

Religion and Pluralism in Education

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*Comparative Approaches
in the Western Balkans*

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3. Religious education in Croatia

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Introduction

Religion and religiosity form an integral and active element of culture: as one way of man's correlation with the world, as a possible answer to the crucial questions of human existence, and as a practical value orientation in life. Like other forms of human spirit, religion is also an active factor of every socio-cultural milieu, and thus a factor in the development of spiritual and material culture. There is a substantial number of practical implications for the behaviour of religious people and members of a certain religious community, as well as of those outside of it. All this suggests the importance of young people getting acquainted with the religious phenomenon through education in schools as well.

School is one of the prime movers of socialization, and it exists within, and is marked by, a concrete socio-historical context. Educational contents in school are shaped not only by the general results of the development of basic human knowledge, but also by the tradition and culture of an actual society. Each state makes sure that school passes on the values and norms that form the foundation of social life. Other institutions than the state can also influence the teaching content in schools. The Catholic Church in Croatia, for example, exercised a significant influence on the teaching content in the state primary and secondary schools and the introduction of religious instruction in kindergartens and public schools at the beginning of the 1990s.

Social and religious context in Croatia

Under communism, in Croatia (as a part of the former Yugoslavia), religion and churches carried negative connotations, were confined to the private sphere, and did not have any social impact. Although the constitution guaranteed all forms of religious rights and freedoms, the desirable conformity patterns were non-religiosity and atheism. Ideological “struggle” against religion and churches had been fought in various areas of social life (with varying intensity). Therefore, on the institutional level they were invisible—for instance in the educational system and mass media.

However, religion and the church did not disappear from people’s lives. They were widely spread in traditional forms across all segments of society, being constituent of the traditional rural as well as “modern” urban environment (although less so in the latter). In the context of confessional differences Croatia was, together with Slovenia, the most religious part of the former Yugoslavia. Sociologists recognized this widespread traditional religiosity as a potential for revitalisation of religion in different social circumstances.

The transitional context in Croatia, as well as in other post-communist countries, has been marked by the transformation of the institutional, industrial, economic and cultural structures of society, followed by parallel processes of liberalisation and democratisation as preconditions of political and social changes.

Religious changes have an important place within the process of socio-cultural change in the transitional period. Shaped predominantly by the leading party (HDZ) at the beginning of the 1990s, the major framework of these changes was the openness of the political structure and society as a whole to religion and the church (especially the Catholic Church)—from institutional solutions to the change of their position and the role in society. Another important part of this framework was the activity of the churches in the pre-war, war, and post-war period, followed by national and religious homogenisation.

Crucial for our theme is the fact that religion and churches assumed a presence in public life, the media, and the educational system. The change of their position after 1990 has been followed by a

huge increase in declared religiosity, as shown by various studies (Boneta, 2000; Cifrić, 2000; Črpić and Kušar, 1998; Goja, 2000; Mandarić, 2000; Marinović Jerolimov, 2000, 2001; Zrinščak, Črpić and Kušar, 2000; Vrcan, 2001). The strong identification with religion and the church became almost complete in the population, which places Croatia among the countries with the highest level of religiosity in Europe behind Poland, Romanian Transsylvania, Malta, Portugal, Italy and Ireland (Aračić, Črpić and Nikodem, 2003; Davie, 2000; Zrinščak, Črpić and Kušar, 2000).

The revitalisation of religion and religiosity has been followed by processes of desecularisation and deprivatisation. Casanova (1994) introduced the concept of deprivatisation to describe the religious situation in modern societies after the 1980s, confirming a certain turnabout in secular trends, and emphasising the entrance of religion in the public sphere, where it would participate in defining relationships on all levels of society and in all areas. Although the religious tradition had been recognised as a part of culture and social life like in West European societies, the revitalisation of religion in Croatia followed a different path. It did not manifest a rise of the so-called *religion à la carte*, a religious *bricolage* or the processes of individualisation, de-traditionalisation and de-collectivisation. On the contrary, the revitalisation of religion in Croatia occurred more within the framework of re-traditionalisation, re-totalisation and re-collectivisation (Vrcan, 1999). Some data from the recent study "Social and religious changes in Croatia" (2004) confirm these findings.

Religiosity in Croatia: some empirical data

According to the 2001 census, 94 per cent of the population belong to some religion, and 6 per cent are agnostics, undeclared, not religious, or listed as unknown. However, the vast majority (87.83 percent) declared themselves Catholics. Adherence to different religious communities was as in Table 3.1 (overleaf).

The study "Social and religious changes in Croatia" (2004), conducted by the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb on a representative sample of the adult population of Croatia, confirmed the

Table 3.1: Confessional Structure of the Republic of Croatia

	<i>Republic of Croatia</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Roman Catholic Church	3,897,332	87.83
Orthodox Churches	195,969	4.42
Agnostics and undeclared	132,532	2.99
Not religious	98,376	2.22
Islamic Religious Community	56,777	1.28
Unknown	25,874	0.58
Greek Catholic Church	6,219	0.14
Jehovah's Witnesses	6,094	0.14
Other religions	4,764	0.11
Other protestant churches	4,068	0.09
Evangelic Church	3,339	0.08
Adventist Church	3,001	0.07
Baptist Church	1,981	0.04
Jewish Religious Community	495	0.01
Christ's Pentecostal Church	336	0.01

Source: Census 2001

same level of declared Catholics. Together with indicators of religious identification, religious socialisation, religious belief and practice, it documents a highly visible trend towards the re-vitalisation of religiosity after the fall of communism.

As we can see from the data in Table 3.2, there is a high incidence of elements of traditional church religiosity transferred through family socialisation, such as religious upbringing and sacramental practice. The same can be observed in basic church beliefs. However, religious beliefs are fragmented, a fact that has been documented in various research on religion in Croatia (as elsewhere) for decades. The level of regular religious practice is lower than other elements of religiosity.

Besides these basic indicators of religiosity, deeper analysis showed a significant difference, in all the dimensions explored, between firm believers and religious people who do not accept everything their religion teaches. Women, housewives, farmers, the less educated, and people from rural areas are more religious; men, the more educated, higher professionals, and urbanites are less religious. The religious and non-religious respondents differ in their ac-

ceptance of traditional and modern values—religious people being closer to traditional values, and non-religious people to modern values. There is a discrepancy between the attitudes of respondents and the attitudes of the Church concerning family and sexuality (Marinović Jerolimov, 2005).

Besides the dominant Catholic religion to which the majority of the population belongs, there are various traditional churches and smaller religious communities of Christian and non-Christian provenance in Croatia, as well as a certain percentage of agnostics, non-believers, atheists, and undecided. The list of 40 registered churches

Table 3.2: Religiosity in Croatia in 2004

<i>Indicators of religiosity</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Religious affiliation	
Catholics	87
Religious identification	
Religious	78
Sacramental practice	
Baptised	94
First communion	85
Confirmation	81
Religious socialisation	
Religious upbringing	81
Religious instruction in church and at school	83
Religious beliefs	
God exists	82
God created world and men	72
God is the source of morality	70
Heaven and hell exist	53
There is a life after death	52
Religious practice	
Attend church weekly	27

A six-item scale was used for measuring religious self-identification. It was constructed as a continuum from the firm believer to those opposed to religion: “I am firm believer and I accept everything my religion teaches”; “I am religious but I do not accept everything my religion teaches”; “I am not sure whether I believe or not”; “I am indifferent towards religion”; “I am not religious, but I have nothing against religion”; “I am not religious and I am opposed to religion.”

Table 3.3: Registered Churches and Religious Communities in Croatia

1. Roman Catholic Church	22. Protestant Reformed Christian Church
2. Serbian Orthodox Church	23. Jehovah's Witnesses
3. Jewish Communities	24. Evangelical Church Valdese [Evangeoska crkva Valdeze]
4. Islamic Religious Community	25. Evangelical Methodist Church
5. Evangelical Church	26. Church of Christ's Disciples [Crkva Kristovih učenika]
6. Reformed Christian Church	27. Independent Baptist Church
7. Pentecostal Church	28. Union of Churches "Word of Life"
8. Christian Adventist Church	29. International United Pentecostal Church
9. Union of Baptist Churches	30. Christian Prophet's Church
10. Old Catholic Church	31. Free Catholic Church
11. Bulgarian Orthodox Church	32. Church of Happy News [Crkva Radosna vijest]
12. Macedonian Orthodox Church	33. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
13. Christ's Churches	34. Baha'i Community
14. Church of God	35. Hindu Religious Community
15. Union of Christ's Pentecostal Churches	36. Vaisnava Religious Community
16. Reformed Movement of Seventh-Day Adventists	37. Buddhist Religious Community Darmaloka
17. Christian Neo-Pentecostal Church	38. Church of Scientology
18. Christ's Spiritual Church	39. Universal Life
19. New Apostolic Church [Hrvatska apostolska crkva]	40. Evangelical Christians
20. Church of the Full Gospel [Crkva cjelovitog evandolja]	
21. Reformed Christian Church of Hungarians	

Source: Government of the Republic of Croatia, Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, February 2005

in Table 3.3 partly describes this diversity. Another eighteen religious communities are in the process of registration.

Legal framework for the introduction of religious education in schools

The legal documents important for the introduction of religious education in the school system are as follows: the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (1990), the Contract between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Holy See about cooperation

in the field of education and culture (1996), the Contract between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian Conference of Bishops about Catholic catechism in public schools and public preschool institutions (1999), the Law on the legal status of religious communities (2002), and Contracts between another eight religious communities and the Government of the Republic of Croatia about questions of mutual interest (2002 and 2003).

The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia defines religious freedom, religious rights and the protection of these rights in its Articles 14, 17, 39 and 40. Crucial for our theme is Article 41, as the basis for establishing other legal and official acts concerning religious communities:

All religious communities shall be equal before the law and shall be separated from the State. Religious communities shall be free, in conformity with law, to perform religious services publicly, to open schools, educational and other institutions, social and charitable institutions and to manage them, and shall in their activity enjoy the protection and assistance of the State.

For some religious communities, Article 47 is very important because it provides that:

Conscientious objection shall be allowed to all those who for religious or moral reasons are not willing to participate in the performance of military service in the armed forces. Such persons shall be obliged to perform other duties specified by law.

Contracts between the Republic of Croatia and the Catholic Church

The Government of the Republic of Croatia is signatory to special contracts regulating the rights of religious communities with regard to financing, pastoral care in hospitals, prisons and armed forces, return of nationalised properties, cooperation in the fields of education and culture (1996), and economic issues (1998).

a) Important in our context is the “Contract between the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia about cooperation in the field of education and culture” that was signed on December 19, 1996 in order to regulate the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Republic of Croatia. Both sides agreed:

- that the contract is based on the Constitution's Articles 14, 40 and 68, on the Second Vatican Council declaration *Gravissimum educationis* and canon law;
- to take into account the irreplaceable historical and present role of the Catholic Church in Croatia in the cultural and moral upbringing of the people, and also its role in the field of culture and education;
- to take into account that the majority of citizens of the Republic of Croatia belong to the Catholic Church.

The Contract guarantees Catholic religious instruction (catechism) in all public primary schools, secondary schools and pre-school institutions as an *optional* subject (but compulsory for those who choose it).

It stresses that *choice* is guaranteed for all parents and students and that this choice will not be the basis for any form of discrimination in school activities. A possibility to withdraw from the religious instruction (catechism) is declared. Requests for withdrawal should be submitted in writing to the school principal at the beginning of the school year.

The Contract further provides that all public educational institutions shall take into account values of Christian ethics.¹

According to the Contract, the program of Catholic religious instruction will be regulated by special contracts between the Government of Croatia and the Croatian Conference of Bishops. Both the church and the state authorities are in charge of monitoring the quality of religious instruction and its accordance with church and state laws. Religious instruction can only be taught by persons with a writ of canonic mandate (*missio canonica*) from the diocesan bishop. Programmes, the content of textbooks, and didactic materials will be made by the Croatian Conference of Bishops, who submit them to the competent authorities of the Republic of Croatia for their inclusion in the curriculum. All expenses of publishing textbooks are to be covered by the Republic of Croatia in accordance with present decisions concerning all other school textbooks.

1. This statement provoked a public reaction from professor Neven Budak, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb.

The possibility to organize additional religious activities in the school is also guaranteed. Further, the Catholic Church shall have the right to establish pre-school institutions, and schools at all levels, and to manage them under canon law and state laws. Such schools shall have the same duties and rights as state schools, also in terms of financing.²

b) Based on Article 2 of this contract, an additional “Contract between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian Conference of Bishops about Catholic catechism in public schools and public pre-school institutions” was signed.

This contract regulates Catholic religious instruction (catechism) in public primary and secondary schools as an optional subject equal to other subjects; the number of students needed in order to organize the class (seven pupils); the obligation of church and school authorities to inform parents and pupils about the goals and the content of the subject; the number of hours per week (two); competence for drawing up the curriculum (the Croatian Conference of Bishops) and for confirming it (the Minister of Education³); responsibility for the training of teachers, and the level of education needed for the teachers. The Croatian Conference of Bishops is obliged to submit to the Ministry a list of teacher-training institutions. The National Catechetical Institute is responsible for all Catholic religious instruction in schools. The diocesan bishop and a counselor in the diocesan office for catechism together take care of religious instruction in pre-school institutions and in primary and secondary schools.

Articles 11 and 12 of this contract should be stressed, because they differ from the contracts that the Government has signed with other religious communities. Article 11 says that Catholic religious traditions are deeply rooted in Croatian cultural heritage, which will be taken into account in the public Croatian school system, espe-

2. There are religious pre-school institutions in the Republic of Croatia, but no religious primary schools. There are ten Catholic secondary schools, and two secondary schools of other religious communities (Islamic and Orthodox).

3. The education ministry's full name is the Ministry of Science, Education, and Sports. In the early 1990s, when Religious Instruction was introduced, it was the Ministry of Education and Culture.

cially in realising appropriate religio-cultural initiatives and programmes that comprehend different fields of social and cultural life besides the school system. Although worship takes place in churches, it could be performed and celebrated in schools on special occasions with the consent of the principal and school authorities; participation of pupils and teachers is voluntary. The school will enable pupils and teachers to meet the diocesan bishop in school when he visits his parish.

Article 12 provides that parish priests, because of the nature of their service, have the right to perform Catholic religious instruction in school several times a week.

The law on religious communities

The Law on the legal position of religious communities was passed in 2002. For our purposes, Article 13 of this law is important because it defines religious instruction in pre-school, primary school and secondary school institutions. In accordance with the law and previous contracts between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Catholic Church, it states that:

- On the request of parents (or foster parents) the programme in pre-school institutions includes religious education;
- On the request of parents (or foster parents) of pupils younger than 15 years, and of both parents and pupils older than 15 years, confessional religious instruction as an optional subject is established in accordance with the curriculum of primary and secondary schools;
- Only persons who meet the legal requirements can perform confessional religious instruction;
- Religious communities propose, and the Ministry of Education confirms, the programmes for religious education in pre-school institutions, primary schools and secondary schools, together with textbooks and didactic materials;
- Religious education in pre-school institutions, primary schools and secondary schools is separate from the religious education in religious communities.

Article 18 defines the social rights of clerics and students of religious schools and faculties as equal to those of other state officials and students, respectively.

Contracts between the Government of Croatia and other religious communities

Immediately after the law entered into force, the Government of Croatia signed *Contracts about questions of mutual interest* with the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Religious Community (2002), and later with the Evangelical Church and the Reformed Christian Church, the Evangelical Pentecostal Church and its affiliates the Church of God and the Union of Pentecostal Churches, the Adventist Church and its affiliate the Reformed Movement of the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Union of Baptist Churches and its affiliate the Council of the Churches of Christ, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and the Croatian Old Catholic Church (2003). A contract has been arranged with the Jewish Community as well, but it has not been signed as yet. Jehovah's Witnesses refused to agree on a contract with the Republic of Croatia, although they were interested in settling some issues with the state, such as marriages and pastoral care in hospitals.

The Government and religious communities signed these contracts in order to:

- regulate their relationships in the fields of upbringing, education and culture and pastoral care for believers in prisons, hospitals, armed forces, police and the members of their families;
- strive to assure the material conditions for religious activities;
- create and maintain better conditions for religious activities.

The contracts are “based on international conventions and standards” and their goal is “mutual cooperation for the benefit of all citizens, regardless of their religious convictions.”

These contracts include all the issues listed in the contract with the Catholic Church, except articles 11 and 12 mentioned above.

Public Discourse on the Introduction of Religious Education in Schools in the 1990s

On June 10, 1990, on the proposal of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Croatia, the Educational Council of Croatia decided to give religious communities space in primary and secondary schools for their religious teaching, free of charge. This decision was followed by a recommendation of the City Secretariat for Education in Zagreb “that upon parents’ request the schools have the obligation to secure space and time for confessional religious instruction organized by religious communities.” On June 6, 1990, Croatian bishops made a request for introduction of religious instruction as an elective subject in primary and secondary schools. On June 12, 1990 they issued a public “Message on confessional religious instruction in the school and in the parish community.” Pursuant to the decision of the Ministry of Education, as of 1991/1992 confessional religious instruction was introduced in schools as an elective subject. Religious communities were given a mandate to define the content and the manner of teaching, as well as to provide the necessary number of instructors and to train them. By the Contract on cooperation in the field of education and culture, signed by the Republic of Croatia and the Holy See in 1996, Croatia assumed the obligation to enable Catholic instruction in primary and secondary schools as well as in pre-school facilities. This contract was followed by a Contract on Catholic instruction in public schools and religious instruction in public pre-school facilities, signed by the Croatian Bishop’s Conference and the Government of the Republic of Croatia, which legalized confessional religious instruction in public schools by virtue of “the principle of shared responsibility between the State and the Church.”⁴

After the Law on the Legal Status of the Religious Communities in Croatia was passed (2002), other religious communities got an opportunity to enter into contracts with the state to regulate certain fields of the communities’ activities, including confessional religious instruction in schools. In this way, an approach was accepted that

4. “Crkva i država podijelile su odgovornost za vjerski odgoj,” *Jutarnji list*, January 31, 1999.

enables several different confessions to hold confessional religious instruction in schools. Six religious communities drew up programmes of confessional instruction, and the Ministry of Education approved the curricula for Catholic, Orthodox, Islamic and Jewish religious instruction, as well as for the Adventists and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

The first public discussions on introduction of religious instruction and/or an alternative subject, "Religious Culture," started in the mid-1990s. However, the declarations and documents issued by political and educational authorities speeded up this process, outpacing the dialogue between representatives of religious communities and the academic public. As a result, the opinion that prevailed in the public was that the hastily organised public discussions were a mere alibi and were held only because of the need for a "quasi-scientific verification of the political decision."⁵ That this is true is clear from the widespread confusion over fundamental terms in the debate, Religious Culture and Confessional Religious Culture; even the theologians, and especially the journalists, did not distinguish these two notions.

On September 18–21, 1990, an interconfessional and interdisciplinary meeting on the questions on the relationship of Confessional Religious Culture, the school and the public media was organized by the Commission of the Catechetical Council of the Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia and the Catechetical Institute of the Faculty of Catholic Theology in Zagreb. The participants were mostly theologians and representatives of the religious communities, while scholars of non-theological religious studies were absent (except for the sociologist don Ivan Grubišić).⁶ Some of them were invited but did not come, while some were not invited at all, with the explanation that "a short time limit for organizing such a meeting and ... some administrative backlog might also be the cause."⁷ Therefore the

5. "Vjeronauk – nova ideologizacija?", *Slobodna Dalmacija*, September 23, 1990.

6. Ivan Grubišić in *Slobodna Dalmacija*, September 23, 1990. Grubišić is a parish priest from Split and one of the leading liberal theologians in Catholic Church, with a PhD in the Sociology of Religion.

7. Josip Baričević, PhD, in "Očenaš u razredu," *Oko*, October 18, 1990. Baričević is the head of the Catechetical Institute in Zagreb and senior adviser to the

media wittily dubbed this meeting a “group portrait in black and white.”⁸

Public debates have sporadically been held both in the period before the regulations were laid down and later, and the basic tone has been set by the theologians of the Catholic Church. In the debates on the two possible approaches to the religious phenomenon in the teaching process, the non-confessional Religious Culture subject was gradually marginalized, and Confessional Religious Culture was given prominence by the most of the participants and was given legal form in the Confessional (Catholic) Instruction subject.⁹ Two factions have crystallized: the more “conservative” majority, which backed Religious Instruction and mostly consisted of theologians, and the “liberal” minority, which, besides some Catholic theologians, consisted of members of the minority religious communities and secular experts. The minority has pointed to the danger of instrumentalisation and politicisation of religion, and has pleaded for a secular school, giving priority to the non-confessional subject—Religious Culture.

The arguments for introducing Confessional (Catholic) Instruction came down to the following:

- Catholic religious tradition is deeply rooted in the Croatian cultural heritage.¹⁰
- In the past, religion has been suppressed or distorted for ideological reasons.
- It enables getting acquainted with and developing one’s own cultural religious identity and respect for that of others.

The following are the most important arguments against introducing confessional religious instruction, and against the procedure

National Catechetical Office of the Croatian Bishops’ Conference for confessional education.

8. “Očenaš u razredu.”

9. At the end of the 1990s, the Catechetical Council of the Croatian Bishops’ Conference still spoke of confessional religious culture.

10. In the Contract on Catholic religious instruction in public schools and religious education in public pre-school facilities, this wording has been supplemented to say that this “will be taken into account in the public Croatian school system.”

under which confessional religious instruction has been introduced, as well as the arguments for a non-confessional Culture of Religion subject:

a) The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Croatia decided to introduce confessional Religious Instruction before having consulted public opinion:¹¹ the experts,¹² professors and teachers.¹³

b) School is a public institution and will cease to be so if the Church or the Mosque enters it.¹⁴

c) Religion cannot be the frame or philosophy of life in a public school and separation of state and church should be pursued in a consistent manner.¹⁵

d) Instead, the law should enable the opening of confessional schools where confessional ideas could be taught.¹⁶

e) The deficit of spiritual culture and knowledge should be compensated by a Religious Culture subject that would take into account the multi-confessional character of society, since spirituality should not be reduced to the confessional model.¹⁷

11. According to one author, 1) these contracts were prepared in great secrecy and the text was available to the public only after it passed the parliamentary procedure. 2) Public critical objections concerned only some legal and practical implications of these contracts, but the question of religious rights and freedom was only articulated by other religious communities, especially the ones traditionally present in Croatia. 3) The ratification took place in the Vatican one week before the elections in Croatia. 4) Various articles, especially in the contract about legal matters, had not been implemented in legislation, which created problems—for instance, the contract included a list of non-working days which cannot be changed by usual legal procedure, because international agreements take precedence over domestic law. (Zrinščak, 1998).

12. Peter Kuzmič, PhD, Protestant theologian from Osijek in “Očenaš u razredu.”

13. Tomo Žalac, PhD, professor of pedagogy from Zagreb, in “Militantni nastup dijela klera velik problem za Crkvu”, *Novi list*, November 10, 1998.

14. Mustafa Cerić, PhD, currently the Grand Mufti of Bosnia (at the time the imam of the Zagreb mosque) in “Očenaš u razredu.”

15. Srđan Matić, executive vice-president of the Jewish community in Zagreb, in “Očenaš u razredu.”

16. Srđan Matić in “Očenaš u razredu.”

17. Peter Kuzmič in “Očenaš u razredu.”

f) There is a danger of proselytism, since confessional religious education, such as carried out in churches, can become the subject of confessional non-understanding.¹⁸

g) Religious instruction as upbringing in belief and for belief belongs in the family and church communities.¹⁹

h) Religious Culture should be an educational and not indoctrinating subject, because the place of doctrine is within religious communities.²⁰

i) As a mandatory subject, Confessional Religious Instruction would get a secular guise.²¹

j) Religion should not be taught, it should be a lifestyle.²²

Discussions in the media have sporadically continued, especially after some salient dates in the legal enactment of confessional religious instruction.²³ The arguments from both sides mainly remained the same, but it was only after seven years of confessional religious instruction that the question its creators found most difficult to answer popped up: Can the classroom really replace the community of believers, and thus be an appropriate setting for the transmission of religious truths? Several participants in the debate have argued that

18. Milenko Popović, priest (*protonamesnik*) of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and Tihomir Kukulja, representative of the Christian Adventist Church in Croatia in “Očenaš u razredu.”

19. Adalbert Rebić, Ph.D., professor at the Catholic Faculty University of Zagreb, in “Očenaš u razredu.”

20. Mustafa Cerić in “Očenaš u razredu.”

21. Luka Vincetić in “Bliski susret škole i religije!”, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, June 16, 1990. Vincetić was parish priest in Trnava near Đakovo,

22. Don Ivan Grubišić in “Vjeronauku nije mjesto u školi i vrtiću!”, *Arena*, November 12, 1998.

23. As is clear from the following newspaper headlines: “Duel of religious instruction and culture of religion” (*Večernji list*, 1995), “Expulsion of God from the school grade book” (*Vjesnik*, 2000), “Close encounter of school and religion” (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 1990), “Intolerable clericalization of school and society” (*Novi list*, 1998), “Religion as new ideology” (*Glas Slavonije*, 1998), “Religious instruction—new ideologization” (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 1990), “The Lord’s Prayer in the classroom” (*Oko*, 1990); “Croatia in the trap of a religious one-track view” (*Vjesnik*, 1994).

it cannot: The school can only be a poor surrogate for something that should really be offered by the religious communities,²⁴ it is “alienation from the natural context of spiritual growth—the church community.”²⁵ Besides this, religious communities, as other non-government organizations, are limited to the circle of their members, while school is a social and state institution as well, with its educational aims and tasks at the service of all citizens, regardless of their religious, national or class affiliation.²⁶

After confessional Religious Instruction was introduced as a kind of digest of parish religious instruction and Confessional Religious Culture, supported by the majority of Catholic theologians, the debates on introducing a confessionally neutral subject (“Religious Culture”) more or less came to a halt, and only sporadically some isolated expressions of support could be heard and some modest initiatives emerged. Thus, different titles were used: History of Religion²⁷, Discipline on Religions, and even “Culturological Religious Instruction.”²⁸ So far, no such subject has been introduced in public schools. The concept of a non-confessional Religious Culture subject was strongly criticised by the Catholic church, even by cardinal Bozanić (president of the Croatian Conference of Bishops), who ascribes to it the intention “that through some religious culture [subject] a syncretist religious message will be introduced, some kind of neutral religion as a part of the new world order.”²⁹

In secondary schools, Ethics was introduced as an alternative subject to religious instruction, and the whole second-year pro-

24. Dr Branko Lovrec, president of the Union of Baptist Churches, in Croatia in *Glas Slavonije*, December 12, 1998.

25. Krešimir Dujmović, “Izgon Boga iz školskog imenika,” *Vjesnik*, April 15, 2000.

26. Tomo Žalac in “Militantni nastup dijela klera velik problem za Crkvu”, *Novi list*, November 10, 1998.

27. Dr Ognjen Kraus, president of the Jewish Community in Croatia, in *Glas Slavonije*, December 12, 1998.

28. Ševko Omerbašić, leader of the Islamic Community in Croatia, in *Glas Slavonije*, December 12, 1990.

29. Stručni katolički kolokvij, 2000 (<http://www.nku.hbk.hr/skupovi/priop%202000/kat-kol.htm>).

gramme was dedicated to the history of religions and to religious changes in the contemporary world. But in 2000, the Ministry of Education introduced a new program of Ethics in which the subject matter of religion was completely left out, without any comment. This move by the Ministry was not met with any response from the media or the teaching profession.

Curriculum

Religion can be taught in schools in at least two ways—confessionally as Religious Education (Instruction)³⁰ or non-confessionally, whether as a separate subject³¹ or within other subjects. The aim of confessional education is to promote a sense of obligation towards a certain religion, while that of Religious Culture is to give information on religion/religions, to encourage an understanding of religion in general as well as of several different religions and philosophies of life, enabling students to make their own knowledgeable choice.³² Religious instruction as catechism is actually “an initiation and guide for the catechumens in their true growth and development in religion (cultivation of religion)” (Skledar, 2001). As such it should be conceived in terms of confession, but oriented towards ecumenism and dialogue (*ibid.*).

In Croatian schools, the confessional subject Religious Instruction started in 1991/1992. It was introduced gradually, depending on the number of interested students and available teachers (Peranić, 1998). At the very beginning some mistreatment of Religious Instruction was observed, especially regarding the position of the subject in the daily schedule and in schools where principals did not treat confessional religious instruction as other subjects. The

30. In European educational systems the following terms are used: Religious Education, Religious Instruction, Religion, Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Education...

31. Different terms are used for non-confessional religious education: Religious Culture, Science of Religions, Ethics, Religions and Ethics, History of Religions.

32. These two approaches differ in many ways: time and place of instruction, teacher, position within a teaching programme, and the methods used in teaching and giving grades.

same author pointed to some other problems of introducing the subject to the schools: an unfinished syllabus; no textbooks or manual for the teachers; a shortage of teachers; the inadequate education of lay persons who taught at the beginning; and the lack of pedagogical education for the priests and nuns who taught it, and who were afraid of how other teachers would accept them (Peranić, 1998). Those in charge of the subject paid special attention to the personality of the teacher, who should, in order to gain the acceptance of pupils and other teachers, be simple, humane and sympathetic.³³

Primary schools

The programme (curriculum) for primary education in the Republic of Croatia was laid down in 1999. As far as religious instruction is concerned, it is only mentioned that it is an elective course that should be held two hours per week, respectively 70 hours annually. As we have seen, the Contract between the government and the Croatian Conference of Bishops stipulates that upon the proposal of the Croatian Conference of Bishops, the programme of Catholic religious instruction will be enacted by the Minister of Education.

The first programme of Catholic religious instruction was drafted in 1991. In 1998 an amended “Plan and Programme of Catholic Religious Instruction” was published as a comprehensive document. In January 1999, the Minister approved the “Programme of Catholic Instruction in Primary School” (2nd amended and supplemented edition). This amended edition, like the first edition from 1998, explains that it is based on theological-ecclesiastic and anthropological-pedagogical principles and criteria.³⁴ The amend-

33. A large number of articles in the review *Kateheza* were dedicated to the desirable personal characteristics of the Religious Instruction teacher.

34. The programme follows the relevant catechetical and other documents of the Catholic Church, especially the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the General Catechetical Directorate (GCD 1997), the Croatian Bishops’ document “Joyful Announcement of the Gospel and Upbringing in Belief” (1983), Catechism of the Catholic Church (1993), basic starting points of the “Plan and Programme of the Catholic Religious Instruction in Primary School” (1998) of the Croatian Bishops’ Conference, and its document “The Parish Catechesis in

ments in 1998 and 1999 are said to have been made in accordance with social and ecclesiastic changes posing new challenges for religious education and inculturation.

According to the 1999 programme, Catholic Religious Instruction emphasizes the integral education and upbringing of man, having in mind the religious dimension and the promotion of both personal and social, general human and religious values. The confessional character of Religious Instruction is based on the universal educational and cultural meaning of the religious fact for the person, culture, and society as a whole. The principles of religious instruction in school are the following: devotion to God and man, ecumenical openness and openness to dialogue, correlation of religious upbringing and education according to the principle of an integral education, and an intercultural approach to religious instruction and education.

Catholic Religious Instruction in primary school connects revelation and church tradition with the worldly experience of the pupil. Its goal is a systematic, ecumenical and dialogically open introduction of the Catholic faith, on the levels of information, cognition, perception, and action, to give the pupils a mature Christian faith and wholesome human and religious education.³⁵

Renewal of the Parish Community” (2000).

35. The summarised general goals relate to the following: openness towards ultimate questions (the meaning of human life and the world, relationship of the transient and the eternal); a mature human and religious personality, on both the individual and social level; human and Christian consciousness towards oneself, others, society and the world; understanding the biblical messages and connecting them to the everyday life; understanding basic doctrine on God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ (the Trinity), the sacrament of God’s love, the Church as sacrament of human salvation; understanding the history of Church and its meaning (as a whole and among Croats); a wholesome Christian morality; being acquainted with and experiencing the spiritual power and salvific worth of liturgical and church celebrations, sacraments, religiosity and religious life; acquaintance with other and different cultures, and respect for different cultures, denominations and religions (the ecumenical and dialogical dimension); getting to know the role of family and developing a sense for one’s responsibility in the family and wider societal community; learning how to resist negative temptations and problems in life; developing spiritual and other

There is no alternative subject to this compulsory-elective course of religious education in primary school.³⁶ At the same time, religious subject matters are also taught through other subjects such as History, Geography, Literature, and Arts. In our view, not enough is taught about religion at present, and the methods are not always adequate: textbooks in general assume that children already have previous factual knowledge of religions and a historical perspective on religious events, which is not a realistic expectation. For that matter, it is not a realistic expectation that textbook authors have adequate factual knowledge of religions. There are many examples in textbooks that prove this supposition to be wrong. The current integrated approach is mostly traditional, outdated and un-inventive, with only a few elements of current interest or about other cultures. For example, the religious contents taught in third and fourth grade in the subject Nature and Society (Days of Bread, All Saints' day, Christmas and Easter) are all exclusively Christian or exclusively Catholic. The fact that Croatia is a country with a predominantly Catholic population is not an excuse for omitting basic religious customs of at least the major world religions, all the more so since these are public (secular), not Catholic schools.

Secondary schools

The Croatian Conference of Bishops in 1990 formed a special working group for religious instruction in secondary schools, which prepared a Programme of religious instruction for secondary school, approved by Croatian bishops in 1991. Then the Ministry of Education decided to introduce religious instruction in Croatian secondary schools. The difference from primary school is that secondary school has an alternative subject, Ethics. Both subjects are taught one hour per week.

Altogether, the curriculum for secondary schools teaches about religion through three subjects apart from confessional religious instruction:

creative abilities.

36. Finland and Germany in some parts offer Ethics as an alternative subject to denominational religious education.

- *Ethics* is an elective subject taught in single weekly lessons, i.e. 35 lessons per year for four years. The syllabus for the subject stresses that it does not prefer a single worldview or a single philosophy, and it aims at ensuring respect for multiculturalism and a philosophical openness to dialogue. Within each academic year, religious content can be taught through two lessons pertaining to multiculturalism, coexistence, human rights and universalism, whilst one unit is allocated in the fourth grade to the differing approaches to morality, including the religious approach.
- *Sociology* is a compulsory subject in the third grade, taught in two weekly lessons. The accompanying textbook contains a special chapter encompassing the sociological definition of religion, magic and religion, the classics of the sociology of religion, types of religious groups, secularisation, interconnectedness of religion and societal change, as well as the religious communities in Croatia. It is up to the teacher's discretion which parts of the textbooks to teach in greater depth.
- *Politics and economics* is a compulsory subject in the fourth grade of grammar school and is taught in one weekly lesson. A single lesson is dedicated to the relationship between politics and religion in relation to the rights of the individual human being and citizen.

In comparison with some European countries where religious education is only nominally confessional (Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands), and where the main goal is developing educational competence (knowledge about religion alongside knowledge about everything else), the Croatian syllabus of religious education also includes the goals of developing knowledge, skills and values that are the essence of the Catholic faith; the pastoral goal (tied to religious practice); and the evangelic goal (the spreading of the Catholic faith). Unlike some other countries (Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, England), in Croatia religious education is a subject that not only provides knowledge *about* belief but also teaches *to believe* (as in Ireland, Scotland, Austria and Germany). Therefore, it is primarily the teaching of one particular faith, and only secondarily a presentation of other religious and non-religious views of life. It is a subject that

(complementary with parish catechism) is mostly aimed at aiding the transmission of such religious knowledge (tradition) as is also received in the family and church (which were for decades the only settings for this transmission).

Textbooks

In the following we will briefly consider the contents of textbooks for religious instruction, with particular attention to their representation of other religions.

Catholic textbooks

The production of curricula and textbooks went as fast as the political and legal process that led to the introduction of religious instruction. At first the Catholic Church used already existing parish catechism textbooks as the basis for creating new ones (Peranić, 1998).

Because of a “lack of recent domestic examples of syllabi and textbooks for religious instruction and a lack of time” (Paloš, 1998), the above-mentioned Commission chose the Austrian programme for secondary schools as the basic framework and tried to accommodate it to the Croatian church and socio-cultural climate. In spring 1991, the programme was publicly proclaimed and production of religious instruction textbooks for secondary schools could start. Textbooks were published between 1992 and 1994,³⁷ and have since been revised several times. Textbooks mainly follow issues that have been represented in the programme. All the themes are presented “in the context of God’s revelation.”

Like the syllabi, the textbooks are firmly based on the doctrinal teaching of the Catholic Church and its normative theology. Textbooks communicate moral values originating from Catholic ethical teaching. From the review of programmes and textbooks it is visible that they emphasise the formative nature of Christian (Catholic) values in education—helping to form a Christian (Catholic) identity. As noted above, one of the principles of school religious instruction is

37. Religious instruction manuals for kindergarten teachers and teachers who work with children with special needs have also been made.

“ecumenic and dialogical openness.” Respecting this principle, textbook authors present both monotheistic religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) and Oriental religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism). Non-Catholic religions have been treated systematically and tolerantly, within the limitations that are inherent to the confessional approach.

The endeavours of textbook authors to present other Christian and non-Christian religions seriously and tolerantly should be appreciated. But the confessional approach is deficient by definition. No matter how tolerant and dialogical it is and how ecumenical it seeks to be, it still validates other religions from a confessional outlook. How can a catechist present to pupils New Age spirituality without value judgments? The problem is especially visible in the textbooks. The tolerant and dialogical approach is given up in the case of new religious movements, whose authenticity and distinctiveness is denied. New religious movements are presented as a consequence of various shortcomings of society and the church. The term “sect,” in the context of new religious movements, is given negative connotations (“the youth is often the victim of the sects”; “sects—alienation from their own roots”; “adolescence as a time of escape”; “making a god to one’s liking (golden calf)”; “non-critical interpretation of the Bible”; etc.)

Evangelisation as a goal is emphasised in the textbooks of religious instruction. It is visible from many titles in the textbooks’ tables of contents: “Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the longing present in all world religions”; “Jesus, set me free from idols—power, pleasure, dependence, different religious movements and sects”; etc.

Islamic textbooks

The Islamic Religious Community has textbooks for all grades of primary and secondary school, except, at the moment, for the second and third grade of primary school. For those grades they use an “Islamic reader” by Ševko ef. Omerbašić. All the textbooks are approved by the Ministry of Education. There are no special sections in primary and secondary school textbooks dedicated to other religious traditions, but tolerance towards other people besides

Muslims is clearly stated (for instance in the section “Islam,” where basic Islamic principles are presented): the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims “has to be in accordance with humane Islamic principles,” and the following quotation from the Koran is given: “If your Master wanted, everybody in the world would have believed the same. Are you going to hate people until they become believers?” (Omerbašić, 2001: 83).³⁸

One section in a secondary school textbook is dedicated to secularism and laicism (in the sense of the people without religion) and their negative influence on religion in general and on the Islamic community in particular (Omerbašić, 2004: 81–82). There is also a negative attitude to paganism, magic and astrology (Omerbašić, 2004: 94–95).

Other confessions

The Serbian Orthodox Church has textbooks for the first through third grade of primary schools and for the first and second grade of secondary schools (all pending approval by the Ministry of Education). Already approved is a manual on method for teachers in primary schools. The remaining religious communities do not teach confessional education in public schools, only in their churches or communities, so they are not obliged to have textbooks.

Teacher training

Religious communities are responsible for the training of teachers, which is regulated by the Law on the legal position of religious communities and by contracts that the Government has signed with particular religious communities.

The leaders or leading bodies of religious communities issue the permissions to teach in public schools, but they can also withdraw this permission from teachers with shortcomings in teaching or in personal morality (Contracts 1999, 2002, 2003). The Ministry of Education confirms the permission, taking into account other legal documents needed for all teachers.

38. [This is a rather free translation of Sura 10 (Yunus): 99. Most translations would have “force” (or similar) instead of “hate.” —Ed.]

For all teachers, level VII/I of education (university degree) is required, but level VI (college after secondary school) is also permitted. If there are not enough teachers to carry out confessional religious education in schools, other persons can do it if the religious leader or leading body gives permission. Teachers of confessional education are members of teachers' councils, and have the same rights and duties as other teachers in school. They have to pass a professional exam after a one-year training period, and under the same conditions as other teachers, to be promoted to the status of mentor-teacher or adviser-teacher (a better-paid position that involves counselling younger colleagues).

The education of Catholic religious instruction teachers is the most developed. They are educated at the Catechetic Institutes and Faculties of Theology.³⁹ The National Catechetic Office of the Croatian Conference of Bishops is responsible for permanent teacher training as well as for additional training organized through seminars. Many such additional seminars are organized during the year, and the permission to teach Catholic religious instruction (*missio canonica*) can be withdrawn from a teacher who fails to attend this permanent education.⁴⁰ As we mentioned before, at the beginning of the 1990s there was a lack of properly educated teachers for confessional religious instruction. Only priests and nuns started to teach, but they were mostly without methodical and didactical training. Lay-persons gradually started to teach and to reach the needed level

39. The biggest Catholic theological faculty is the one at the University of Zagreb (founded in 1669), which has a Catechetic Institute. Affiliated to this faculty are other higher theological schools in Split, Đakovo, Rijeka, the Franciscan higher theological school in Makarska and the higher theological-catechetical school in Zadar. There is also a theological school within the Diocesan Missionary Neocatechumen Preparatory in Pula. In Zagreb, the Jesuits have a Philosophical Theological Institute which is affiliated to the Pontifical University Gregoriana, Rome. A Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy is part of the Croatian Studies University of Zagreb.

40. In its letter to Catholic confessional education teachers, the National Catechetic Office of the Croatian Conference of Bishops warned them that they are obliged to attend additional and permanent education through organized seminars in order to maintain the needed professional level (<http://www.nku.hbk.hr/glasnik/>).

of education. A transitional five-year period (1991/1992–1995/96) was extended twice, but by 2000, time was up for the teachers who had to reach the required educational level (Kurečić, 1998).

According to data obtained from National Catechetical Office, today there are 2,454 teachers of Catholic confessional instruction in primary and secondary schools. Among them, there are more laypersons than priests and nuns. In secondary schools, there are 413 teachers. Catholic confessional religious instruction is attended by 84 per cent of all primary school pupils.⁴¹

Islamic confessional religious instruction is taught by 14 teachers in 46 schools in Croatia. In public schools, 690 pupils attend these classes. Teachers are educated at the Islamic faculty in Sarajevo and in various Muslim countries (like Turkey and Malaysia). There are an additional 540 pupils who also attend religious instruction in the Zagreb Mosque.⁴²

In Eastern Croatia (the Eparchy of Osječko-Polje and Baranja) with the greatest presence of the Serbian ethnic minority, there are 30 teachers of Orthodox confessional religious instruction in public schools for 4,000 pupils.⁴³

Empirical data on attitudes towards religious education in schools

Public attitudes towards religious instruction in public schools were explored in two studies conducted in 1989 and 1996 on representative samples of the adult population in Croatia.⁴⁴

In the 1989 study, when asked the question: “Should a greater role in education for religious organizations be allowed?” adult citizens of Croatia responded as follows: 68% agreed, 32% disagreed.

41. *Glas koncila*, February 6, 2005.

42. Within the Zagreb Mosque, there is an Islamic center which also includes the *Medresa* or Islamic theological secondary school.

43. For other eparchies, data are not yet available.

44. The studies “Social structure and quality of life” conducted by the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb in 1989 and “Social structure and quality of life in the transitional period” conducted by the Centre for Transition and Civil Society Research” in 1996.

The data show that that a majority of the respondents at that time were tolerant of, and ready to accept, a greater role for the church in children's education.

In the 1996 study, the following question was asked: "What do you think about introduction of religious instruction in schools?" The respondents answered as follows: "It should be obligatory"—28%, "It should be optional"—65%, "It should be expelled"—7%. The majority (65%) of respondents in the 1996 survey, then, declared that religious/confessional instruction in public schools should be optional—which it already was at that time. Obviously the present situation is congenial to the majority.

Also interesting are the data from the study "Children and the media"⁴⁵ conducted on a representative sample of 1,000 primary school pupils from fifth to eighth grade. Asked the question "Should confessional religious instruction be taught in schools or not?" pupils responded as follows: 48% were for and 52% against confessional religious instruction in schools (Marinović Bobinac, 2001).

Some of the results of the study "Evaluation of the curriculum and development of the models of curriculum for primary education in Croatia" are also relevant for the topic of religious instruction.⁴⁶ According to the opinion of the school-grade and secondary school teachers, the present curriculum is too extensive and out-of-date. It is considered that the present curriculum should be re-structured and refreshed with new contents. Thirty-four per cent of the teachers deem that religious instruction should not be held in school. At the same time they support the introduction of more

45. Research was conducted in 2000 by the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb and the State Bureau for the Protection of Family, Motherhood and Youth.

46. These are the results of the empirical assessment of the opinions of primary school and secondary school teachers on the present curriculum, its implementation and amendments. The research has been carried out in 2003 on the sample of 2,134 junior-high and 1,134 grade-school teachers, 2,674 eighth-grade pupils, and 120 principals in 121 primary schools in Croatia. The research was done by the Centre for Education of the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb.

foreign languages, informatics as a mandatory subject, sexual education, human rights education, etc. They consider a major failing of the present curriculum to be a lack of balance, i. e. under-representation of “pedagogical” subjects, whose number of hours per week should be increased (arts, music, gym, health and technical culture) and over-representation of some others, which should be reduced (religious instruction is in the first place, mentioned by 51% of the teachers) (Baranović, 2005). The analysis of the curriculum points at the need for a coherent, well-balanced and integrated national curriculum. For Croatia, accession to the European Union is a key strategic target, and thus adapting to the European educational context is one of the main conditions of development in the field of education. So, besides the domestic educational and social context, development of the national curriculum must take into account the experience and the development trends in Europe as well as in the world (Baranović, 2005).

Conclusion

After the fall of communism, the position and the role of religion and churches was completely changed. Religion became present in public life, the media, and the educational system as well.

Various legal acts (the Constitution, the Law on the position of religious communities, and the contracts between religious communities and the Government of the Republic of Croatia) enabled the introduction of religious instruction in schools. This was followed by a discourse about whether religious education should be confessional or non-confessional.

The ruling political structures at that time strongly supported the confessional approach, pushed by the Catholic Church. Although confessional religious instruction in schools was not supported by other religious communities at the beginning, they finally agreed to introduce it in public schools after signing contracts of mutual interest with the Croatian government. The advocates of the non-confessional approach were intellectuals from different areas of social life, including religious communities. But the non-confessional approach has been completely marginalised in the debate.

Therefore, the situation in the Croatian schools is as follows. Religious Instruction as a confessional, optional subject in all grades of primary and secondary school has been the dominant mode of teaching religion in the last 15 years. Although it could be debated whether the public school is the right place for it, and whether it is in accordance with the principle of separation of the state and the church, it is a fact that confessional Religious Instruction already has its history in Croatian schools.

The subject is graded and treated as all other subjects in schools. Its teachers, too, are treated equally with other teachers. Religious education has been segregated and mono-denominational (with some multi-denominational elements) and general issues are taught through specific religions. The responsibility for Religious Instruction is split between the state and the church.

Catholic, Orthodox and Islamic confessional Religious Instruction is taught in public schools, while other religious communities teach it in their churches. Religious Instruction is taught by clerics as well as by lay persons educated at theological faculties, whereas Ethics is taught by philosophers and sociologists.

Tolerance towards other religions is present in all textbooks, but new religious movements, atheism, and secularism are negatively evaluated.

Finally, it should be stressed that the lack of an alternative subject means that pupils who are not religiously socialised within their families and who do not attend confessional religious instruction in schools are deprived of the opportunity to meet the world and values of different religions.

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