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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**

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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 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 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.





