

2013 Council of Europe Exchange on the religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue "Freedom of Religion in today's world: challenges and guarantees."

Panel III Report : "Avenues for future action within and beyond Europe: youth education and awareness-raising on religion and beliefs, dialogue and co-operation among and with religious and non-religious representatives"

The introductory outlines considered the prevention of conflict and tolerance in the context of religious plurality:

1. Where there are different religions we should work for the prevention of conflict.

- a. Religious conflict is not necessarily just religious. It may also be political or ethnic, although religious aspects can exacerbate conflict.
- b. Other factors include different or partial versions of history, for example in Bosnia Herzegovina.
We are brought up in families which imbue us with attitudes or ideas and lead to disagreements (including religious ones) which may lead to intolerance or the risk of hatred.
Education must aim to help us to understand that other people are different and that difference is a human right.
- c. In another sense, young people need to learn to see themselves as others see them.
Although religions have a right to educate people in or into their beliefs, the public school is different. Schools provided by public authorities should provide contextual teaching about religions and beliefs without endorsing or aiming to transmit any of them.
- d. Therefore, a division of duties between the state, the public school system, the family and religious organisations is desirable. See, for example, the Toledo Guidelines, or the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers guidance (2008) on the Dimension of Religions and non-Religious belief in intercultural education.

2. Tolerance among and between people of different religions and convictions is a requisite for civil peace and for living together in society.

- a. Values are important for tolerance because the danger is the absence of shared values (not the clash of civilisations).
- b. We need ethics based on shared values that lead to a more just and caring world open to all, governed by freedom, peace non discrimination and respect for diversity.
- c. Values are linked to existence itself, they can be seen as part of our identity. We can choose values but there are also universal values, which obviously embrace those adumbrated by the 1948 Universal declaration of Human Rights.

Education should enable us to :

- respect difference,
- work towards common objectives,
- adapt to global change,
- confront religious violence,
- respect dignity
- live with difference (multiculturalism)

Ethical concepts are or have been internalised in religious and non religious societies. Within that prescription religious pluralism has brought problems both in history and more recently.

The School is a place of excellence where tolerance is practised and exercised and human rights are respected (see Unesco document 1964).

It would have been useful, if we had had time, to consider pluralism and plurality (*pluralismus and pluralität*) - interesting work has been done in German in that field.

In the plenary debate:

1. Discussion of **non formal education** saw a connection with the **internet**. Participants had good and bad perceptions of the internet as a whole.
 - There might be a change of interest from relations to values, where the latter might involve the core pillars of the Council of Europe (human rights, democracy, the rule of law...).
 - Values include a justification for the exercise of rights.
 - Relations between people, however, concern interpersonal reactions and not just the core values of the Council of Europe.

"But afterward let him live in the apartment of novices, and there let him meditate, eat, and sleep. Let a senior also be appointed for him, who is qualified to win souls, who will observe him with great care and see whether **he really seeks God ...**

Implications for education.² and for the method of education.

Education in or into religion by the religious organisations was seen as acceptable, but :

This should not occur in the public school.

Deductive education, in some traditions called catechesis, runs the risk of imparting the conclusions of religious debate and history without explaining the working and the development of thought.

Inductive education involves using lived experience (perhaps also spiritual experience).

Learning about religion may include an equilibrium between the tradition and experience.

In countries where there is education for religion in schools these considerations relate to the content and method.

Non confessional awareness of different religious traditions.

With added value that includes tolerance, mutual respect and human rights.

We need to respect pluralism (sic). (*Plurality may be a better term*).

5. Proposals included

The development of appropriate syllabuses. There were several issues :

Are we dealing with religion or conviction? Both terms were used in the discussion.

Is religion a restrictive term because it refers to types of conviction that include transcendence (which need not necessarily be theist - see Buddhism for example).

The Arab spring and the manipulation of convictions had been mentioned.

Many people have non-religious convictions.

Belief, conscience and conviction are to be respected (article 9 § 1).

So interconviction and interconvictional education are important (mention of conviction was present but there were instances of confusion of conviction and religion).

The North/South centre has particular and useful knowledge and experience about :

- religion,
- cultural and religious differences
- both sides of the Mediterranean.

Human rights, religion and the rule of law contain common factors and religion should be a positive and cooperative contributor.

We need good philosophy (universal) of human dignity, the existence of which is a foundation for the universal value of human rights.

One has to be careful of using, say, the *Imago Dei* argument based on Genesis i : 27f because it could involve or be perceived as involving a literal interpretation of a Biblical myth.

Other issues

Truth and culture. One participant rolled up a sheet of paper. What we see can depend on our point of view, in this case the angle from which we see the sheet of paper. It can be perceived as a circle or, say, as a rectangle.

Perceptions of truth are part of our religious liberty. We need to enter the view of the other.

Legal diversity in Europe : Many countries of Europe have a "code civil" system. England, Wales and Ireland have a common law system. Scandinavian law is also somewhat different.

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² See above on the public school.