an image reproduced in a textbook, an artwork is first an object: painting or fresco, architectural element or sculpture, manuscript, liturgical object... and this object has a function, a status... How was it perceived? Was it a venerated manuscript or a profane work that one could casually flip through? Was it placed in a religious edifice? For what rites was it intended: worship, hand use, processions?

In fact, what differs most from one religion to another is the status associated with works of art, more than their production as such. There should probably be more precise details here on Islam, taking into account not only different movements within it but also specific eras and regions. Nonetheless, the Koran prohibits worship of images, not images themselves⁴. So there are no paintings or drawings to be found in mosques and they play no role in religious rites, but there is an abundance of illustrated profane manuscripts dealing with religious topics, elements from the Koran, or legends such as the mystical voyage of Mohammed. If the production of images in Islam was important in the Persian, Indian and Ottoman worlds especially, and remains much rarer in the Arabian Peninsula, to think that all images of Islamic subject matter are illicit is to lend credence to a purely Wahhabi interpretation of images, which is only one out of many ways to see the issue among the variety of schools of Islam.

9. The approach through art and the temptation of apologetics

Approaching religions through art makes it possible to take the middle of the road into their symbolic systems, while avoiding a representation of religious facts that is limited to religion's role in conflicts, division and the rejection of the outside world by some groups. But one should not go too far in this direction and make what those who favour a strictly secular and neutral attitude see as the opposite mistake: presenting only the beautiful side of religion and thus tending toward apologetics, treating religions as a privileged source of artistic expression. But here again, this argument fails to take the diversity of artistic expression into account, and those wishing to examine the less glorious elements of religions have a wealth of material at their disposal, as it is well-known that formal beauty and ethical righteousness do not always go hand-in-hand. The figure of the blindfolded Synagogue is one of the most beautiful statues decorating the cathedral in Strasbourg, but it is also an opportunity to

⁴ Prohibitions on images come mostly from the Hadith. There is a wealth of literature on the subject; see Grabar, 1987; Naef, 2004.

see an expression of medieval anti-Semitism, where Judaism is contrasted with the Church, that has become the *Verus Israël*. The violence of the Wars of Religion was portrayed in mass-produced engravings and pamphlets in a way that may be too sensitive for class presentations, but one can still add the striking effect of the group of sculptures on the Church of the Gesù in Rome representing the triumph of religion over heresy (17th century), which could be used as an introduction to a discussion on tolerance. But other objectives have been added to the process of addressing the lack of religious culture and the cultural expectations of twenty years ago: how to live with others as a community, and how to accept others through learning more about religions. This should not just mean tolerating the ideas and opinions of others, but also being able to distance oneself from one's own beliefs, a skill that is a characteristic of both the capacity to think and the commitment to ideals. This does not mean appeasing conflicts by only presenting the aesthetic and artistic expressions of religious culture; it means situating the material and physical signs of these expressions through the use of artworks, in order to understand the issues involved.

10. *Conclusion: Art as something not always universal...*

Of course, the connection to be made is not an easy one! And when we know how to put a Christian painting, a miniature from a Hebrew or Islamic manuscript, or a work by Chagall in their proper contexts, what do we do with the image of a God who sometimes resembles Jupiter? Becoming aware of such complexities is essential.

Taking an approach to cultural heritage into account requires a stance toward religion that sees it not just as metaphysical, as an unchanging doctrine, but also as a set of practices and symbolic relations that are deeply rooted in the lives of generations who have devoted themselves to these realms of belief in different ways. Works of art bear witness to the different levels at which they are received, each level having its own mode of interpretation and adaptation; they give full expression to their place in a historical continuum. Art should be accessible to all (this is not the place to discuss the perception of beauty per se), and the use of artworks in teaching religious facts shows that it is necessary to recreate their respective universes of meaning in order to understand them fully, but this cannot be inferred solely from spontaneous perception. The place of artworks in school textbooks should take this into account without glossing over the possible drawbacks of a method that still has the same limitations as other approaches from the perspective of objectivity and secularism (*laïcité*), and runs the same risks of misinterpretation, anachronism or reductionism.

Art still offers an effective means to engage students on developments in religious sensibilities and the symbolic dimension of religion. This is especially conducive to the discovery of a common heritage that belongs to all believers, agnostics or atheists alike.

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12. *Curriculum vitae*

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Online resources for the history of religion: a look at national history museums and at the House of European History¹

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Abstract

History museums have been influenced by developments in contemporary museology, opening up to new forms of interaction with their local communities. This is true also in the case of European national history museums, with their growing focus on communicating with the public both through the social media and through their own websites.

Images, texts and virtual exhibitions are as many ways of depicting and of narrating a nation's history with the aim of attracting new visitors in what, for many of them, will be their very first contact with an institute of education tasked with building knowledge and identity. People often decide to organise a visit to a museum after viewing its website.

Analysing a selection of national museums and the House of European History, we will be asking ourselves questions regarding the presence of the history of religion in these narratives on the web.

Keywords

National History Museums; House of European History; ReIReS Project; History of Religion..

Riassunto

I musei di storia hanno risentito degli sviluppi nella museologia contemporanea, aprendosi a forme nuove di comunicazione con le comunità di riferimento. È ciò che si registra anche nel caso dei musei nazionali di storia europei, sempre più attenti alla comunicazione con il pubblico sia attraverso i social, sia attraverso il loro sito web.

Immagini, testi, mostre virtuali costituiscono pratiche di rappresentazione e di narrazione della storia della nazione che hanno lo scopo di attrarre nuovi visitatori, costituendo per moltissimi di loro il primo contatto con una istituzione educativa, agente di costruzione di conoscenza e di elementi identitari. Spesso è dopo aver visitato il sito che si decide di organizzare una visita.

Attraverso l'analisi di alcuni casi di musei nazionali, e dell'House of European History, ci interrogheremo sulla presenza della storia religiosa in queste narrazioni attraverso il web.

Parole chiave

Musei di Storia Nazionale; Casa della Storia europea; Progetto ReIReS; Storia della religione.

¹ All the sites mentioned were visited in December 2018.

1. Introduction. - 2. A look at the national history museums (through their websites). - 2.1. The National Museum of Denmark (Copenhagen). - 2.2. The Swedish History Museum (Stockholm). - 2.3. The German Historical Museum (Berlin). - 3. The House of European History (Brussels). - 4. Conclusions. - 5. References. - 6. Curriculum vitae.

1. Introduction

As is well known, the Faro Convention², signed by ten countries in 2011, has represented a fundamental juncture in museological reflection, welcoming a shift of attention already underway for some time from the object 'cultural heritage' to the subject, that is, to citizens and communities.

It is worth mentioning here, for the issues that will be developed in this text, Article 12 of the Convention: *Access to cultural heritage and democratic participation*. Subscribers undertake to:

- a) encourage everyone to participate in: - the process of identification, study, interpretation, protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural heritage; - public reflection and debate on the opportunities and challenges which the cultural heritage represents; b) take into consideration the value attached by each heritage community to the cultural heritage with which it identifies; c) recognise the role of voluntary organisations both as partners in activities and as constructive critics of cultural heritage policies; d) take steps to improve access to the heritage, especially among young people and the disadvantaged, in order to raise awareness about its value, the need to maintain and preserve it, and the benefits which may be derived from it.

The Convention therefore involves the participation of citizens and communities as the key to increasing awareness in Europe of the value of cultural heritage and its contribution to well-being and quality of life, as well as to social inclusion and stability. The debate on a new museology and in particular on ecomuseums goes in this direction³.

Cultural institutions are called upon to accept a complex challenge, which is no longer limited to the ordering, conservation, enhancement and facilitation of the enjoyment of a cultural product: there is increasing agreement with the idea that they must take charge of an activity directed towards the construction of

² Faro, 27/10/2005, *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*: <<https://www.coe.int/it/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/199>>.

³ <http://archives.icom.museum/ecomuseums_links.html>.

active citizenship, taking on an educational dimension and – a challenge that seems even more difficult – acting against social exclusion and marginalization⁴. The website of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) has an extensive bibliography on these issues, to which reference should be made for further information⁵.

As far as museums in particular are concerned, it is not only a question of eliminating all access barriers, of developing new communication strategies to try to attract non-traditional publics as well, of improving reception policies, but also of undertaking as a mission the development of participatory planning, a principle that is now also recognised in the official documents of international trade associations⁶.

Even the ‘classic’ definition of the museum is now outdated. According to the ICOM Statutes, adopted by the 22nd General Assembly in Vienna on 24 August 2007, a museum “is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment”. In the aftermath of the 2016 ICOM General Conference in Milan, a new Standing Committee has been appointed to study the current definition, because it “does not reflect and express adequately the complexities of the 21st century and the current responsibilities and commitments of museums, nor their challenges and visions for the future”⁷.

It is important here to remember the point of view of a feminist museology that instead emphasizes how, in many ways, and despite all the good intentions, many museums remain ‘peremptory’ places, authoritative, little or not at all attentive to the development of gender paths and policies of. A group of Canadian pedagogues developed the *Feminist Museum Hack* project, “analytical and creative processes to unmask, interrogate, deconstruct and resist patriarchy as an ‘epistemology of mastery’ concealed in museums’ practices of representation, considering images, placing and texts” (Clover - Taber - Sanford, 2018); in Spain *Museos en femenino*⁸ involved four national art museums. These are still niche routes, which are waiting to receive the attention they deserve at a

⁴ From Milan, 2019.

⁵ <<https://icom.museum/en/resources/publications/?q=&y=&type=85>>.

⁶ International Council of Museums, *Code of Ethics for Museums*, section VI: *Museums work in close collaboration with the communities from which their collections originate as well as those they serve* (<<https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf>>).

⁷ <<https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>>.

⁸ This is a project on museums and gender funded by the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Commission. It ended in 2013: López Fernández Cao - Fernández Valencia, 2018.

European level as well, although the *She-Culture* project financed by the Culture 2007-2013 programme and dedicated to women's museums, seemed to be an opening in this sense⁹.

Here it is interesting to remember this approach, however, because this line converges to indicate a necessary path of museological democratization, meaning by this word the need to put a plurality of audiences at the centre of museum cultural policies, to take into account the cultural, social and gender differences in society to develop inclusive policies and to accommodate marginal narratives and 'different' points of view. As we have seen, however, it is a public that is no longer required to be a spectator, that is, a passive recipient of cultural policies, but a participant in the cultural policies themselves. In the end, continuing along this path, we come to question, in the name of participatory planning, the concept of authorship. This is what emerges, for example, from the now extensive literature on Public History, a discipline born in the United States and rooted above all in English-speaking countries that has long focused on the forms of communication and dissemination of history, the way in which historians interact with their audiences. According to Thomas Cauvin, president of The International Federation for Public History, public history is not just about history *for* "but also *with* non-academic audiences". And he adds: "Historians should accept that they do not work for the sake of history only, to advance historical research, but also for and with others"; developing therefore, on the basis of this assumption, the concept of shared authority, that is, of an authorship that the historian shares with his public. In what way, and according to what dynamics? In this regard, Cauvin provides some examples by calling museums into question: "Sharing authority can be done, for instance, through inviting visitors attending exhibitions to share their stories and interpretations of the collections, through collaboration with narrators in creating oral history sources, or through developing on line crowd sourcing projects" (Cauvin, 2016, pp. 14, 2, 217)¹⁰. The theme of history museums recurs in the annual appointments of the National Council on Public History¹¹ as well as in those of the Italian Association of Public History¹².

Unfortunately, these three levels of debate (ICOM, feminist museology and

⁹ *Guidelines for Women's Museums and/or gender oriented Museums by the She-Culture Project Group*, 2015: <<http://www.she-culture.com/en/outputs/guidelines-english>>.

¹⁰ On the relationship between museums and public history, see also: Noiret, 2017 and Porciani, 2017.

¹¹ National Council on Public History: <<https://ncph.org/>>.

¹² Associazione Italiana di Public History: <<https://aiph.hypotheses.org/>>. For the Third National AIPH Conference (University of Campania, Santa Maria Capua Vetere, 24-28 June 2019) proposals have been submitted for many fields, among which "History in museums, libraries, archives, exhibitions, galleries".

Public History,) continue not to interact (Porciani 2010), but thinking about the will of the ReIReS Project to depart from the more strictly academic path, to raise debate and to reach various audiences, to become conscience and widespread knowledge¹³, museums are places to be taken into account as possible interlocutors. As Steven Conn reminds us, “we live in a museum age (...) more people are going to more museums than at any time in the past” (Conn, 2010, pp. 1-19) and museums are places where the common sense of history is built.

2. *A look at the national history museums (through their websites)*

The founding of national history museums runs from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the urgency for their establishment appeared to be a European phenomenon: collections of royal or aristocratic property were grouped together and reinterpreted in a national context (Aronsson, 2010). These museums aim to offer a ‘national story’, a master narrative that contributes to the creation of a pantheon of the nation, celebrating ages, events, characters and myths considered fundamental, and excluding, of course, others.

Not all European countries have a museum of national history: there are none, for example, in Italy¹⁴, Spain or Portugal. In France, the establishment of a national museum of history launched by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2009 was the subject of a heated debate and the project was then cancelled (Porciani, 2010, pp. 109-114; Nora 2010)¹⁵, as was the case with the Nationaal Historisch Museum in the Netherlands¹⁶.

These museums have been the subject of the European EUNAMUS project, *European national museums: Identity politics, the uses of the past and the European*

¹³ See, in particular, the content of Work Package 8: *Dissemination and Exploitation of Results, Communication*: <<https://reires.eu/about/work-packages/>>.

¹⁴ In Italy there is instead a network of Risorgimento Museums: <<http://www.museionline.info/musei/risorgimento/2>>. Also remember the exhibition “Fare gli italiani 1861-2011. 150 anni di storia nazionale” curated by Walter Barberis and Giovanni De Luna. This exhibition, open from 18 March 2012 to 4 November 2012, has a permanent virtual space <<http://faregliitaliani.archivioluca.com/FareItaliani/index.html>>.

¹⁵ A review of articles in “Le Monde” can be found here: <https://www.lemonde.fr/recherche/?keywords=Maison+de+1%27histoire+de+France&page_num=1&operator=and&exclude_keywords=&q=recherche_titre&author=&period=since_1944&start_day=01&start_month=01&start_year=1944&end_day=29&end_month=01&end_year=2019&sort=desc>.

¹⁶ For further information we can consult the links to the entry: <[https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationaal_Historisch_Museum_\(Nederland\)](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationaal_Historisch_Museum_(Nederland))>.

citizen, whose website can also be consulted for further bibliography¹⁷. Ilaria Porciani gives us an overview of these museums:

Like prisms with many faces, they are and have been places containing collections of heterogeneous and rich documentary materials that included manuscripts, correspondence and documents of various kinds but also commemorative postcards, photographs and objects full of meaning: increasingly valuable sources for historians attentive to the mentality and anthropological aspects of the construction of identities. They have been and still are real research laboratories. Finally, they were proposed as a breeding ground for the construction of a discourse intended to reach a very wide audience. A decisive place for the development of a complex public use of history, the museums have acted as a catalyst for the discussion of history but also of national consciousness. These are real texts that have an immediate and often disruptive effect on the public debate, often generating strong contrasts¹⁸.

A museum of national history is much more than a container of archaeological, ethnographic and artistic collections. In the cases examined – the National Museum of Denmark (Copenhagen), the Swedish History Museum (Stockholm), the German Historical Museum (Berlin) – the museums have a library and a archive, organise temporary exhibitions and plan cultural activities related to them, organise guided tours inside the museum and educational tours, produce apps and audio guides, manage social media, carrying out and promoting scientific research. Through this series of activities, the museums are proposed as a primary vehicle to reach the thousands of visitors yearly.

The world they tell about and try to identify is the nation, and they do so, first and foremost, from their websites. Images, texts, video and virtual exhibitions are the many ways of depicting and of narrating a nation's history with the aim of attracting new visitors in what, for many of them, will be their very first contact with an institute of education tasked with building knowledge and identity in a manner capable of triggering enthusiasm and emotion. People often decide to organise a visit to a museum after viewing its website, for example after considering whether the museum offers appropriate spaces and tours devised for children.

Analysing these cases and the House of European History, we will be asking ourselves questions regarding the presence of the history of religion in these narratives on the web. What themes do they develop? On what periods do they

¹⁷ <<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/94002/results/en>>. See also the project website, completed in January 2013: <<http://www.ep.liu.se/eunamus/>>.

¹⁸ Porciani, 2010, p. 115; the original in Italian.

focus? How does “religion” fit into the idea of the construction of a nation, of our common European house, that we aim to convey?

In the context of the *ReIReS* Project, it appears to be of some importance that we reflect on museums of history as venues for providing and building narratives designed for ever broader audiences. Museums build knowledge and contribute to forming identities; in other words, their practices of representation are central to how they present, imagine and narrate the world (Clover - Taber - Sanford, 2018). In the long-term goals of the *ReIReS* Project there is not only the dissemination of knowledge, but the desire to affect social stability, encouraging interreligious dialogue: “Knowledge of religious traditions helps us to reduce fear and anger because of prejudices and unfamiliarity with ‘the other’”¹⁹. Museums are complex cultural institutions, places where it is possible to develop interactions even between very different audiences, ‘contact zones’. To what extent can they ultimately help in the direction desired by the *ReIReS* Project, at least judging from their websites?

2.1. *The National Museum of Denmark (Copenhagen)*²⁰

The National Museum of Denmark has an important prehistoric collection, with well-known pieces such as *The Sun Chariot*²¹, placed on the ground floor. On the first floor there are objects from the 1050/1660 period, divided into sections: Middle Ages (1050-1536) and Renaissance (1536-1660). On the second floor, the exhibition continues with the period of the absolute monarchy until the most recent years.

The site does not offer information on the birth of the museum²², which opened in 1849 (Zipsane, 2011, p. 213). At the beginning of the 19th Century, the monarchy established what would become the country’s two main national museums: The State Art Museum for art and The National Museum for archaeology, ethnology, and history.

The visit can be prepared by reading *Historical knowledge. Denmark*, which presents a very broad chronological overview, from the Mesolithic period to the middle of the 20th century. For each period the chapters are usually short or very short, accompanied by a set of images. The part dedicated to the Viking Age, on the other hand, is extensive and structured, and its beginning is also significant: “Danish prehistory *culminated* in the Viking Age, the period from 800 until 1050

¹⁹ <<https://reires.eu/about/>>.

²⁰ <<https://natmus.dk>>.

²¹ <<https://en.natmus.dk/museums-and-palaces/the-national-museum-of-denmark/information-for-tourists/>>.

²² <<https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/historical-themes/the-history-of-the-national-museum/>>.

AD". It contains a graphically effective time line (reproduced on a Viking boat) that cites the most relevant events in order to create a chronological reference framework and a video lasting about three minutes is also available. During the Viking Age there was the transition to Christianity and the religious aspect is treated in several passages, especially in the chapter on *Religion, magic, death and rituals*. A number of points in this text should be taken up and considered:

The relationship between the belief in the Norse gods and Christianity during the Viking period has been the subject of much discussion.

The Viking transition to Christianity did not just involve religion; politics also played a significant role. In the larger kingdoms south of Denmark, Christian rulers and the Church were powerful forces in Viking Age and medieval Europe. The conquering of countries was praiseworthy if the objective was to Christianize their inhabitants. (*The transition to Christianity*)

The baptism of King Harald around 965 marks a decisive step, taking the form of "tactical manoeuvre to hold the German emperor and the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen at bay"²³. The vision of a *religio instrumentum regni* is underlined in several passages while, on the other hand, the persistence of a "Nordic religion" well beyond the threshold of the tenth century is outlined²⁴: Christianity, encountering a different mentality in Scandinavia from that found "in Southern Europe"²⁵, would win without "the old belief" being completely abandoned. The approximately 500-1000 people who in today's Denmark "believe in the old Nordic religion and worship its ancient gods", with an accurate description and images of their main practices and festivities, also conquer an important space in the economy of narration. Of course, the text specifies that it is not a direct continuation of the religiosity of the Vikings, but the phenomenon - although very limited in terms of adherence - is configured as something more than a revival and a contemporary reinterpretation ("The modern belief in the Norse gods is not a direct continuation of the beliefs of the Vikings. It is more of a revival and reinterpretation of the old religion..."). If it is

²³ <<https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/religion-magic-death-and-rituals/the-transition-to-christianity/>>.

²⁴ "Many think that the old Nordic religion – the belief in the Norse gods – disappeared with the introduction of Christianity. However, it did not, but was instead practiced secretly or under a Christian cloak": *The old Nordic religion (asatro) today*, <<https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/religion-magic-death-and-rituals/the-old-nordic-religion-today/>>.

²⁵ *The transition to Christianity. The victorious Christ*: <<https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/religion-magic-death-and-rituals/the-transition-to-christianity/>>.

not a contemporary revival and reinterpretation, how to define these practices? The text is deliberately suspended, leaving the reader to take the next step: the vitality of a primordial North that echoes from generation to generation and with which the imaginary nation, the folk community, is merged (Bäckström, 2010). And it is this cultural heritage, imagined and celebrated, which is also used to explain certain dynamics of the present, as is clear from the part reserved for Viking women²⁶:

Just like today, women in the Viking period sought a suitable partner. The sagas are filled with stories of women competing over who has the best man. However, love did not always last. So it was good that Scandinavia was a pioneering region when it came to equal opportunities. The Viking woman could choose a husband and later decide not to marry him after all, if she so wished.

With Christianisation begins the long Middle Ages, which, in the chronological sequence proposed by the Museum website, continues until the introduction of Lutheranism in 1536. ("when the Lutheran Reformation defeated and replaced the Roman Catholic Church controlled by the Pope"²⁷). A very short part has been reserved for this passage:

The Reformation meant that the Danish Church became Protestant, with the king as its supreme protector, who also had the responsibility of choosing Denmark's seven bishops. However, there was no violent destruction of altars, figures and paintings, but rather a gradual removal of the numerous images of saints and side altars from the Catholic period. The main elements in the new church organisation were that Danish became the language for church services instead of Latin, including sermons and hymns, the giving of both wine and bread at the Eucharist and that there was finally a church discipline that made sure all knew their Christianity from an early age.

As Zipsane observes (2011, p. 211), "no doubt the archaeology museum was, from the very beginning, significant in creating a historically founded Danish nationalism that can be detected in the composition and priorities of the national museums".

²⁶ *Women in the Viking Age*: <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/the-people/women/>.

²⁷ <<https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/middle-ages-1000-1536/>>.

2.2. *The Swedish History Museum (Stockholm)*²⁸

Founded in 1866, The Swedish History Museum operates as a government agency. The permanent displays are arranged in chronological order: the pre-Christian collections are on the ground floor and the collections from around 800 onwards upstairs. It has an impressive Viking collection, which includes objects from the 800-1050 period. In 1994 the *Gold Room* was opened²⁹, with a large number of gold and silver objects on display.

The website of this museum does not offer information on the history of the institution. While I'm writing (January 2019) the home page is divided into several boxes: the top one provides information about a temporary exhibition on the Holocaust³⁰; short notes for the presentation of the Museum follow. The middle and lower sections of the homepage are dominated by the Viking Age. A new Viking exhibition is announced in preparation for May 2020, with a short video and an explanatory text about the objectives of the exhibition, basically a better knowledge of the Viking people "through unique objects, new stories, and interactive stations"; another image introduces the best-known part of the permanent exhibition, gold and silver jewellery and objects placed in the Gold Room on the lower floor of the Museum³¹, with images of important pieces of the collection, such as a fifth century golden collar. Next we find a quiz, *Who are you in Norse mythology?*, a way of deepening the mysterious world of Viking sagas and legends with *The worlds and beings of Norse mythology*, and an introduction to *The mythological world of the Vikings* through Yggdrasil, the tree of life. There is also a blog, with news on an ongoing project on the Middle Neolithic pile dwelling of Alvastra in Östergötland.

If we exclude the temporary exhibition on the Holocaust, the Museum's welcome page is monothematic, aimed at attracting the public through videos and eye-catching graphics and with the celebration of the Viking Age, the founding myth of the nation.

At the top of the menu, by selecting *Exhibitions*, we can access the *History of Sweden*, but the text is really too short to allow reflections:

A thousand years of Swedish history. The "History of Sweden" exhibition is a concentration of events and personal destinies from the 11th century down to the present day. Influential men and women are highlighted, as well as class

²⁸ <<http://historiska.se/home/>>. We also recommend the entry in Wikipedia for the rich apparatus of notes and the linkography: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swedish_History_Museum>.

²⁹ <<http://historiska.se/utställningar/the-gold-room/>>.

³⁰ *Speaking Memories - The Last Witnesses of the Holocaust. An Exhibition at the Swedish History Museum*, January 25 - September 1 2019.

³¹ <<http://historiska.se/utställningar/the-gold-room/>>.

struggles, minorities and immigrants, all of whom have made their mark on history. The History of Sweden exhibition starts in the 11th century, long before Sweden became Sweden. Each century is represented by a variety of dramatic scenes.

Unfortunately the site does not develop this part, in that it does not propose something more about minorities and immigrants. Apart from this brief quotation, we question what place they have in the Museum's overall cultural policies. With this question in mind, through *Exhibitions*, we attempt to deepen the contents of *History unfolded: A reflection*. *History unfolded* is an exhibition and a series of cultural events proposed by the Museum. In this section of the site the museum's awareness of being an important agent emerges "in providing a perspective on how history and the cultural heritage is formed and developed"³². The creation of museums and the interpretation of history are complex processes that have immense importance for society; consideration is given to the need to welcome and give the right emphasis to narratives and perspectives that have previously not been shown. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the focus always remains on the cultural heritage of the nation. Among the events we find a cultural initiative on *Spiritual cultural heritage. Religion, diversity and museums*³³ and its approach confirms what has just been written: the basic question which the speakers try to answer concerns the influence of the religious cultural heritage on a secularised country like Sweden today, what kind of relationship visitors establish with the church and the religious objects that are part of the museum collection. The present nation, at least for the most part secularised, discusses how to enter into a dialogue with the nation of the past.

2.3. *The German Historical Museum (Berlin)*³⁴

Since 1952, the Democratic Republic has had a Museum für Deutsche Geschichte. The Federal Republic's response matured in the 1980s, after the success of several exhibitions on German history. The burgomaster of Berlin charged some historians with the feasibility project; the support of the chancellor Helmut Kohl also arrived (Porciani, 2010, pp. 125 et seq) and, after and despite a lively discussion about the legitimacy and appropriateness of establishing this museum, it was inaugurated in 1987, on the occasion of the 750th anniversary celebration of Berlin³⁵.

³² <<http://historiska.se/utställningar/history-unfolds-a-reflection/>>.

³³ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uyTtbNYfNCA&feature=youtu.be>>.

³⁴ <<https://www.dhm.de/>>.

³⁵ A list of publications on the museum is available here: <<https://www.dhm.de/sammlung->

The institution proposes and presents itself as “a place of active communication and discussion of history”³⁶, carrying out a multifaceted and intense cultural activity: permanent and temporary exhibitions are accompanied by the *Zeughauskino* with its collection of historical film material, and a public *Reference Library* and a *Picture Archive* (with around 500,000 photos on German and European history) are active. *Living Museum Online* (LeMO) is a virtual museum developed together with other institutions. The portal covers the period from 1800 to the present day and provides the web public with texts, objects, interviews, films and other materials of historical interest in digital format.

The welcome page features a horizontal panel with sliding images at the top, offering visitors an overview of upcoming or ongoing temporary exhibitions. *About us* offers a multi-lingual introduction to the museum’s permanent collection: not only in German and English, but also in Spanish, French, Italian and Chinese³⁷:

The Permanent Exhibition in the Zeughaus provides key insights into 1500 years of Germany’s past. A tour covering the two floors of the exhibition chronologically presents German history in its European context: the introductory section on the first floor revolves around changes in the borders of Germany and Europe, and the history of the German language. The tour then covers the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Thirty Years’ War, on to the German Empire and end of the First World War in 1918. The ground floor explores the Weimar Republic, the National Socialist regime, and the post-war period. The exhibition also covers the history of the two German states from 1949, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and German reunification in 1990. 7000 historical exhibits show us how people lived and thought, as well as the events and historical developments they were part of. The exhibition focuses on political history shaped by rulers, politicians and communities. Furthermore, each epoch in the exhibition also contains a variety of rooms in which everyday life is explored.

Visitors can download the pdf file with the museum plan and see the organisation of the collection, located in the rooms on the ground floor and first floor. I would like to point out that: 1) the Museum proposes through its website a very long period, from the Middle Ages to reunification, in a European framework (“(...) German history in its European context (...)”, “(...)

forschung/forschung/publikationen/ausstellungen-und-sammlungen/publikationen-mit-symposiumsbeitragen.html>.

³⁶ <<https://www.dhm.de/en/about-us/about-us.html>>.

³⁷ <<https://www.dhm.de/en/ausstellungen/permanent-exhibition.html>>.

on the first floor revolves around changes in the borders of Germany and Europe (...)"', a view also confirmed by the availability of materials in a plurality of languages; 2) the museum's focus is not only on the national community but also on the wider geographical area in which the German language is spoken; 3) together with the political-institutional data, the exhibition contemplates the narration of daily life ("7000 historical exhibits show us how people lived and thought").

By selecting *German History from the Middle Ages to the Fall of the Berlin Wall*, we can take a closer look at the various eras, for each of which short texts and a gallery of images are proposed, all with very accurate captions (unfortunately only available in German). For the 500-1500 period the 'religious', although in a few lines, is presented as being closely and complexly incorporated into society: "Surviving testimonials on everyday culture and authentic works of medieval art give us insight into the importance of religion and the imperial church and into medieval society and the class divisions of the estates"³⁸. In the following period, *Reformation and the Thirty Years' War (1500-1650)*, we find confirmation of the interweaving between religion and politics:

In the 16th century the teachings of Luther, the distribution of which was aided by early book-printing, gave the impulse for a reform of the church that resulted in profound religious and political changes in the Empire. The political powers split into followers and opponents of the Reformation. The Religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555 brought decades of peace and encouraged the growth of urban culture in many places. Around 1600, increased confessional differences and political conflicts led to the Thirty Years' War, from 1618-1648. The Empire became the theatre of this war; testimony to its horrors can be found not only in drawings and reports of the time, but also in the armour and weapons in the historical collection of the Zeughaus. The battles were soon joined by other European powers that were less concerned with the religious issues than with their own interests in power politics. Not until 1648 could the Peace of Westphalia create a new European order, which was then to guarantee peace for the next half century.

In the images proposed are Luther and the other reformers, but also objects that refer to the spread of the plague (*Plague doctor mask*, 16thC), a picture of the Jesuit college in Dillingen, an allegory of peace and justice by van Thulden painted immediately after the Peace of Westphalia, objects of everyday life, like a travel sundial. The style of writing is controlled and in no way can one perceive a celebratory intent, for example, of the figure of Luther; of the period, both through the text and through the images, the objective is to communicate

³⁸ <<https://www.dhm.de/en/ausstellungen/permanent-exhibition/epochs/500-1500.html>>.

above all the conflict, the harshness of the conditions of daily life (effectively transmitted by the painting with a scene of looting by Sebastian Vrancx, about 1600), the sense of precariousness. The peace of Westphalia creates the new European order, while in the image gallery the painting *Martin Luther in the circle of Reformers* (between 1625 and 1650) transmits - as we read in the caption - the utopia of a peaceful religious conversation. Even for later eras, up to the most difficult and controversial period, the images and their long captions weave a controlled narrative, which does not obscure or remove anything.

The German Historical Museum aims to play a social role, establishing a 'contact zone', defining itself as a place of exchange and debate and carrying out inclusive cultural policies, oriented towards the involvement of the public in its activities³⁹. The website effectively communicates this orientation, also informing us that the collection of religious objects can be increased with pieces from immigrant families and their churches⁴⁰.

It is important to remember the availability of audio guides in Chinese, English, French, Italian, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Turkish, and also in Arabic, in order to emphasise the opening of this museum. The Museum is also part of the *Multaka: Museum as Meeting Point - Refugees as Guides in Berlin Museums*, a project created in collaboration with other cultural institutions: Syrian and Iraqi refugees are being trained as museum guides so that they can then provide guided museum tours for Arabic-speaking refugees in their native language. 'Multaka' (Arabic for "meeting point") also aims to facilitate the interchange of diverse cultural and historical experiences⁴¹.

³⁹ The *Democracy Lab* initiative is also very interesting: "What do a protester's placard, a bag of empty (returnable) bottles and a Mesut Özil German national team fan shirt have to do with democracy? The Democracy Laboratory is a participatory exhibition that allows visitors to actively discuss such questions. They will be encouraged to reflect on how societal / political participation and cohabitation should look in both present-day and future Germany. Seven rooms offer an introduction to topics such as voting, civil society, basic rights, social justice, the media, citizenship, and state violence. The laboratory offers not only an insight into the histories of original artifacts. It also provides a space within which to approach the subject of democracy in a participatory and hands-on way". <<https://www.dhm.de/en/bildungsvermittlung/schwerpunkt-demokratie.html>>.

⁴⁰ <<https://www.dhm.de/en/collections-research/sammlungen00/material-culture/religious-objects/the-collection.html>>.

⁴¹ <<https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-fuer-islamische-kunst/collection-research/research-cooperation/multaka.html>>.

3. *The House of European History (Brussels)*⁴²

The House of European History opened its doors in 2017, after some failed attempts at “putting Europe in the museum”⁴³. In 2008, the main objective of a Committee of Experts was to set up a place of “where a memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated and which at the same time is available as a locus of the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union”⁴⁴. In the following years, the members of the Academic Project Team considered the concept of identity too problematic, believing that the House of European History could not be “a stage for presentation of a pre-defined European identity”⁴⁵.

It is worth proposing what two members of the team (Taja Vovk van Gaal and Christine Dupont) wrote during the project phase of the museum:

That is the reason for the choice of the more fluid notion of collective memory as a tool to support the narrative of the permanent exhibition and the various programmes. Memory is at the same time what divides and what unites Europe. This notion has a strong critical potential, which can be used to promote a dynamic dialogue with the visitors. The choice of focusing on the 20th century is of course the perfect terrain for this kind of debate, even if memory-conflicts about this century are among the hottest topics in history as well as in politics. Building the HEH as a reservoir of European memory offers the possibility to reflect on different perceptions of the past and different interpretations of history (...). The choice of a European perspective is of course restrictive (...). This choice means a focus on historical processes and events which have originated in Europe, which expanded across Europe, and which are relevant up to nowadays (Vovk van Gaal - Dupont, 2012, p. 49).

A description of the sections of the permanent exhibition is available in *Remes 2017*, and it will be appropriate to refer to this publication for a more in-depth presentation. The exhibition focuses on the European history of the 20th century, with particular attention to the process of European Integration from 1945.

As I write, the website advertises the discussion of a volume about the

⁴² <<https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en>>.

⁴³ Camille Mazé quoted in *Remes*, 2017, p. 107.

⁴⁴ Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament, quoted in Committee of Experts 2008, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Andrea Mork, *Presentation of the House of European History*, quoted in *Remes*, 2017, p. 109. See also Mork - Christodoulou, 2019 (<<https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/focus/new-publication-creating-house-european-history>>).

changes that followed 1989; it offers information about the institution's mission ("Our primary mission is to enhance understanding of European history in all its complexity, to encourage the exchange of ideas and to question assumptions"⁴⁶); it provides practical information on how to plan a visit (*Visit us. General information*), or on the didactic activity at the museum (*Visit us. Families, groups and schools*).

The institution conveys through its website the image of a welcoming place, open to all, to the questions and needs of all⁴⁷. The museum strongly invests in multimedia and interactivity: in the *Interactions* exhibition, dedicated to the themes of mobility and meeting, the introductory space is devoted to a collaborative digital mapping experiment. This map is still available on the site: *Tracking my Europe*⁴⁸.

Through *What's on. Past events* we can take a look at the cultural activity carried out by the young institution: from a thematic guided tour on the memory of the Shoah, to a series of initiatives together with Europeans on the Great War, to a round table on *The legacy of 1968* for Europe today, to cultural initiatives of EUNIC (European Union National Institutes for Culture), to living history activities⁴⁹. These events focus on the most recent history or current events, with the sole exception of a debate dedicated to ancient history⁵⁰. The themes chosen for the temporary exhibitions confirm this approach: *Growing up in Europe, 1945 to now* and *Interactions*.

The page of the site *What to see. Permanent exhibition* introduces the permanent display, with the reminder that the visitor will not find there the story of each European nation. What the curators instead propose is "to explore how history has shaped a sense of European memory and continues to

⁴⁶ *About us: Mission:* <<https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/mission-vision>>. On this page you can download a guide to the permanent exhibition in the twenty-four languages.

⁴⁷ *Discover. Overview:* "The House of European History is a place for all. It informs, it challenges, it reflects, but most of all it allows you to ask questions. Our exhibition galleries, interpretative devices, hands-on spaces, programmes and events are devised in such a way that you can delve into aspects of European history at whatever level you wish. The learning offer of the museum takes a trans-European viewpoint that explores the historical memories, diverse experiences and common ground of the peoples of Europe and how these relate to the present day. The House of European History is a museum for everyone. Working together with diverse groups and communities is a vital aspect of the museum's activities. We aim to reach out to extraordinary people both near and far through tailored visits and specific programs. Do not hesitate to send us your specific requests and we will do our utmost to make our museum accessible to you". <<https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/discover>>

⁴⁸ <<http://www.myinteractions.eu/apps/heh-web-portal/>>.

⁴⁹ *Nocturne at the Museum!* <<https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/agenda/thursday-11-october-nocturne-museum>>.

⁵⁰ <<https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/agenda/boring-old-stories-antiquity-today>>.

influence our lives today and in the future”⁵¹. The website offers limited examples of what you will find in the exhibition: the first section, *Shaping Europe*, is presented as a reflective section, through which the visitor is invited to ask himself a series of questions:

What is Europe? Geography shows us that Europe has never been a clearly defined space. The continent’s name comes from the ancient Greek myth of Europa, a story that has been re-interpreted, like history itself, from various points of view over time.

Europe is described through its achievements and traditions but what distinguishes it from other continents? Can we say that we have a shared European past when history has affected people differently? Can we find any commonality – a reservoir of European memory?

The site offers four itineraries within the section: *Mapping Europe*, *The Myth of Europa*, *European Heritage*, *Memory*. In *Mapping Europe* an image from Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmographia* (1488-1552) represents Europe as the Virgin Mary, and is accompanied by this caption: “Maps created during the Middle Ages often disregarded geographical accuracy in favour of Christian messages and symbolism. In the Renaissance, the continent of Europe was represented as the Virgin Mary: an expression of its Christian identity”. Also in *European Heritage* a sacred carved figure reminds us that Christianity spread across Europe to become immensely influential and a defining feature of Western civilisation, and that European values, traditions and culture “still reflect this long Christian heritage”.

Despite the team’s declared desire to avoid a teleological vision and to address a very problematic and elusive discourse on European identity, these two captions suggest the idea of Europe as a community of values, of a presence of Christianity as a bond and as a fundamental trait of European civilisation: a suggestion to be linked to the “commonality of roots” present, albeit in a nuanced way, in the text *Conceptual Basis of the HEH*⁵².

There is no doubt about the willingness of the team members to provoke debate and discussion, not to tell a story of Europe other than a success story, as is clear, for example, from how the website informs us about the Nobel Peace Prize obtained by Europe in 2012: space is left for protests, and the reasons for

⁵¹ <<https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/permanent-exhibition>>.

⁵² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721_en.pdf>: “On the basis of historical experience and effects, it should be made clear why the European Institutions were founded and built up in the second half of the 20th century. The exhibition should equally illustrate both the diversity of the history of Europe and the commonality of its roots”.

protests⁵³. But as far as religion is concerned, we can only register either an absence of the topic or a simplification. As Marcello Verga pointed out:

It may come as a surprise that on the five floors of the beautiful Eastman building there is never any mention of religion or migration. (...) Does the absence of any reference to religion mean that we intend to propose a history of Europe marked by secularisation? Or does it rather mean the renunciation of the House to confront one of the elements that most characterise the European heritage?

Carlo Spagnolo (2017), on the other hand, stressed that the deepest cultural limit is to assimilate the history of Europe to the history of European integration⁵⁴, and not to recognise the dignity of representation of the divided memories of Europe.

In order to build a common European house - what the museum aspires to be - there seems to be an urgent need for a long-distance cultural project which, above all, extends to dealing with the contents, the difficulties and the problems of the historiographic subject of 'Europe'⁵⁵, which only a very long-term look, not crushed by the most recent history and current events, can help to tackle through the museum's multiform activities. Without eluding themes such as religion, on which Europe, also through a project such as *REIRES*, is called to accept confrontation and challenges

4. Conclusions

It is legitimate to ask ourselves a series of questions about national history museums, starting from the usefulness of their own institution: how can they manage to approach history in a correct way? How much can, "a single great coherent narrative, communicated with the penetrating force of objects and images that are not capable of suggesting nuances and questions" be capable of accepting the challenges of the present, the complex issues related to massive immigration and multi-ethnicity? (Porciani, 2010).

Some museums seem 'to expiate' the reasons for their birth, the construction of the nation, as an 'original sin', a legacy that acts as a great repository of collective mythologies from which to draw. The overall cultural activity, which the website documents and communicates, insists on the self-recognition of the

⁵³ *Appraisal and criticism*: <<https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/permanent-exhibition/accolades-and-criticism>>.

⁵⁴ Verga and Spagnolo were interviewed by Fiori, 2018.

⁵⁵ On this subject, I shall limit myself to quoting, also for further bibliographical studies: Verga, 2004.

national community rather than on learning, speaks the language of the imaginary and shared feelings of that community without opening up to new scenarios, to the acceptance of new challenges. Religion is introduced to the extent that it becomes an element of a founding mythology, of a great coherent narrative that points to the search for unifying elements.

Yet, cultural activities, didactics, temporary exhibitions offer the museum not only the opportunity to address the topic of 'nation' in a critical and comparative way, but also to play a social educational role, to attract different audiences, really representing a place of contact and exchange. The most diverse collateral activities can develop from a collection. The collection is neither a limit nor an alibi to justify the absence of inclusive and participatory cultural policies. Above all, ideas and creativity are needed, as well as courage in dealing with controversial subjects.

In the end, it seems to be possible to say that the more a museum has adopted the principles of openness and precariousness, the more it can aspire to be an agent of intercultural understanding, helping to bridge inequalities and to create social cohesion (Sandell, p. 138; Rosati, p. 51).

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6. Curriculum vitae

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Academic purges and reforms in the Academy in relation to the studies in Church history in the early stages of Communism in Bulgaria

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Abstract

Verouchenie (faith-education) was introduced into the Bulgarian schools as early as 1824 and remained a mandatory subject until 1944. With the rise of communists to power, education in religion was scraped from the schools' curricula. Yet even under Communism, history lessons continued to provide knowledge of the Church's role in history. However, professors and teachers, who – after World War II – were labeled as non-Marxists, were dismissed from their jobs and were subsequently replaced by people who would teach history from a Marxist viewpoint. This article presents several cases of well-known professors who lost their jobs in Sofia University on account of their being considered 'bourgeois elements'.

Keywords

Faith-education; Academic purges; Bulgarian schools; Sofia University.

Riassunto

L'insegnamento della religione ortodossa (*verouchenie*) venne introdotto nelle scuole bulgare sin dal 1824 e rimase materia scolastica obbligatoria fino al 1944. Con la presa del potere i comunisti ne vietarono l'insegnamento e la disciplina venne cancellata dai programmi di scuola. In quel periodo, però, grazie alle lezioni di storia si continuava a ottenere certe conoscenze sul ruolo che la Chiesa aveva avuto nella storia. I professori universitari e liceali, dichiarati non-marxisti l'indomani della seconda guerra mondiale, vennero licenziati e sostituiti da quadri leali al regime che avrebbero insegnato la storia da posizioni marxiste. Il saggio presenta alcuni casi di celebri professori dell'Università di Sofia che persero il lavoro perché considerati 'elementi borghesi'.

Mots-clés

Educazione religiosa; purghe accademiche; scuola bulgara; Università di Sofia.

1. Bibliography. - 2. Curriculum vitae.

Even as, from the 1820s onwards, education in Bulgaria was becoming increasingly secular (Petrov, 2013, pp. 85-102), *catechesis* as "an education in the

faith of children” remained an integral part of the school curricula in the country. In the fifty-four-year period between 1824 and 1878, 281 different textbooks and teacher’s manuals in religious education were published. In order to meet the specific requirements of various school boards, textbooks of religious education varied in content and displayed a variety of titles: e.g., *Divine Law*, *Catechesis*, *Church History*, or *Liturgy*. What all those early textbooks and teacher’s manuals had in common was that they, for the most part, were translations from foreign languages, primarily Russian, Greek or German. Prominent National Revival figures such as Yoakim Gruev, Petko R. Slaveykov, Christo G. Danov and Ivan Momtchilov, to name but a few, were either authors or translators of religious education textbooks in the pre-1878 period of Bulgarian history (Sapundzhieva, 2010). On the eve of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877/78, in the Bulgarian provinces of the Ottoman Empire there were 1711 elementary schools, several dozens of middle schools, three high schools and several trade schools (Kolev, 1992, p. 22). All of them, without exception, offered classes in religion.

In the years following Bulgaria’s Liberation in 1878, the secular character of the Bulgarian education system was regulated by legislation (Peev, 2014). In both the state and private schools in Bulgaria religious education remained a mandatory subject. As before, it laid emphasis on the traditional Eastern Orthodox Christian values. In order to qualify as teachers in religious education, teachers attended special courses, which were organized by the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Following the military coup of 19 May 1934, religious education was assigned special importance; clerics too were allowed into the classrooms. As for the textbooks, their contents ought to be approved by the Holy Synod. Thus, the first-grade textbook was to contain only pictures illustrating the evangelical tales while the second and third grade textbooks included some text as well.

In the 1930s, prominent Bulgarian writers and artists were among the authors and illustrators of the textbooks in religion. To this day, one of the best examples of a primary school textbook in religious education is the fourth-grade textbook that was approved by both the Holy Synod and the Ministry of Education in 1934: it is authored by Chr. Spassovsky and T. Bliznakov and is beautifully illustrated by the famous children’s books illustrator V. Lazarkevitch. Teacher’s manuals too were authored by well-known writers. Thus, the author of the 1936 second-grade teacher’s manual in religious education is the famous Bulgarian writer Elin Pelin who has penned many children’s books as well. Education in religion, or *verouchenie* (faith-education) and *Zakon Bozhi* (Divine Law) as it was popularly known, remained a mandatory subject in Bulgarian schools until 1944 (Pironkova, 2013).

With the rise of communists to power in 1944, dramatic changes took place in Bulgaria. In the school year 1944/45, education in religion was only listed as an optional subject in the curricula. Two years later, in 1946/47 religious education was altogether scraped from the curricula. It was only in 2000 that the Bulgarian Ministry of Education allowed a new subject called *Religion* to be taught in the Bulgarian schools: it was to be offered as an optional, that is, non-mandatory subject, and in two different versions, *Religion-Christianity* and *Religion-Islam*, educating students in Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Sunni Islam, respectively.

Let us go back to the mid-1940s when radical changes were taking place in Bulgarian society. Catechetical education was removed from the school curricula but history lessons continued to provide some knowledge of the cultural and political role, which Christianity in general and the Orthodox Church in particular played in Bulgarian history. In the history textbooks, the periods under consideration were those of the Middle Ages, the Ottoman Rule, and the National Revival of the later 18th to the mid-19th century. The early history of the Church was excluded from the textbooks, and so was the history of the various Church denominations. As I said, if any knowledge of the church history was to be included in the textbooks, it had to be the history of the Orthodox Church, mostly in the context of the cultural role it played in national history.

Furthermore, the narrative of the historical role of the Orthodox Church had to be presented in such a way as to fit into the general Marxist teachings. Professors who did not share the ideology of Marxism-Leninism were expelled from Sofia University. For the same reason, a great number of teachers were dismissed from schools. The purges in the Academia affected the lives and careers of professors and scholars who were considered “bourgeois elements” by the new regime. The subsequent setting of historiography on “Marxist rails” had a tremendous impact on the study and teaching of history, including ecclesiastical history. As a result, the limiting of education in theology and church history had long-lasting consequences as far as the spiritual and societal life in Bulgaria was concerned.

Let me present a brief account of the facts pertaining to the academic purges and reforms in Bulgaria in the mid- to late 1940s and early '50s. The events that followed in the wake of the 1944 coup encouraged the so-called “anti-fascist forces” in Bulgaria to take action against everybody whom they viewed as a “fascist”. (Needless to say, every person who did not share the communist ideology and was not thrilled at the prospect of Bulgaria’s becoming a Bolshevik country was labeled a “fascist”.)

As early as 12 Oct. 1944, that is, only a month after the coup, some faculty members of the History-and-Philology Department at Sofia University drafted a letter, which they sent to the University Committee of the Fatherland Front (FF). In it, they urged the university to immediately purge itself of all the “hostile elements” in its ranks, pointing the finger at some of their fellow professors whom they regarded as being “fascists” or, to say the least, “bourgeois”. In the list containing the names of the university professors to be expelled one comes across such prominent academic figures as Prof. Ivan Dujčev, Prof. Vesselin Beševliev, and Prof. Mikhail Arnaudov, Prof. Boris Yotsov, Prof. B. Filov, K. Galabov, to mention but a few (Mutafčieva - Čičovska, 1995, pp. 50-52).

Only 20 days later, on 3 Nov. 1944, the Council of Ministers, prompted by the Ministry of Education, issued an ordinance, according to which the schools, the teachers’ institutes, Sofia University and the other institutions of higher education had to dismiss all those teachers and professors who had actively supported “the old regime” and propagated its ideas (Mutafčieva - Čičovska, 1995, pp. 54–55). Needless to say, the dismissal of prominent professors from Sofia University exerted a negative impact on the quality of education (Doytchinov, 1991, pp. 48-49; Yanev, 2009).

Three years later, similar measures were taken by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, which too needed to get purged of “the elements that were hostile with regard to the new regime” (Mutafčieva - Čičovska, 1995, pp. 81-82). Special measures were taken with regard to the education of clergy. For example, in 1950 the Sofia Orthodox Seminary “St. John of Rila” (i.e., the theological high school) was ordered to leave its premises in the city of Sofia. The school was then exiled to the Tcherepish monastery in the mountains, some 90 km to the north-east of Sofia. A year later, in 1951 the Parliament passed a law, according to which the Faculty of Theology was to be removed from Sofia University: it became an Academy of Theology (i.e., an institution of higher education ranking lower than a university).

Let me adduce a few examples of how eminent professors were fired from the Faculty of History & Philology in the mid-40s. A leading authority on medieval history, Prof. Ivan Dujčev was dismissed from Sofia University in November 1945, on account of his being a ‘bourgeois element’ and a ‘fascist’. A doctoral degree was bestowed upon him by La Sapienza University (Rome) in 1934. In 1935, Dujčev took the annual *corso di paleografia, diplomatica e archivistica* at the *Scuola Vaticana di Paleografia*. In 1936, he returned to Sofia to become an assistant professor of medieval studies in Sofia University. In 1939 Dujčev was tenured and, following the deaths of two eminent figures in medieval studies, Prof. Petar Mutafčiev and Prof. Petar Nikov, he came to chair two departments, the Department of Byzantine Studies and the Department of Balkan History

(Avramov, 2013, pp. 2–3). Vesselin Beševliev, an eminent professor in classical studies and archaeology and a corresponding member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, was also expelled from Sofia University, on account of his being a ‘proponent of Hitler’s ideas. Beševliev had studied in Germany, in the universities of Halle, Jena and Würzburg, where he got his doctoral degree in 1925. Mikhail Arnaudov, a professor in comparative literary studies who had specialized in the universities of Leipzig and Berlin and, along with his teaching career had become a member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, was not only dismissed from Sofia University but was also sentenced to life on account of his serving as a minister of education in one of the last pre-communist cabinets in Bulgaria. The list of professors who were purged in the Historical-Philological Faculty of Sofia University is longer than that. But even the three cases that I have cited are illustrative of the fact that the purges affected eminent professors who had one thing in common: they were alumni of Western European universities and did not subscribe to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. Other professors who were also labeled “ideologically unreliable” – a euphemism for being a non-Communist – were fired at a somewhat later date. For example, Professor Borislav Primov, the medievalist, was fired in 1954. It was in 1948 and ’49 that some of the leading professors in the Theology Department of Sofia University, such as Ivan Snegarov and Ivan Goshev, also suffered persecution and repressions.

The late 1940s and early ’50s are also known as ‘the years of debate’: the new, Marxist ideology was being introduced into scholarship and higher education, especially in the humanities and social sciences. This had a tremendous impact on the teaching of history (including history of the Church). It was the year 1948 that marked the beginnings of this process. The first ‘debate,’ which also happened to be of the longest duration and which had the deepest ideological impact on the work of Bulgarian historians, took place during the so-called Meeting of Historians that was organized by the Committee of Science, Art, and Culture (March–April 1948). It aimed at setting up the ideological goals that historians in Bulgaria should strive to accomplish in their future work. All the sessions of the meeting took place in the aula of Sofia University and were presided over by the then prime-minister of Bulgaria Vălko Tchervenkov. Here, I do not intend to review and summarize the proceedings of that ‘debate’. Suffice it to say that all the historical studies conducted and published before 1947 were said to be suffering from ‘bourgeois helplessness’ on account of the methods used. The ideological directives that were being drawn at the meeting were expected to set Bulgarian historiography on new, ‘Marxist rails.’ During that meeting, those professors and scholars who had survived the purges were forced to subject their own views and former writings to adverse criticism while

fervently making promises for their future work, which was going to be in line with the new ideology.

So, while under Communism in Bulgaria education in religion was excluded from the curricula of state schools Church history remained part of the history lessons; however, ecclesiastical history was to be interpreted from a Marxist point of view. As I have already mentioned, the inclusion, in the school curricula, of a discrete academic subject dealing with the religious traditions of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Sunni Islam became a reality only in the year 2000.

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2. *Curriculum vitae*

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