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Scholastic education and religious culture

A European approach to the problem of teaching religion in school

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FOR SHARING

In your particular cultural situation,

- what meaning have the following words for you: religious phenomenon/ secularization/ religious culture/ catechesis/ religious teaching/ evangelisation/ inter religious approach?
- Are there any words which have no meaning in your culture? Why?
- How do you link together the words which make sense for you?

Presentation

The Lasallian school is at the service of the young person in every way; that is why Evangelisation is so important to us in its "openness to the spiritual" and explicit "declaration" of Faith in Jesus Christ. It is basic to our tradition.

The 2000 General Chapter made it one of its priorities. The following passages are taken from it (circular 447 p.23):

"For Lasallian establishments to be the living expression of the Good News, they must be places for dialogue in truth, freedom and hope. In this way, the Brothers and Lasallian Partners can enter into the culture of the young to announce the Good News, and feel the need themselves for continual conversion. Among Lasallian institutions, the school is an ideal place for an inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue which will bear witness to the values of all forms of faith. Lasallians working in universities have the opportunity to contribute to our mission, in a special way, by their commitment to research in the field of the faith development of young people, whatever their religion, and by the training and accompaniment of those persons entrusted with the difficult task of sharing the Good News in an increasingly secularised and multi-religious context.

The Lasallian charism is already a source of inspiration in the context of multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. Young people from all cultures and religious traditions have the right and freedom to benefit from, and to live according to the Lasallian charism."

This all shows a desire and a lucidity because in a few years the social, political and religious contexts of the Lasallian schools have greatly changed almost everywhere, as have our 'religious clientele' of children, young people, and adults. Our practices have also changed.

In this respect today's Europe is a huge laboratory in which old attitudes and new needs coexist, where words are fighting for a place: religious instruction, religious phenomenon, catechesis, declaration of faith, pluralism, new secularization... ; words which condition the new living-together which Europe needs.

Yes, this is a European debate, but it concerns the Lasallian Institute. Why? Firstly, a certain number of European concepts permeate our Institute views. Secondly, the approaches touched on here concern a number of aspects of our society: confronting freedom of conscience, cultural and religious pluralism, fluctuating convictions, fundamentalism, conservation and enrichment of the human memory, handing on of values, a tolerance of confrontation, welcome, respect: all the things on which we should unceasingly concentrate our personal and institutional study.

Brother Flavio PAJER has been studying these questions for thirty years and trying out possible practical solutions. We have asked him to provide us with some stimulating and well-based reflections. These straightforward reflections are a private, contextual view which question our own realities, and let us stand back and see them in a new light.

As a researcher in religious pedagogy he places his reflection at the crossroads of culture, civic education, Church/State relationships and the new role of the state school and religious culture in a pluralist society.

He teaches in Rome, at the Salesian University, the Auxilium faculty, at the international Institute Regina Mundi as well as at the faculty of theology in Naples. He is at present president of the European forum for religious instruction in state schools. He is also editor of school manuals of religious culture, among the most widespread in secondary classes in Italy.

We are very grateful to him.

Bro. Nicolas Capelle

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"Post-Christian" Europe is at an important point in its history. Yesterday it was fashioned by the different Christian traditions, before being affected by secularisation. Today it has to come to grips with a growing presence of groups of non-Christian believers, of sects and spiritualities of different shades and ambitions. If one of the determining factors of the cultural identity of a people is the religious component, it is not astonishing that Europe must decide now on the criteria for civil cohabitation and make new provisions concerning the conditions for education in *European citizenship*.

If the candidature of countries of the East with an Orthodox-Christian majority can create problems in the plan for integration in the European Union, the candidature of the Turkish nation poses a much more serious obstacle, since it means integrating an Islamic country into a European continent marked not only by a *Christian* culture, but also by a *secularised* Christian culture, with *secular* politico-juridical and educational institutions.

More generally, according to repeated warnings of socio-religious observers, a few ghosts are still wandering around Europe: religious warfare; religious intolerance; sects or "new religions". Are they "the last flames of a past which cannot return, the avant-garde of our future, or signs of an unease which we can still cure?" as René Rémond says. Ought we to believe the idea that our societies, once fashioned by religion, have been freed from its guardianship? Or ought we to admit that "even in the most secularised societies, the religious phenomenon, from a statistical point of view, still remains in a clear majority and remains, in spite of everything, the largest voluntary social fact?"[1] More concretely: in such a context, what part should be given to the school religious education of future generations? Should we continue to

[1]- Cf. R. RÉMOND, Religion et société en Europe. Essai sur la sécularisation des sociétés européennes aux XIX[e] et XX[e] siècles (1789-1998), Seuil, Paris 1998.

raise a denominational identity as we did till yesterday, in a dominant and omnipresent Christianity which has now changed, or open all young people - Christians and non-Christians - to the new values of multi-religious living?

1. The new European society, a mosaic of "Christianities", a crossroads of religions

The link between European society and Christianity which used to exist must now certainly be weakened, since at the end of the millenium (October 1999) the Synod of European bishops spoke of "the apostasy of Europe" (*Instrumentum laboris*, n.14), and pertinently recalled that "a synchronisation between Europe and Christianity could not be claimed at all, a synchronisation that has never existed" (ibid. n. 51). If unity of the continent is desirable, that unity "cannot be considered in terms of Christianity alone, but in terms of 'interactive and collaborative pluralism', to bring about that '*friendliness among cultures*' which can change the temptation to confrontation into a battle of mutual service and welcome, into a synthesis of man and citizen, into a great reality where so many small nations and their cultures can find their place" (*ibid.* n. 10).

On the morrow of the fall of the Berlin Wall and ideologies, a prophetic voice, that of the Florentine Ernesto Balducci (1922-1992), was already calling for pretensions of a "new Christianity" to be banished to the archives. Instead, it should be recorded that "in post ideological Europe meetings of minds should have new bases in the light of an ecumenism which goes beyond the bounds of Christian denominations and religions to include human convictions as well, which have fidelity of reason to its own autonomous resources as the principle of legitimacy. If, in fact, the pre-modern age in Europe was the age of wars of religion, and the modern age that of ideological warfare, the post-modern age is that of a free meeting of minds ready to contribute to a common, historic project, on the basis of a cosmopolitan ethos"[2].

This Europe must be able to handle in the middle- and long-term the transition from a mosaic of ethnic, national and mono-denom-

[2]- E. BALDUCCI, La paideia europea nei prossimi anni, in "Testimonianze", 33, n. 12, December 1990, p. 26; the thesis is well developed in the book L'Uomo planetario, Editions Cultura della pace, Fiesole 1990.

inational identities, to a new situation of *plural citizenship*[3]*, share-holding citizenship*[4]. This condition must be understood not as an improbable and shapeless, levelling melting pot, but rather as a kind of coexistence of associations which can accept the cultural and religious difference as legitimate and fruitful and make it respected, while avoiding the opposite tendencies to unifying indifference or fundamental intolerance, as well as the irruption of a blind proselytising (which at least has been checked of late in many countries, by laws to curb the missionary activity of traditional and new religions)[5].

We should not be astonished, then, that for several years past and in almost all European educational systems, the urgency is more and more apparent of an *intercultural education*, in school and after school[6]. It is an education which does not evade the "religious" by improperly leaving it to the pastoral ministry skills of religious institutions only; or by ignoring it: considering it an insignificant element for the critical maturity of the person and the citizen. On the contrary, we need an education in which the "religious" is recognised and worked at as an historic dimension which cannot be dissociated from cultures, or, more precisely, as one of the main keys in the interpretation of human history.

Defending the legitimacy, and even the necessity, of a critical, religious culture in state education, is no longer a duty which

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[3]- K. FOUAD ALLAM, Religione, identità e cittadinanza in Europa, in Laicità e religioni nella scuola del 2000, under the direction of F. Massimeo, A. Portoghese, P. Selvaggi, Irrsae Puglia, Cahier n. 39, Progedit éditeur, Bari 1999, pp. 59-71.

[4]- P. DONATI, Modelli culturali e processi di integrazione: quale progetto culturale per l'Europa di domani? in L'Europa, sfida e problema per i cattolici. Il Forum del Progetto culturale, EDB, Bologne 1999, pp. 19-55

[5]- Cf. S. FERRARI, Proselitismo nell'età della globalizzazione: autodisciplina delle religioni, in "Il Regno-attualità", 15th February 2000, pp. 132-140. A new Observatoire européen des phénomènes racistes et xénophobes was officially opened in Vienna on 7th April 2000, with the aim "of organising research into the evolution of xenophobia in Europe, of setting up networks and information campaigns in all the member countries, of taking every means of combating racism, for example by education and the media". According to those in charge at the Observatory, "the future of Europe will be determined by cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. Mutual understanding and non-discrimination are the fundamental pillars of the EU. Racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism are radically incompatible with these principles and threaten them" (from the monthly publication Europe infos, edited by Comece and by l'Ocipe, April 2000, p.4).

[6]- F. GOBBO, L'educazione interculturale in Europa: elementi per un dibattito, in "Studium Educationis, a review for the formation of the educational professions", Cedam, Padua 1999, n.4, pp. 691-704

belongs only to religious organisations or groups of believers; it is frequently demanded by national and international civil authorities appointed to the management of cultural good, and common educational policies.

Examples are not lacking to illustrate this proposal, and I shall give three of the most recent.

It was the international Commission on education for the XXIst century, in its latest Report to UNESCO, which wanted inserted among the four basic pillars of all education the requirement *to learn to live together in and alongside differences*. "By teaching young people to adopt the point of view of other groups, whether ethnic or religious, misunderstandings that engender hatred and violence among adults can be avoided. The teaching of the history of religions or customs can thus act as a useful reference for future behaviour"[7].

The international colloquium *Constructing common European identity*, organised by the Agnelli foundation (Turin, 28th-29th February 2000) has as its aim to study "a common model of society for the XXIst century, based on a shared European identity, which has its roots in the cultural, ethical and spiritual heritage of Europe. This model must necessarily be redrawn in the light of new challenges posed by post-modernity and by a critical reading of contemporary history".

The Debray Report (April 2002), widely known and well received in France, advocates *the teaching of the religious phenomenon* in lay schools, because, on the one hand, of the anguish of a community dismemberment of civic strengths, to which our *ignorance* of the past and beliefs of others, contributes a great deal, full as it is of clichés and prejudices; and on the other hand, because of the research, "through the universality of the sacred with its prohibitions and its permissions, of a *fund of unifying value*s, to haul along civic education and temper the explosion of landmarks such as the diversity, unprecedented for us, of religious membership in a country, where immigration, is, fortunately, mainly open."(p. 14). It is evident that such a cultural challenge cannot rely only on

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[7]- J. DELORS et al., Learning: the Treasure within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for Twenty-first Century, UNESCO 1996 (edit.1997, p. 86).

present religious instruction courses; particularly as most of them are still denominationally based, with the exception of English and Scandinavian state systems, which have long since chosen a multi-denominational approach. In spite of the many, appreciable adjustments of the content and of didactic orchestration, the outlook of so many school religious courses still seems to remain anchored in the presupposition of a European society considered, legitimately and effectively, as Christian.

In a Europe which has become effectively post-Christian and multi-religious, it is inescapable that the School and University (when preparing future teachers) should improve the reading and interpretation of the religious phenomenon - including the corresponding phenomenon of secularisation - with the aim of training young people to know how to see the permanence of the religious in the strata of human cultures; to know how to be open to the fundamental problems of sense and transcendency; to learn how to take on a personal and civil *identity* open to *otherness*, that is, being able to communicate with other identities, which are equal in dignity and legitimacy.

2. Uninterrupted religious transmission

State religious arrangements for education, based uniquely on concordat norms, are found to be more and more inadequate. Many countries, Catholic or Protestant, of western Europe, in fact still give religious education on the basis of an agreement, or para-concordat or preferential agreement with a "national church" (Scandinavian, English and Orthodox countries corresponding to their respective historical denominations. On the institutional level, the still ongoing construction of Europe will not be able to comprise an artificial homogeneity of relationships between States and religions[8]. On the other hand, it appears legitimate that the future European constitution should recognise and respect the juridical statute that the Churches and cults have held until now in the respective national legislations. The adoption of future laws on religious liberty, personal as well as institutional, will still more commit democratic and lay States to recognise the juridical personality and social importance of religious minorities and new cults.

[8]- H. MENDRAS, L'Europa degli europei, Il Mulino, Bologne 1999, p. 74.

The prevailing tendency today is as follows: *the state school* of the European countries, at least in the western and dominantly Catholic and Protestant part, is still less disposed to accepting in its school programme, denominational educational activities, preferring to leave them or restore them to extra curricular pastoral care of the different religious communities. In this difficult distinction of roles and abilities it often happens that the state school wrongly abdicates its inalienable task of pedagogical work in this huge sector of universal culture which is the religious heritage.

The task of the state school consists in giving each pupil-citizen objective knowledge and critical abilities concerning the religious phenomenon, everything which is going to let him blend in or react in a constructive way to the typical ethos of a multicultural society. For that, the state school must, evidently, set aside actual or future religious options for the child. This educational task cannot simply be abandoned to religious organisations; it remains the specific role of the state school, especially in a historical situation and cultural space like those in present-day Europe, where the reasons for civil cohabitation are at risk of dissolving in the general "amnesia" of religious and ethical roots.

A pluralist society is democratic if, with the *liberty of belief*, it also ensures the *right to know* the religious phenomenon. All citizens should be guaranteed both rights: the first one by the public freedom of action of church institutions or recognised cults, the second by a systematic approach to the religious phenomenon in the state education curriculum. If this is not so, we witness a diffuse disagreement between the juridical arrangements guaranteeing the freedom of religion, and the lack of means put at the disposal of the civil society to satisfy the right of a secular awareness of the religious phenomenon.

3. Religion: cultural memory and secular reson

Western Europe, says the American sociologist Peter L. Berger, differently from other industrialised societies such as the United States, Japan or Australia, is the unique region on the world scene where the classic hypotheses of secularisation and dechristianisation are fully realised as a process of the progressive social trivialising of institutional religion[9]. Christianity is no longer the social link of national identities. This means that where yesterday's

national identity could draw fully from the values coming mainly from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, today's national identity, forced to transcend itself even more on a transnational horizon, is still less attached to these traditional roots. There is then a lack of those stable and socially plausible references, which at one time were provided by the blending of the political and cultural with the religious.

On this subject it is noteworthy that almost all the constitutions of European countries were affected, more or less completely - even without declaring it and even sometimes without realising it - by the principles and values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In terms of political and juridical culture, they combined them with the modern values of freedom of conscience and secularisation of institutions. Those cultural and ethical roots, however, which inspired the fundamental texts for western civil cohabitation, have now almost entirely disappeared from the collective memory of contemporary people. A "cultural amnesia" of the West (Ch. Duquoc), a "religion now deprived of memory", of secularisation as a "crisis of the religious memory" (D. Hervieu-Léger), of "religion deprived of tradition" (R. Campiche) are terms now easily used.

It is an amnesia which is not simply ignorance of the Christian Culture phenomenon, an amnesia which is not only ignorance of the bible text as the "code of the western culture" (N. Frye), but which is rather a suppression, a voluntary "giving up", as though it were something which is no longer of interest: "for many of our contemporaries, Christianity is now no more than an archaic monument, like Gregorian chant, Romanesque art or Greek tragedy. It is fine, but holds nothing for us any more"[10].

Johann Baptist Metz, the theologian of "Christianity as a subversive memory", says that the European mind has given rise to two kinds of rationality in the field of modernity: it has developed that techno-scientific rationality, inspired in its origins by a desire for

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[9]- P. BERGER, A Far Glory. The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity, New York, The Free Press, 1992 (éd. it. Il Mulino, Bologne 1994, pp. 31 ss).

[10]- Ch. DUQUOC, Fede cristiana e amnesia culturale, in "Concilium" 1/1999, p. 158. Amnesia is not a corrupting force simply because it is ignorance, says the author, but because it leans towards the existential non-sense, to the split between living and why live, to the "diabolical", in the etymological sense of the word. It is the example of the student culture of today, which, from the Sixth Form to the University, can be marked

power over a still untamed nature, a resolutely instrumental rationality; but, at the same time, the European mind has developed another kind of rationality, that of the universality of human rights, "that rationality which is the basis for a new political culture aiming at the freedom of the individual and the dignity of every human being"[11]. The first rationality is Eurocentric, the logic of power which gave birth to colonialism, the social utopias of the XIXth century, and the abuses of scientism and bourgeois and Marxist secularism… The other rationality is anti-Eurocentric, at the centre of which are values or ideals, such as the State ruled by law, freedom of conscience, social solidarity, recognition of the other as being my equal, but also as independent and different from me in religious convictions and ethical choices: that is the rationality which could give rise to that critical look and those typically European ethical features called *secularisation*.

After the great epoch of the humanist secularization of a Machiavelli, an Erasmus, a Thomas More, it is true that Europe had the abuses of the political secularization of the French revolution, and especially the long wave of those multi-coloured secular doctrines which, from the time of the Enlightened (Voltaire) and positivism (Comte), invaded almost the whole continent up to the first half of the XXth century. It is equally true that the refusal of religion in the XVIIIth century has today changed into a "neo-secularization of confrontation" (R. Rémond), a "many-level secularization" (J.P. Willaime) or "contractual" (J. Baubérot), or

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in the corner of erudition throughout the whole of instrumental knowledge. This runs the risk of arousing rancour towards the teachers and the whole of society, who accept the institutional task of passing on something which is not pertinent for existence today. On the subject of "betrayal of values" of actual scholastic knowledge, the philosopher Guy COQ dwells at length in Démocratie, religion, éducation, Mame, Paris 1993, and in Laïcité et République. Le lien nécessaire, Éditions du Félin, Paris 1995.

[11]- J.B. METZ, Lo spirito europeo: crisi e compiti, in "Concilium" 2/1992, pp. 138-147. Metz gives an interesting definition of the biblico-Christian tradition as anamnesiac rationality, "the true rationality of the biblical tradition had an anamnesiac structure which presupposes the indissoluble unity of ratio and memoria, to such a point that in my opinion it was forgotten by the Enlightenment rationality searching for freedom. The criticism that the Enlightenment made of dogmatism and traditionalism was based on good reasons. Did it not forget, though, that a particular kind of memory is always innate in a critical reason which has no intention of becoming pure criticism? Has it not forgotten that not only faith, but also all reason which wishes to find expression in praxis as freedom, needs this memory? Faced with our techno-scientific system, this reminder takes on the character of a dangerous memory, outside of which a human being would not recognise itself as personal and solid freedom". (pp. 144-145).

"dynamic" (P. Ricœur), which is neither a hostile or indifferent neutrality towards the religious phenomenon, and which no longer dismisses it as something marginal or insignificant in the formation of the personal and national identity. On the contrary, it positively recognises its social and cultural function and has demanded that this objective religious data, which was forcibly excluded by reciprocal bans between the "opposing clericalisms" be reinstated as a norm in the state school and state university programme of studies[12]. The Catholic sociologist Emile Poulat says that today, "unlike in some common domains secularization is not a simple neutrality of State and school, but consists in their commitment to ensure and guarantee the exercise of all our freedoms. It is not true that secularization coincides with the idea of separation from religion. Rather it is *the solution* of the problems

4. Educating to an identity in a context of otherness

The Hellenic-Christian concept of person allowed the working of other concepts: those of tolerance, freedom of conscience, inalienable individual responsibility; the forging of social rules of democratic cohabitation, based on equality and justice. All that is one of the greatest and irreversible victories of the European spirit. That, as we now realise, is only a step, that of the construction of the dignity of the individual, of the elaboration of national identities, but also a step concerning language barriers, patriotic rhetoric, denominational enclosures, ethnocentric educational systems.

Today, faced with the impact, not experienced before, of a multiform otherness, the new generations need to make one more step. The young must learn to live with others inside a social space which no longer has either frontier or hierarchy of any type. confronted with this state of facts, some are tempted to raise defence "walls", under pretext of preserving the "inalienable conquests of our civilisation", perhaps with the conviction of also defending in this way, *ipso facto*, the orthodoxy of their own religious faith.

Year after year, European schools are filling up with pupils belonging to other cultures, who have the right to the full respect of their different identity, but the educational systems were made to integrate the young people into their own territorial culture, in a local culture, often identified with *the* universal culture. These systems now find themselves managing a clientele which is more and more foreign, and above all, bearer of different cultures, which are the refutation of all pretentious European universalism. The cultural closeness in the same educational space first of all forces the process of a healthy dialectic between different identities (this is the pedagogy of confrontation: going beyond stereo-

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The historian, Jacques Le Goff, has himself ventured a successful presentation of L'Europe racontée aux jeunes, Seuil, Paris 1996, pp. 96).

In Malta, the University of Valetta recently organised a meeting of 200 Jews, Christians and Muslims, with a view to preparing the publication of common texts for the secondary schools of the Mediterranean countries. The "European perspective" is even gradually affecting other subjects, and the whole school education, including prescriptive texts of the new school legislation, tends to prescribe, in a more determined way, openness of disciplines to the continental dimension.

types and prejudices, reciprocal consciousness, autocriticism), but then imposes the finding of a basis of common and shared values to be able to live together, by knowing how to give a new sense to this life (it is the pedagogy of mediation or of the quest for convergence on important points, sharing of common projects for a common cause)[15]. Such steps cannot be taken without hard work in cultural mediations of every kind. Among these, *religious mediation* is certainly the one which builds a pedagogy of *interculturality*.

Cultural anthropology and the history of religions teach us the importance of religious diversity in relationships between cultures. If the religious identity evokes in the individual specific symbolic representations, conveys specific meanings of the cosmos and history, imposes specific hierarchies of truths and ethical values, attributes a particular meaning to life and death, it is evident that it is the totality and continuity of the person which is involved and not simply some isolated faculty. Furthermore, the membership group is implicated, and the jealous link which identifies the individual with his community and traditions. That is why an intercultural dialogue is seen as superficial and illusory, especially in the context of the formation of young people and children, if the religious element of the personal and social identity is not taken objectively into account. This is a work which is all the more necessary in what concerns - as the history of peoples, particularly European peoples - a great part of the religious conflicts which are not brought about by the particular nature of religions or the aim of their credo, but arise rather from a subjective lack of religious education of the religious people, and the unfortunate tendency to use religion as an instrument for ends which are foreign to it.

In conditions of cultural and religious promiscuity, *the proselytising attitude*, whether explicit or implicit, would be not only anti-educational and destructive, but the very *identity language* of a religion, one of liturgical symbols, the rationalised language of its theology or catechesis, would become negative or discrim-

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[15]- Cf. G. DAL FERRO, Libertà e culture. Nuove sfide per le religioni, Messaggero, Padoue 1999, pp. 85-102 ; C. SIRNA TERRANOVA, Pedagogia interculturale,Guerini, Milan 1999, pp. 119-130.

inatory, and finally “exclusive”, if it is imposed as the only legitimate language to talk about religion in the context of state education. It is not astonishing that in Europe, in the last twenty years or so, all forms of denominational religious teaching is in crisis[16]. They were able to function in state schools as long as society was a 'sociologically' Christian society.

For a long time, depending on the context, this educational model has become largely impracticable because of changing circumstances which have affected the whole social and educational system:

- the socio-religious profile of the school population has changed, and the religious experiences of young people, especially of the denominational kind, are more and more rare.

- the present-day morphology of the religious and “spiritual” phenomenon, in its visible sociability as in its psychological turns and
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school[17];

- the body of scholastic knowledge is dominated, particularly in western culture, by the primacy of the efficacy of formalised and scientific disciplines, to the disadvantage of the humanist disciplines (known as 'the humanities'), more familiar with the symbolico-religious codes: from which a school instruction tending henceforth to marginalise or completely silence the irrepressible problem of common sense ("the very genetic code of society", as Niklas Luhmann call it), a problem which remains a properly human task, common to all pupils, before being a religious problem or even a problem over which a single religious denomination can claim exclusive competency.

These factors have changed the social and cultural panorama of the school. They oblige, then, a reconsideration of 'vocation' which had been assigned to it by modernity, and to check if its traditional role is still acceptable in post-modernity.

One more reason and one more matter of urgency, for the competent State institutions, to establish a *civil and secular* normative team, which, without discrimination with regard to any church or religious organisation whatsoever, can manage a common literacy in the religious phenomenon, at the service of the *cultural difference* among all its pupils, in the name of their *common citizenship*.

5. The cognitive and ethical potential of the religious culture

To say that *religion* might (also) be seen as a cultural product, and so as an object of information or historical analysis, is to say something that is henceforth generally accepted at the academic level.

It remains, though, more problematic to affirm that religion has a cognitive *value*. However, on the one hand, it sets itself up as a knowledge in itself (the object of diverse sciences of religion); and

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[17]- Cf . J. GÓMEZ CAFFARENA S.J., ¿Por qué no una Facultad universitaria de "Sciencias de las Religiones"?, in "Razón y Fe", volume 232 (1995) 73-85; J. JONCHERAY (ed.), Approches scientifiques des faits religieux, Beauchesne, Paris 1997 ; P. GISEL, La théologie face aux sciences religieuses, Labor et Fides, Genève 1999.

on the other it can serve as a *key to reading* numerous aspects of knowledge on man, societies, the history of peoples and civilisations. On the one hand it is a static, factual, descriptive and explanatory knowledge, with an end in itself; on the other hand it is a dynamic, functional knowledge with the aim of discovering the sense and value in human acts, a mediator of a certain sensible understanding of the world, and not only a (scientific) explanation. To justify the first knowledge, it suffices to invoke the principle of intelligibility of the religious phenomenon as a cultural product: it is accessible to the intellect and susceptible of teaching when it can be read, documented, decoded, put into context, compared… From this point of view it is evident that there is no need to be a Jew to know the Decalogue of Moses, nor to be a Catholic to grasp the message of the Beatitudes, nor a Moslem to read the Koran. Not to admit the premise of the cultural intelligibility of the religious phenomenon, would mean that an enormous heritage which is symbolic of humanity and transmitted by tradition over thousands of years, is no longer transmissible.

To support the legitimacy of the second kind of religious knowledge, understanding, we must take a further step and, without abandoning the exigencies of criticism, accept into human history the existence of those proper signs of the symbolic activity of people, called religion, the final meaning of which transcends the limits of rational intelligibility and scientific investigation. As this meaning is written into all kinds of cultural expression of people of all times and every civilisation, that is why these cultural expressions (myths, ways of life, philosophies, arts, literatures…) cannot be understood fully if one is unaware of the movement which inspired them or the deep message that they intended to mean and hand on.

"The knowledge of religion serves to know the world": that is a thesis which no longer needs to be proven if one accepts the historical indissolubility between religions and cultures, the anthropological indissolubility between culture and meaning of life, the theological indissolubility between meaning of life and faith in a meta-historical, other-worldly salvation. So the knowledge of religions can be justified by a functional reason above all: religions provide conceptual instruments and symbolic materials to be able to understand the world and oneself in a meaningful way. Religion is not important only for the knowledge it conveys, but

also and especially for the second use of such knowledge in the process of school acculturation. Now if, in school, it is accepted that it can and should contribute to the "construction of the meaning" (R. Campiche), knowledge of the religious factor will always be of capital importance, whether it means analysing the cultural heritage of history or facing the great philosophical themes of the human condition, whether it means learning to acquire and exercise ethical competence, or learning to live democratic values in a pluralist society…

In terms of historic progression, G. Gusdorf has traced the trajectory of western conscience in three stages. In the first, humanity takes in a first word which is imposed on it from outside, a spectator as it is of the unfathomable mystery of the cosmos, a word which dominates and seduces it: it is the long archaic time of the mythical awareness. In the second stage, man works out a word on the world, a speech which proceeds to the vivisection of reality as partial awareness, which makes him lose contact with the first word and consequently forget the roots and meanings of things: it is the recent epoch of the imperialism of science, of the rational conscience. In the third, a more mature and more conscientious conquest, capable of remaining open to mystery, leads him to recover the primordial word and to evolve towards a new form of awareness: it is the awareness that G. Gusdorf, fifty years ago, called "existential" and that A. Rizzi, following H.G. Gadamer, translates in the modern term of hermeneutic awareness[18].

6. The training of teachers: religious sciences in higher studies

The University has a curious fate: denominational in origin as one of the most prestigious "inventions" of the Christian Middle Ages, with theology, which was then the queen of sciences, at the top,

[18]- A. RIZZI, Il sacro e il Senso. Lineamenti di filosofia della religione, Elledici, Turin-Leumann 1995, p.116. "Hermeneutic reason is, by definition, 'second'; it does not engender the Sense of reality and does not really discover it, but finds it in those signs in which the experience of sense is pronounced. Just as the mythico-religious awareness, so all experience of sense (aesthetic, love, convivial, and others as well) is a tract which can be understood, which is for the human being a source of realisation." (ivi, p 116) Cf. R.J. CAMPICHE, École et construction du sens, in "Revue Française de Pédagogie" Nº 125, Oct-Dec. 1998, pp. 28-41.

it then became secularised to the point where it no longer recognised the right of theology to have a place among its disciplines. This is confirmed and continues to be confirmed in most Latin countries with a Catholic majority, and less drastically so in those of protestant tradition. The historical events are known. On the scales, there are not simply the State responsibilities (Napoleonic centralisation of the system, state monopoly of instruction, nationalism…) but also the choices of the Church to reserve, for the whole Tridentine era, the teaching of the sacred sciences to priestly candidates only, within institutions (seminaries, ecclesiastical faculties of theology or male religious orders), generally separated from the influx of the ambient culture, with a double and spectacular result: on the one hand that of having impoverished the sacred sciences of the stimulation coming from parallel research in the human sciences (the end of the XIXth century arrived before the first tentative signs of adoption of the historico-critical method in biblical exegesis were seen…) and, on the other hand, of having deprived modern culture arising from science and technology - as well as society born of the industrial revolution and popular schooling, urbanisation and democratisation - of the possibility of a systematic dialogue, or at least of a healthy dialectic, with the theological sciences.

The relationships between State and Church have manifestly improved over time. Dialogue between State universities and Catholic universities is no exception either. Today, there exist favourable conditions and historic opportunities for re-establishing reciprocal and intense collaboration. In Europe there are universities dependent on the Church which can confer officially recognised diplomas. There are denominational faculties of theology fully integrated into state universities. There are inter-university conventions which allow an ecclesiastical faculty to award officially recognised titles as equivalent to an analogous title of science of religion conferred by a State faculty[19].

One of the present problems is that of the scientific and didactic training of the teacher of religion who is working in a school milieu, a professional figure who is no longer to be confused with that of catechist. The 'school catechesis' of yesteryear is directed

[19]- Cf. S. FERRARI-I.C.IBÁN, Diritto e religione in Europa occidentale, Il Mulino, Bologna 1997, pp. 107-133.

towards a 'teaching of religion' (sometimes: religions, ethics): a school discipline addressed to the totality of the pupils, harmonised with the educational and critical aims of the global plan of the school[20]. The result is that the profile of the academic and professional training of the teacher will have to change. The State will have to create structures for such a preparation. In Europe, models of initial training are already in place and the results seem to be satisfactory. Others are being set up or restructured[21].

In conclusion

Some challenges appear urgent. I will point them out schematically without being able to go into their conditions of practicability, which can vary from one country to another:

1. From today, in those countries with an agreement, we must rethink the training of teachers of religion, placing it inside the principles and rules of training of other teachers in the state school. This is in order to get away from that growing dichotomy which artificially isolates the study path of the teacher of religion from that common to his colleagues, and to promote a more coherent collaboration between State and Church, which unfortunately continue to ignore one another, or almost, in this area of

[20]- T. GARCÍA REGIDOR, De la 'catequesis escolar' a la enseñanza religiosa escolar, in "Sinite" 40 (1999) 3, n.122, pp. 417-438.

[21]- A bird's-eye view of Europe shows that the basic training of teachers of Christian religion (Catholic or Protestant) is ensured, in general, by one or other of these routes: or in a State university with theology faculties or training science (as is the case in Germany, Austria, Nordic countries prevalently Lutheran, United Kingdom and in the French region Alsace-Lorraine with a special status); or in Higher Institutes of religious sciences, pedagogical or catechetical, run by the Churches, recognised as fit for awarding titles authorising religious teaching in state and/or denominational schools (as is the case in Belgium, Croatia, Spain, Holland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal Switzerland). In Germany the candidate who undertakes the career of teaching of religion must also take another diploma in another subject, so that, in case his mandate is revoked by his Church, or there is a lack of religion posts, the teacher will not lose his position but can be given another subject: it is a guarantee foreseen by the law of the State. In the United Kingdom, and in the Nordic Countries, different from other States, the teacher of religion has no need to be mandated by his Church (Church certificate of aptitude, missio canonica for Catholics, vocatio for Protestants), cannot be removed for pastoral reasons; he is recruited and taken on by the school system according to parameters exclusively academic or professional. In those countries, religious instruction is generally trans-denominational or non-denominational, which does not imply denominational membership of itself of either the teacher or pupil. Also outside the control of religious authorities are the teachers of Secular morals or Natural ethics or History of religions or similar subjects in Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain and in the 14 European Schools functioning in several countries of the Union.

training[22].

2. To train teachers who know how to work in a perspective and on a scale which are 'European', in the sense that they know how and can teach - across the specificity of the cultural approach of the religious - citizens who are capable of living together with their own identity and, at the same time, capable of living together with the differences proper to a pluralist world. Given the 'philosophy' of the recent school reforms introduced almost everywhere in Europe, and the specific orientations which accompany the religious instruction programmes, it is expected that the teaching of religion(s): -should contribute to the evolution of the personal and cultural identity of the pupil in formation; -should be a preparation for being able to live with others in a plural society; -should develop reciprocal tolerance and the capacity for intercultural dialogue between persons and ethnic groups; -should promote religious capabilities (or key qualifications, according to the German vocabulary) in terms of critical information, of capacity of judgement and personal decision, of exchanges; -should develop the possibility of confronting the historico-cultural heritage of Europe, and of his own nation in particular.

In the hypothesis indicated above, aiming at the constitution of a religious subject run directly under the responsibility of the State, there remains the profile and the professional curriculum of the one in charge of such a discipline to be considered. The examples confirmed in some European countries, setting to one side the specificity of the historico-cultural context proper to each region, show that it is not a matter of impracticable hypotheses, and they encourage the trying of new steps in training, attaining, for example, the setting up of degree and doctorate courses in religious sciences[23].

[22]- Cf. G. CAMPANINI, La formazione degli insegnanti di religione: compiti della chiesa e responsabilità dello stato, in A. GIANNI (ed.), L'istruzione religiosa nelle scuole italiane. La nuova normativa secondo gli Accordi tra Stato e Confessioni religiose, Paoline Publishers, Cinisello Balsamo 1991, pp. 110-131; P. VANZAN, Gli istituti di scienze religiose tra fede e cultura, in L. PRENNA (ed.), Assicurata ma facoltativa, Ave, Rome 1997, pp. 153-170; L. PRENNA, Gli istituti di scienze religiose nella Chiesa. Una ipotesi di statuto epistemologico, ivi, pp. 171-177.

[23]- Examples of cultural debate and didactic experimentation in the Italian region of Pouilles, in two papers L'insegnamento delle religioni oggi et Laicità e religioni nella scuola del 2000, by Bro. Massimeo, A. Portoghese, P. Sevaggi, Progedit, Bari 1998-1999. For an up-to-date panoramic view of the academic state of religious sciences in Europe, cf. L'insegnamento universitario delle scienze religiose et teologiche. Prospettive italiane ed esperienze straniere, in "Quaderni di diritto e politica ecclesiastica", 9(2001), 1, 3-211.

4. Beyond the training of the one in charge of religious discipline, in one or other of the typologies mentioned, it is urgent to proceed to a reform of the general culture of all teachers, starting with those humanist subjects, which often misrepresent, perhaps unconsciously, an incomplete vision of the cultural roots of their discipline; they should be able to interpret correctly the religious phenomenon they meet in their discipline, by treating it in the epistemological logic of their own discipline, instead of eliminating it and exploiting it in an improper way. What comprises an academic curriculum, rethought and integrated, according to disciplinary areas, with specific content and appropriate methodologies is approaching the religious dimension of cultural heritage.

1. In your cultural context,

- Has the state school a role in arousing transcendency and a role of social cohesion?
- What are the role and place
  - of denominational schools?
  - of Lasallian schools?

2. Depending on your cultural context

- What is the role today of the Lasallian school at the heart of multireligious and multicultural societies?
- What are the inevitable consequences on our Lasallian practices?

3. Has this PAPER read in the light of your cultural and religious reality, suggested to you new convictions and new educational approaches touching on:

- the construction of personal meaning and identity
- an opening on transcendency
- the explicit proposition of the Christian Faith?