Multicultural Society as a Challenge for Coexistence in Europe

Nenad Malović * and Kristina Vujica

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb, Vlaška 38, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia; kristinavujica@yahoo.com
* Correspondence: nenad.malovic@vz.t-com.hr

Abstract: The aim of this article is to show that the intercultural way of education, which includes the interreligious dimension, is a fundamental way to create and maintain conditions for coexistence in a multicultural society. The background of this claim is represented in the belief that the starting point of every encounter with the other and the different should be the human being and its experience of humanity, not an intellectual polemic about doctrines and ideologies. Schools are particularly suitable for such a more personal manner of dialogue. The topic is discussed primarily in a philosophical way from a Christian (Catholic) perspective. The context of reflection is the European society marked by Christianity, secularization and, increasingly, Islam. Croatia is also mentioned, as the issue of multiculturality is becoming increasingly topical there. The context of cultural pluralism is presented first. Then, the necessity of dialogue based on the experience of everyday life is highlighted. The next section is focused on the analysis of the multicultural society’s need for values that are acceptable for all members of society in order to maintain social peace and mutual respect and cooperation. The following chapter deals with the difficulties and challenges of dialogue. Then, the section after that presents an analysis of the fundamental European documents that provide crucial guidelines for understanding religious and cultural pluralism and the role of religions in a multicultural and multireligious society as values on which society should be built. Finally, the place and role of religious education is discussed as a vital and unavoidable factor in co-creating the preconditions for appropriate coexistence in a multicultural society.

Keywords: interculturalism; religious pluralism; dialogue; religious education; coexistence in multicultural society

1. Introduction

Multiculturality is not a new phenomenon in European society. The experience of multiculturality can be traced all the way to the ancient world (Gražulis and Mockiene 2017, pp. 35–37). The policies of Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire are the best ancient examples of dealing with multicultural societies. Keeping and respecting indigenous cultures and costumes was a way to keep peace and loyalty (Gražulis and Mockiene 2017). The multiculturality of our time has different roots and causes, i.e., it is not a consequence of military conquests. In the last decades of the twentieth century, the European debate on multiculturality on a theoretical level relied on the rich experience of the United States. Still, it does not seem to really be clear at all how the notion of multiculturalism should be understood (Neubert et al. 2008; Robertson-von Trotha 2009, pp. 61–117). In recent times, multiculturalism as a philosophical, sociological and political term has been increasingly criticized, with the term ‘interculturalism’ being the preferred variant (Kymlicka 2010; Levrau and Loobuyck 2018). Synonymous use of the terms ‘multiculturality’ and ‘multiculturalism’ as well as ‘interculturality’ and ‘interculturalism’ does not make the comprehension of the problems any easier. Either way, it remains a factum of a multicultural society. Conceptual vagueness and unfinished discussions about which term would be most appropriate to denote the social situation of the modern European society do not liberate us from the practical need to seek the best ways to coexist.
European societies and states are no longer determined by a single prevailing culture. That is a result of several interrelated factors. Here we will recall only secularization, globalization and migrations. When it comes to Europe, after centuries dominated by the Christian faith and Judeo-Christian culture (the complex and hostile relationship between Catholics and Protestants over the centuries is a topic that deserves separate treatment, which is not the aim of this text), the process of secularization began to weaken the influence of established religious institutions on social as well as political trends. Better yet, the influence they used to have provoked negative reactions and objections. Secularization was considered the only way that the demands of a plural society could be met following the breakup of marriage between church, culture and state (Valčo 2019). What was aspired to on a formal social level, i.e., separation of church and state, crossed over to the individual level as well. The main rationale behind the critique of religion and everything religious was (and still is) science, more precisely, the natural sciences whose rapid and successful development promised the progress and improvement of mankind on an individual and social level. Non-religious views of the world are becoming more popular, as well as distancing from established religions—whether only internal or external and formalized. Although the culture of a social group is the result of both religious and non-religious beliefs, the European cultural circle has lost touch with its religious roots and reasoning that contributed to the articulation of the culture and values on which community life is built (cf. Bullivant 2018). Without this substantive connection of culture with the religion that influenced it, the reason for the establishment of values of that same culture and society becomes lost.

The strengthening of individualism is also accompanied by the process of the privatization of religion in the sense that each individual in the supermarket of different spiritual offerings can create his or her own private religion. The European Value Study, in which the Republic of Croatia also participates, confirms the significant influence that the process of individualization and modernization has had on the overall reality of ecclesiality, i.e., Christian religiosity—the Christian faith (Baloban et al. 2014, 2019). Syncretism proliferated especially thanks to the process of globalization and the technological networking of the world, which resulted in a certain virtual multiculturality: a whole new and different world—culture and religion are just a click away from where we are sitting.

The globalization of all areas of life has turned the world into a global village. The economic development of rich European countries encouraged economically motivated migration and initially seemed to have achieved a win-win situation. However, the demographic deficit present in developed countries has resulted in the need for more migrants in order to maintain the economic standard on the one hand, while on the other, migrants of different cultures and religions have reached a level of critical mass no longer satisfied only with a good hourly wage. Migrations conditioned and prompted by wars (or political decisions) also add to the whole situation. Pătrașcu and Allam (2019, p. 327) analysed European demographic trends in the period from 1955 to 2018 through the perspective on migrations and multiculturalism and concluded the following: “The early change in the population was more due to natural birth than migration till 1995 and later vice versa. The natural growth of the population declined after 1995 when the differences between ratios of births and deaths became zero. The migration took a positive node after 1975. In 1975 the net positive migration reached 420,966. This was the first time in post World War II when more people came to Europe than left it. What is an important thing to note is that with the passage of time more and more immigrants reached Europe. This period is also the period of starting of the policy of multiculturalism in many European countries.”

In the context of liberal democracies, ethnic groups with different religious and cultural beliefs and with different, often opposite, value systems, demand equal opportunities to exercise their rights and lifestyles as domicile members of society. In the European context, special attention should be paid to the issue of Islam in the Christian context, which will be the topic of a later chapter.
2. Dialogue—Creating Conditions for Coexistence with Differences

Religious and cultural diversity is, today more than ever, a strong cultural, religious and political challenge, especially for Europe. The sharp increase in the cultural and religious diversity has led to the need to create a society that is open to differences, yet stable. The emergence of multicultural social structures is changing relations between people and opening many questions, especially for the education system, with regard to the intercultural, interreligious and ethical dialogue and coexistence. The task of politics is to create core values that will be acceptable to all parties but also have enough connecting potential for quality coexistence. This requires the inclusion of different religious and non-religious beliefs in legal, social and educational policies (Committee of Ministers 2008). Certain risks are present, naturally, but the factum of a multicultural society and the necessity of coexistence require that reality be seen as an opportunity, not a threat, simply because there is no alternative.

Learning to live with that social, cultural, ethnic, religious and other diversity has become one of the greatest challenges of modern education. Educational institutions, schools especially, have an important role to play in promoting intercultural education and dialogue. The religious dimension of that dialogue is fairly inevitable. The rediscovery of religion as an important factor in social and political life was conditioned by the demonstration of its violent potential in the 9/11 attacks. Since then, religion has become a topic of discussions again, but mostly under the guise of its social function and with no serious attempts to understand its character and the value it has. The secular state will not violate the principle of secularity and secularism if religious communities are also taken into account in the process of creating the curriculum of the education system, in addition to the required interdisciplinary approach. More specifically, when religion is proclaimed to be a private matter, the notion of privacy does not refer to the fact that it can be practised only in the privacy of individual life or in the privacy of a closed religious community. Privacy means the freedom and right of every person to individually choose what he or she believes in and, accordingly, which religion he or she will declaratively join. This in no way precludes the public consequences of these private decisions. Moreover, the violent suppression of religion in public life can only contribute to the strengthening of its negative and violent potential, which is conditioned more by psychological than religious reasons.

Considering that the discussion on interreligious dialogue has also recently become a hot topic, we will present the assumptions and possibilities of interreligious dialogue below. These assumptions can also be applied to the dialogue between religious and non-religious persons. More specifically, until recently, except at the statistical level, there has been no extensive research on the non-religious (Wohlrab-Sahr and Kaden 2014). At the same time, the spread of naturalistic images of the world and the strengthening of the political influence of religions in some parts of the world represent an almost endless number of factors to consider when analysing contemporary society (Habermas 2013). However, the secular view of the world is also not unique nor monotonous. The secular approach relies on reason, but reason has also become pluralistic, and there is even talk of transversal reason (Welsch 1993, pp. 263–318).

Hans Joas points out that religion must not be reduced to value systems alone. People who believe do not see their faith only as a logical system of value propositions or emotionally coloured morality. What is crucial for religion, and in part, for temporally stable and widespread secular interpretations of the world, are experiences, symbolisations and narrations that cannot be reduced to simple formulas. Good knowledge of a religion’s character is a condition for its proper understanding in its educational and scientific forms. The exclusive transmission of a sterile set of information about a religion and its moral rules does not take into account the reasons for their articulation. Such an approach can even lead to the opposite effect, as there are formulations that can sound ridiculous and irrational when considered without their experiential and hermeneutic background (cf. Joas 2013, pp. 151–52). This holds not only for understanding other religions and cultures, but also our own. If the existential and religious experiences that influenced the
formation of a certain culture and its values remain unfamiliar, the members of that culture will end up in a confused and shy distance from their own roots. It also deprives them of the ability to have an authentic dialogue with non-religious people or members of other religions. The assumption of a productive relationship between people of different religions, and between religious and non-religious people, is that neither religions nor non-religious worldviews are grasped only as value-systems or as quasi-scientific knowledge-systems but as attempts to interpret authentic human experiences. The only difference between a secular and a religious approach would be that some view all facets of human experience, including experiences of self-transcendence, as world-immanent entities, while others acknowledge the possibility of encountering real transcendence. Such an open attitude requires humility and acknowledgement of one’s own limitations (Joas 2013, pp. 153–54), given the background of personal interpretation. This does not mean that the beliefs of everyone involved in that dialogue are relativised but that different possibilities for interpreting constitutive human experiences are acknowledged. The richness of experiences cannot be fully encompassed by words and symbols because they are always limited by the historical and cultural situation of the people who articulate them. Openness to other beliefs, as well as humility towards one’s own beliefs, are the first steps of a dialogic encounter, enabling the common search and formulation of the minimum that connects and the understanding of others as they understand themselves. Equally, each side of the dialogue can use the cognition of how they are perceived by others as a stimulus to think about the need for personal correction. That is why Joas argues that only a form of dialogue that does not deny its own religious tradition but views it as a necessary precondition for productive confrontation with others is acceptable for interreligious rapport (Joas 2013, p. 159). The Congregation for Catholic Education also testifies to the connection between knowledge and dialogue by highlighting: “This knowledge is not sufficient in itself, but opens up to dialogue. The more abundant the knowledge, the more it can sustain dialogue and coexistence with people who profess other religion” (Congregation for Catholic Education 2013, No. 19).

From the philosophical-theological perspective, such an approach to interreligious dialogue in general, which can be eminently applied to a multicultural society with religious and non-religious interpretations of the world, is advocated by the German theologian Peter Hünermann. In the context of dialogue-philosophy, Hünermann expresses the thesis that every dialogue is a complex event with several stages, leading to change. However, it is rather important that those changes occur not only at the level of exchange of information and content of beliefs, but also at the existential level of dialogue participants. Dialogue transforms its participants from I-subjects to Self-beings (Hünermann 2007, p. 23). That is exactly the point this paper is trying to make. At the beginning of a dialogue, the first impression of the other participating side is that he or she is a stranger who lives in their own world and has their own life story and experiences. Even after the initial conversation, which mainly comes down to curiosity, as well as the exchange of information and the content of one’s own beliefs, this impression of the stranger is only confirmed. However, that encounter also reveals the characteristics and profile of one’s own life. This realization allows for a different perspective on some self-evident assumptions of one’s own life. What belongs to one subject can no longer be viewed as the only one or as the only correct one. One’s own world is a subjective reality, just as much as the reality and world of someone else. Staying at that level would ultimately mean stating relativism, as there is no reference point for verifying the truth and correctness of one or another belief. That is why the next step in the dialogue process is crucial; questioning the reasons for the development of precisely that way of life, questioning what Joas calls life experience. Furthermore, this level of dialogue also encourages the distinction between what is important in life, and what is irrelevant and only incidental. It is important that the person posing such questions is open and ready to answer those same questions. Such a dialogue, obviously, requires time. In addition, the mutual affirmation of the partners in a dialogue does not mean that new issues and misunderstandings will arise again. It is more about a certain rapprochement,
mutually trusting that the partners in the dialogue are reasonable and responsible, than about eliminating differences. Here, it is important to realize that reality is not limited to what is directly accessible to any of the dialogue participants. Reality transcends subjectivity and requires a common search and constant distinction of the essential from the irrelevant (Hünermann 2007, pp. 24–25). Applying the principles of dialogue to interreligious dialogue, Hünermann sees a threefold result: the reduction of simple and negative discourse on other religions, the prevention of far-reaching secularization in terms of relativising ethical and religious content and the creation or at least rapprochement to the objective historical images of religions (Hünermann 2007, p. 30). The awareness of each religion’s particularity is precisely the best way to prevent religious fundamentalism (Jamnik 2019). The goal of dialogue is not to eliminate differences or to prove one’s own correctness or superiority but to create the conditions for coexistence with differences.

Habermas (2012, pp. 19–95) distinguishes the double meaning of the terms ‘worldview’ (‘Weltbild’ and ‘Weltanschauung’) and ‘lifeworld’ (‘Lebenswelt’). ‘Weltbild’ is a result of the process of ‘Weltanschauung’, which means the apprehension of the whole of the world. Both expressions have existential meaning of a life-orientation. They must not be confused with scientific knowledge, although they may contain some elements of it. For our topic, the lifeworld carries the greatest importance, because, in our opinion, it corresponds with previously (Joas) mentioned life-experiences. The lifeworld is not theoretical in nature, but rather a pre-theoretical to-be-in-the-world. The lifeworld encompasses all existential experiences before any attempt to articulate that experience into the worldview. It represents the space in which communication and dialogue happen.

Paul Tillich approaches the question of religion along the same lines: “Religion is not a special function of man’s spiritual life, but it is the dimension of depth in all of his functions” (Tillich 1957, pp. 5–6). Tillich elaborates that throughout history, religion has wandered from one spiritual function to another in search of a home. It tries to find peace and its home in morality, cognition, art and feelings. Religion is simultaneously affirmed and rejected in each of these functions: due to its own internal demands within morality, underestimation by pure cognition, the task it wanted to fulfil and its seriousness that feelings alone cannot convey. Then, Tillich explains, “In this situation, without a home, without a place in which to dwell, religion suddenly realizes that it does not need such a place, that it does not need to seek form a home. It is at home everywhere, namely, in the depth of all functions of man’s spiritual life. Religion is the dimension of depth in all of them. Religion is the aspect of depth in the totality of the human spirit. What does the metaphor depth mean? It means that the religious aspect points to that which is ultimate, infinite, unconditional in man’s spiritual life. Religion, in the largest and most basic sense of the word, is ultimate concern. And ultimate concern is manifest in all creative functions of the human spirit”. (Tillich 1957, pp. 7–8).

So, when we view religion as a notion that is at the core and foundation of all human functions, as a notion that stimulates questioning power in us, we understand more easily why we can recognize traces of religion in all human disciplines, so discussions on religion within science as scientism, the quasi-religiosity in football (cf. Ludwig 2015) and attachment to a football club, etc., come as no surprise. However, what is more important is that religious education puts its focus on the contribution for being, while our being is expressed through knowledge, action and coexistence. Religion, as the ultimate concern, fuels our research and questioning power. That is the key that can help religion find an area for dialogue and mutual support in regard to all disciplines. At its base, it is inextricably linked to all human functions that motivate us to seek the truth. In our case, when we seek a society of dialogue and mutual respect within different cultures and different religions, religion is not only interested in such an endeavour, nor is it underlying such attempts, but is also indispensable for coexistence in an intercultural and interreligious society. Therefore, it sounds disappointing if we comprehend the seriousness of religions only through the perspective of terrorist attacks. Terrorist attacks only indicate the seriousness of the repression of religion and of everything religious in man. This has only contributed
to putting religion into the focus of reflection in political arenas. Religion has its inner strength that survives in spite of everything, and this is understood only by those who understand religion from within. This is why the dialogue feature of self-explanation is important.

We can state that the philosophical and the theological approaches to the assumptions of fruitful dialogue correspond in emphasizing the importance and the evaluation of personal experiences of the dialogue participants, among which the experience of suffering particularly stands out (Šarčević 2003), and their pre-theoretical lifeworld. The discourse on beliefs and worldviews has many dimensions that need to be distinguished so as not to confuse different levels of dialogue (Haen 2016, p. 24). We will see that it is precisely these “purely human”, authentic experiences that are the preconditions for the correct understanding, acceptance and shaping of religious education.

3. Values in a Multicultural Society

Böckenförde’s famous dictum concerning the moral foundation of the modern liberal state, expressing that “the liberal, secularized state draws its life from preconditions it can-not itself guarantee” (Böckenförde 1976, p. 60), opens even more questions in the context of pluralism and multicultural society. Although at the time he coined the dictum, the (political) society was homogeneous from the perspective of the prevailing culture and religion (Judeo-Christian), though the question of state neutrality arose even then in order to create a just society in which every individual or group could find its place. Reaching that goal in a society where cultural and religious homogeneity disappeared is much more demanding, or it might even seem impossible. Can both demands be met: to assume a position of neutrality towards religious and non-religious values and at the same time create a system of values that would be acceptable to all members and groups of a multicultural society? First of all, we need to know what neutrality means and whether it is possible.

Relying on Berger’s thesis of confusing secularization with pluralization, after analysing models and strategies for neutrality in the public discourse in liberal democracies, Strahovnik claims that the way of dialogue is not neutral and encompasses moral attitudes: “Participants in dialogue must discuss and express what they really think or are truly convinced of. Moral or evaluative dialogue is thus understood in terms of the openness of dialogue with the deepening of our own value standpoints, and by its very nature excludes the above-presented condition of the (value) neutrality of dialogue” (Strahovnik 2019, pp. 71–72). We can agree that moral dialogue demands more patience and time, but it is at least authentic, which is, in our opinion, the most important thing for a dialogue. There are no quick solutions, as presented above. If we take into consideration Strahovnik’s distinction of moral dialogue and neutrality, neutrality is closer to closing eyes in front of a problem then to starting a fruitful moral dialogue. Neutral dialogue starts from a calculation related to the goal of the dialogue, while silence or renunciation of value positions can only create more mistrust. It is political correctness without any content. The stakes in moral dialogue are in the people themselves, so moral dialogue requires more responsibility and creates moral bonds. Insisting on neutrality is even less understandable if we are aware that the main values of modern Western society and the liberal state (e.g., personal freedom, human dignity) are the legacy of Christianity—recalling Böckenförde. In addition to that, neutrality is not possible because all proponents of neutrality advocate certain moral values and moral requirements (Meyer 2011, p. 121).

The insurmountable issue of the state’s proclaimed neutrality and political correctness seems to be that the end result is a dilution of values and the loss of ethical foundations and a clear framework for social life. In order to achieve the stability of society and clarity for all its participants, core values need to be at least at their minimal levels. The principles of the majority and tradition do not necessarily imply a threat to the minority or the impossibility of change if that would be beneficial for the community. The abandonment of those principles has resulted in the conflict of different ideologies that make abundant use
of the tools and possibilities of democracy, with politics remaining a permanent place of tension and conflict and citizens barely trusting political institutions (Baloban et al. 2019, p. 32).

When discussing values, we cannot ignore the attempt of Hans Küng, who views the postmodern paradigm in religious sense as an ecumenical paradigm. In response to the four fundamental crises (economic, political, social and environmental), Küng emphasized the demand for four cultures (non-violence, solidarity, tolerance and equal rights), concluding that a global society needs a common ethic and that the fundamental purpose is to achieve peace between believers and non-believers, between members of different religions and between man and nature, all of it through the mediation of a common ethos drawing upon common human nature, on the *humanum*. In doing so, Küng rejects secular or autonomous secular ethics. There are two underlying foundations that hold the world ethos, functioning equally in all religions: the principle of humanity (common human nature, *humanum*)—every human being should be treated humanely and the principle of reciprocity (the Golden Rule): Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you. These two foundations are further fortified by four rules on which, in their own way, all religions agree: (1) Thou shalt not kill! (the culture of non-violence and respect for all living beings); (2) Thou shalt not steal! (the culture of solidarity and fair economic order); (3) Thou shalt not bear false witness! (the culture of tolerance and life of truth) and (4) Thou shalt not commit adultery! (the culture of equality and partnership of men and women). Küng concludes with four core assertions: (1) that there is no peace between nations without peace between religions; (2) that there is no peace between religions without interreligious dialogue; (3) that there is no such dialogue without global ethical standards; and (4) that our planet cannot live in peace and justice without a new paradigm of international relations based on global ethical standards (Küng 1990). This proposal certainly raises new questions. Nevertheless, this is one of the valuable attempts to create a common platform in accordance with the democratic order of society and the Convention on Human Rights, a step that may encourage another one. What we find important in the context of discussions on interreligious and intercultural dialogue is again the platform of humanity—*humanum*—as the core foundation and the start of building coexistence.

4. Difficulties and Challenges of Dialogue

It is clear that, in reality, there are various difficulties that make dialogue, in the ideal sense, impossible. However, that does not mean that dialogue should be forsaken. One of those difficulties can be found in the values conditioned by culture and religion. If we interpret culture in the broadest sense as everything in which human activity is manifested, whether spiritual or material, especially including the values on which society is based (Lenard 2020), then religion is an indispensable part of culture. However, what exactly is the relationship between religion and culture, especially when it comes to values? Paul Tillich deeply explored the relationship between religion and culture. He views the role of religion as one that has a prophetic role in contemplating cultural values and exposing cultural misconceptions. However, that relationship is mutual. Moreover, religion itself is marked by culture and is equally subject to its criticism. Tillich points out that “Judging means seeing both sides. The Church judges culture, including the Church’s own forms of life. For its forms are created by culture, as its religious substance makes culture possible. The Church and culture are within, not alongside, each other” (Tillich 1957, p. 51). Tillich’s explanation of the permeation of Church and culture, as a comparison, is applicable to all religions according to their homeland. We are aware that the relationship between culture and religion does not affect all countries in the same way, but religion is still an important part of the identity of a nation, of a country. However, the society we are facing no longer consists of a homogeneous culture and religion but a heterogeneous one. The focus of our consideration is, therefore, multiculturality, which has spread to the European continent, bringing new challenges with it.
Even the very notion of multiculturality points out that it is a process and dynamic of cultures that meet, permeate and, at best, enrich. It is a dynamic of encounters with the demanding task of learning from each other and giving the other something that is ours. Here, we will not get into the analysis of the notion of multiculturalism and all its manifestation through the perspective of ideology (Song 2020), but start from the factum of multiculturality. Analysing the situation in Europe in view of Islamic immigration, Tomislav Kovač emphasizes: “Europe is invited to provide its best values to the new Muslims and members of other cultures and religions, all the while knowing how to receive from the values of others”. (Kovač 2021, p. 199). Much has been discussed and written recently about the notion of multicultural society in an effort to find a solution for a better and safer coexistence. Terrorist attacks have contributed to the fear of new Muslims and the Islamization of Europe, and that fear is not completely unjustified (Kovač 2021). Much has been discussed and written recently about the notion of multicultural society in an effort to find a solution for a better and safer coexistence. Terrorist attacks have contributed to the fear of new Muslims and the Islamization of Europe, and that fear is not completely unjustified (Kovač 2021). So, Europe is facing a huge challenge in trying to find a safe common ground for people of different cultures, religions and moral-ethical beliefs. One group of people has been shown not to like the way others live their lives to the point that they are ready to take the most horrific moves. Such moves that terrify the whole world are accompanied by some of the religious cries, in an effort to defend their God from the threat of other people’s values. It is clear that such acts are politically manipulated, but it is equally clear that they are religiously coloured in the sense of one specific interpretation of religion that serves political purposes. That way, these events become a turning point for the treatment of religion, often by being instrumentalized in favour of discussing the harmfulness of religion, but also by putting religion in the focus of reflection once again.

On the other hand, the Enlightenment, secularization and atheization of society contributed to the repression of religion (especially Christianity). The most radical example of this is France, “which, on the basis of its well-known constitutional principle of secularism (la laïcité, according to the 1905 law separating the Church and the State), strictly prohibits the wearing of explicit religious symbols in state institutions, such as schools, municipalities, hospitals, etc.” (Kovač 2021, p. 180). To be more specific, France is witnessing the repression of religion from public life and space in the name of secularization. (Roy 2020). At the same time, proponents of such secularization, which does not tolerate anything religious, will invoke their Christian roots as a tool against Islam. The paradox is that secularization, at least in the words of Roy, is a Christian phenomenon. In addition to claiming that it was clear to the founders of Europe that “Christianity is at the core of European identity, the soul at the heart of this vast bureaucratic body” (Roy 2020, p. 7). He also emphasizes that “when it comes to a new model of the state, one cannot speak of liberalism or dechristianization, but simply of the secularization of religious norms, focused not only on their definitions but also their implementation. That is why we can still speak of ‘Christian culture’” (Roy 2020, p. 22). So, according to Roy, “the debate over Europe’s Christian identity is not based on the binary opposition of Europe and Islam, but on a triangle whose endpoints are Christian religion, European secular values (although they sometimes rely on Christian identity) and Islam as a religion. The eternal question ‘whether Islam is reconcilable with democracy/European values/secularism?” actually imposes another question: What do we confront Islam with—Christianity or the Enlightenment?” (Roy 2020, p. 10). The game-changing events have contributed to politics, and we are focusing here on Europe, starting to take religion ‘seriously’. We are aware that the word ‘seriously’ implies a bit of danger, all the more so as it is becoming increasingly evident that this is not a conflict between secularization and Islam, but a conflict between Christianity and secularization that began long before and in which Islam brought additional difficulties. No solution has been found so far in the search for answers regarding possible coexistence and the aspiration for all of them to live in harmony and peace. All the more so as Islam does not seem to show any propensity for dialogue, democracy or European values.

In light of these considerations, we wanted to highlight problems that are spread over multiple domains. However, if we want to truly come up with an answer, then we need to ask the right questions. Real questions also require an understanding of the position of
Religion. From the position of religion, it is important to emphasize that each religion tries to remain true to the original message, which does not want to turn into a mere cultural feature, without denying the interactivity of religion and culture. Religion is not just a sociological reality. It is that, too, but it does not exhaust itself in its social dimension. In other words, it does not interpret itself that way. If we interpret religion as an interlocutor and a co-builder of coexistence in a multicultural society, then it should be considered with what it really is within. This definitely does not mean that religion is spared from criticism, but that the criticism should also be acknowledged.

Drawing on the previously stated difficulties of the positions from which social participants act, it becomes clear that values are in crisis and that this is not caused solely by Islam, but by Europe in itself: “We have no choice but to return to the basics, especially those of European liberalism, as well as to what is left of the European Christian heritage. We need to go back to the basics of Europe’s original project, beyond the bureaucratic systems. Ultimately, Europe is the only identity into which the spirit can still be infused” (Roy 2020, p. 140). Kovač also recognizes the importance of identity: “True multiculturalism is possible only where there is a dominant and recognizable domestic culture that respects itself and carries a clear system of values that enable the development of a stable coexistence of members of different nations, cultures, and religions. In the long run, silencing or denying one’s own identity and culture in the name of abstract tolerance leads to numerous misunderstandings and difficulties. The newcomer expects to be welcomed by a safe host, and even has the right to a solid, reliable and trustworthy environment” (Kovač 2021, p. 198). However, European society is increasingly complex, layered and transitioning, while European Christianity is eroded by secularization. The encounter with the culture of the Muslim world, whose identity is essentially marked by religion, puts Europe in a position where it is no longer so certain when it comes to recognizing its identity and values. In other words, Europe is an insecure host. Within such changes, when it is crucial to provide a safe common ground for everyone, the following question arises: Is this possible when faced with the challenges of secularization, Christianity, and Islam in Europe?

Many will probably try to avoid this answer in its unambiguous formulation as it confronts us with a hard and repulsive “No! It is not possible!”. We do not want to accept such an answer because it confronts us with the impotence of our policies, religions, calls for dialogue, etc. However, rejecting such an answer can mean something else, and that is that “Yes! It is possible!” is already present in the world, in human experience, in the individual who does not hate the other and to whom the other and the different do not pose a threat. What values could bring together people of different cultures and different religions within one society, as well as non-religious ones? Going back, Küng’s humanum is the basis on which we can build what concerns everyone, and that is our common reality. We do not wish to talk here about a dialogue of religions that will never give up on their doctrinal differences. However, religious as well as non-religious people, with their differences, possess the same common humanum and the same common reality that connects them, especially at the level of local communities and everyday common life. That is why we highlight here school education as the meeting point of living people, not systems. These people/children meet each other and form friendships with others and different people who, with their differences, do not always have to pose a threat. The best examples of this are children in schools and the opportunity to teach them how to build a society of acquaintance, respect, encounter, dialogue and acceptance. It is possible to be a good host and allow newcomers to develop their identity in accordance with their values but also the values of the country to which they have arrived. Here, Europe has a great role which we can interpret the meeting of Islam and Europe as an opportunity. (Kovač 2021). Such an initiative may come from political or religious structures, but those who implement it in their lives and truly live it are citizens and the faithful. Therefore, it is important to encourage and nurture mutual acquaintance and understanding of different cultural backgrounds as early as in schools, where children of different cultures and religions sit in the same classroom.
Religion carries a rich resource for enriching human life and developing coexistence at its core. One of its strengths is the participation in the process of developing a society of dialogue and respect for cultural diversity. With that in mind, Ana Thea Filipović conducted an empirical study in 2015. Its aim was to determine the extent to which the culture of recognition and respect for diversity is present among religious teachers of all religious communities in the Republic of Croatia. She claims that “monotheistic religions, especially majority Christianity, carry a message with an underlying sensitivity towards foreigners, the marginalized, and the deprived” (Filipović 2016, p. 25). We support that claim with the conclusion of this research, in which the author indicates the following: “Research on the attitude of religious teachers in Croatia towards differences in the classroom and teaching has shown that, contrary to the public impression often created in the media, religious teachers of all religious communities in the Republic of Croatia, as a whole, show a high degree of culture of diversity recognition and inclusive treatment of differences. The vast majority of the religious teacher population has a positive attitude towards plurality, productively uses diversity and differences, and seeks to alleviate social inequalities visible in the classroom and in teaching through fair treatment” (Filipović 2016, p. 32). The results of this research show that religion, as well as religious education, participates in the process of developing a multicultural society, contributing immensely to the place where different cultures meet—the classroom. The social impact of school teaching is visible in the European Values Study conducted in Croatia: “If we compare the results in 1999 and 2018, the trend shows that trust and tolerance among people of other races, religions, nationalities or sexual orientations is growing” (Baloban et al. 2019, p. 25). Of course, this is research related to the Republic of Croatia. However, we can draw parallels in relation to the curricula of religious education and other European countries. A comparative analysis of the religious education curricula from the perspective of intercultural education in Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Germany and Sweden reveals that intercultural content is highlighted. The purpose, aims and content of these curricula largely include getting to know other religions and cultures, fostering dialogue and respecting freedom of belief and disbelief. A great emphasis is also put on the educational dimension, as it is crucial for the adoption of attitudes and values that contribute to coexistence in a multicultural society (Razum and Jurišić 2020).

When discussing multiculturality, which equally includes different religious and non-religious beliefs, we must not forget who the real, concrete subjects of dialogue are. These are not systems, neither religious nor secular, but people. Here we wish to show the possibilities and opportunities of religious education at the level of everyday common life, and not at the level of official representatives of certain religious or secular systems. It is clear that at the official level, different religions have mutually incompatible and opposing elements, including the demand for truth. However, everyday life in a multicultural society connects members of different beliefs on a daily basis more than it separates them. A survey conducted in 2016 on high school students in Zagreb clearly shows that young people are increasingly recognizing the importance of promoting dialogue between the different, especially between different religions; 66.4% of respondents consider dialogue between religions to be an important church activity (Mandarić et al. 2019, p. 236).

When we discuss dialogue in the context of this article, we are not primarily focused on the dialogue of official representatives of religions. Religions have their truths that are not questioned. That is why it is important to include religions in the broader cultural vision of society, which enables the discovery of very specific common goals of everyday life. Despite all the difficulties that remain, when trying to achieve intercultural and interreligious dialogue, the mentioned results of the research in Croatia not only allow but also oblige us to an optimistic approach to the education for dialogue. Especially since the wounds from the war from 30 years ago, in which political rhetoric abused religion, are still felt. Reality provides enough material for pessimism but also for optimism. Based on previous depictions of dialogue, we claim that the best way to achieve dialogue is through the exchange of experiences of humanity, with the school/classroom being a privileged
place where children of different cultures and religions meet. Discovering the shared experience of humanity in everyday situations from the beginning of education can enable better mutual understanding, respect and even rapprochement.

5. Council of Europe Guidelines

The documents and recommendations concerning the intercultural and interreligious dialogue, provided by the Council of Europe, start from what is common to all people. Although it is collectively called by different names, it is about the same anthropological reality and foundation of human life: experience, symbolization and narration (Joas), experience of (particularity of) one’s own world, profile of life (Hünermann), life-world (Habermas), ultimate concern, depth (Tillich) and *humanum* (Künig). The reflection and dialogue on the basic experience of humanity is a prerequisite for the realization of the “learning to be together” process, as described in the White Paper (Council of Europe 2008, p. 31) and for the realization of “the four pillars of education”, set out in the Delors Report: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together (International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century 1996). In the last 20 years, the Council of Europe and various bodies and institutions of the European Union have published several important documents and recommendations on interculturality and religious education (Razum and Jurišić 2020). Here, we will reflect only on the most important ones because the main guidelines and recommendations are more or less explicitly expressed in all of them. The aim is to briefly outline the long process of creating and fine-tuning recommendations for improving the conditions for coexistence in a multicultural society. It is important to also note that, as stated in Foreword to *Signposts*, religion was not included in the work on intercultural education prior to 2002 (Jackson 2014, p. 5).

In addition to intercultural dialogue, the Council of Europe also acknowledges interreligious dialogue. Ministers responsible for culture, education, youth and sport from the states parties to the European Cultural Convention, assembled in Wrocław, adopted the Declaration in which they demanded the following: “intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, based on the primacy of common values, should be organized and systemically encouraged as a means of promoting awareness and understanding of each other, preventing conflicts, promoting reconciliation and ensuring the cohesion of society. This should be done in particular through formal and non-formal education, the dimensions of remembrance and common heritage, cultural action and participation in the community” (Council of Europe 2004b, chp. 3). Following this guideline, the importance of the openness of culture to the critique of religion should be emphasized, as well as the religion’s openness to the critique of culture. In a multicultural society, we encounter a pluralism of cultures and a pluralism of values that must be subjected to a debate in which everyone will participate, without exception, in order to make the space of dialogue a space of encounter.

At the same time, the role of religious communities in the context of education is also highlighted at the level of the religious dimension of intercultural education, which affects the adoption of attitudes characterized by respect and tolerance, as well as life in cultural and religious diversity. In the Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention, European Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs expressed their commitment to “consider the development of knowledge of history, cultures, arts and religions from school age onwards to be of central importance,” and to “encourage, through co-operation with the ministerial authorities specifically responsible for education in the different states, the inclusion in school curricula of lessons illustrating both the historical and the contemporary influence of cultures and civilisations on each other, as well as cultural cross-fertilisation, involving, where possible, appropriate collaboration with representatives of the different components of cultural diversity, including religious diversity” (Council of Europe 2004a, p. 8). All decision makers are expected to adopt the recommendations and all of the previously mentioned documents. There is a clear need for communication and coordination of all members of society, especially those who have a direct impact on the formation
of education policies: they need to be open to dialogue and diversity. Such a dialogue presupposes the provision of safe ground for all worldviews, whether they are affiliated with different religions or non-religious or atheists. The notion of a ‘safe ground’ does not presuppose false safety or indifference towards the other and the different, but allows for encounter and dialogue with the different within which an individual can develop personal identity. For an individual to be able to develop personal identity without the fear of other people’s values, it is necessary to emphasize the values that reconcile all religions and all worldviews as much as possible. Non-dialogue, as we have pointed out, breeds fear of the other and the different, while dialogue opens up opportunities for us to discover the values that connect us.

For Martin Buber, “all real life is meeting”, and, “through the Thou a man becomes I” (Buber 1937, pp. 11, 28). This reality underlies the requirement of “learning to live together”. Encounter and dialogue presuppose one self that meets you. The ability to express the self and the ability to say you is a prerequisite for any dialogue, including intercultural and interreligious dialogues. The White Paper does not ignore possible and real obstacles to dialogue: “No dialogue can take place in the absence of respect for the equal dignity of all human beings, human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles. These values, and in particular respect for freedom of expression and other fundamental freedoms, guarantee non-domination and are thus essential to ensure that dialogue is governed by the force of argument rather than the argument of force” (Council of Europe 2008, p. 19). Clearly, dialogue is preceded by certain values without which it would be impossible. In the previous chapter, we emphasized the importance of values in both a pluralistic and multicultural society, and here, we would like to highlight the importance of values education. Values education is also promoted through religious education, precisely through those values that focus on education for the self and education for you, and imply an encounter that occurs first in the individual, and then in his or her relationship with others. The lack of dialogue and neglect of interpersonal relationships has negative implications for both society and individuals: “Not to engage in dialogue makes it easy to develop a stereotypical perception of the other, build up a climate of mutual suspicion, tension and anxiety, use minorities as scapegoats, and generally foster intolerance and discrimination” (Council of Europe 2008, p. 16). Participating in the formation of a multicultural society therefore implies the awareness of the benefits of dialogue and the risks of non-dialogue. The spirit of tolerance, openness, solidarity and respect for the freedom of others is a great challenge and responsibility of everyone involved in the formation of society, not to mention the special role religious communities have in it.

Key recommendations for the implementation of religious and non-religious world views in intercultural education are described in the Signposts (Jackson 2014) publication by the Council of Europe. The importance of that document is also evidenced by a special issue of Intercultural Education (Jackson 2019), which further discusses various topics encouraged by Signposts. The document itself is the result of the joint work of many scholarships dedicated to improving the quality of religious and non-religious education: “It is hoped that Signposts will stimulate and contribute to constructive discussion of the Council of Europe recommendation, stimulating debate about policy making, classroom practice, community links and teacher training in different parts of Europe, and perhaps beyond. The whole document, or individual chapters on specific topics, can be used as a basis for discussion and training” (Jackson 2014, p. 26). Moreover, the document indeed offers a comprehensive approach to education that takes into account religious beliefs and non-religious world views. The classroom is presented as a safe space, emphasizing the importance of the atmosphere and relationships that prevail in it. In this context, teachers are faced with high expectations. Their personality, professionalism and relationships with students are important, because there is a risk of conflict in every classroom. The teacher must therefore know his or her students and their interrelationships. Furthermore, the document mentions the importance of dealing with media reports on religions, especially when it comes to inaccurate representations of religions in the media. The classroom, as a
safe space, should be a privileged place of dialogic access to such posts. A special chapter is devoted to non-religious convictions and world views, in which the topics of moral or values, spirituality, life interpretation, organised and personal world views are addressed (Jackson 2014).

The educational policies of the Council of Europe over the last twenty years shows that there is a growing awareness of the importance of implementing both religious and non-religious beliefs and views on mankind and the world in the education system. This awareness results in caring and providing concrete assistance in the form of clear and elaborate guidelines for all those who need to implement these policies at all levels, including the last addressees—students and teachers.

The guidelines can undoubtedly be objected to for being too general, ideal and putting the responsibility for the design and implementation of concrete steps on the backs of the final recipients—teachers and students. In addition, their feasibility depends on the specific situations in individual countries and the interest and engagement of those responsible for education policies, which may include those who are opposed to such an approach. Ultimately, the difficulties are of the same type as those we discussed in the chapter on dialogue. Yet, the length of the path from proclaimed ideals to real participants should not be neglected.

6. Conclusions

In order for religion to be properly positioned in society and education, it is necessary to recognize and acknowledge the positive potential that is intrinsic to all religions, which justifies the inclusion of religious education in the education system, although opinions on that topic also differ (White 2004, 2005; Wright 2004, 2005). Equally important are the questions regarding differences and the relationship between intercultural education and religious education (Johannessen and Skeie 2019). Religion holds an important place in a multicultural society, as evidenced by interreligious encounters that already exist at different levels. The official stance of religious leaders is certainly an incentive that members of those communities do not fear members of other religions, but approach them in an open and interested manner, wishing to get closer. The encyclical Caritas in veritate provides an important perspective for promoting intercultural dialogue in the field of education by stating: “Today the possibilities of interaction between cultures have increased significantly, giving rise to new openings for intercultural dialogue: a dialogue that, if it is to be effective, has to set out from a deep-seated knowledge of the specific identity of the various dialogue partners” (Benedict XVI 2009, No. 26). Dialogue has now become an important part of the Catholic Church’s mission (Kovač 2019).

Religious and interreligious education, and the same goes for the non-religious approach (Bratén and Everington 2019), should be based on the experience of living in interpersonal dialogue. A precondition for fruitful communication is the understanding of the context of life experiences (Zalec 2019). A comparison of the formulated contents in the form of religious sciences can cause confusion and indifference much more than stimulate a sincere interest in the other but also in one’s own. It is not systems that communicate but people. Human experience, the experience of each individual participant in the dialogue, is a pre-condition for understanding oneself and others. From this perspective arises the controversy of whether non-religious worldviews ought to be included in the curriculum content of religious education (Barnes 2015).

Religion is an essential element of culture and plays an important role in understanding other cultures. In order to achieve coexistence in a Europe of diversity, an intercultural dialogue is needed, including interreligious dialogue. In addition, conforming to the EU recommendations, interreligious dialogue has a key role to play at the “learning to live together” level, and this learning should be integrated into education, not only at the informational level but also at the educational level. Both religious and interreligious competencies are needed. The school has a special role in that process because it can mediate religious diversity as a positive element that enriches the quality of life by expanding
The religious dimension has become an indispensable part of the discourse on intercultural education in European literature and in European documents. In recent European literature, various terms have been used to describe and explain the religious dimension of intercultural education: “the religious dimension of intercultural education”, “religion education”, “teaching about religions”, “teaching about religions and beliefs” and the like. The school subject of “Religious Education” has different and often changing interpretations in different European countries, depending on the socio-cultural, political and religious context. The challenge of multiculturality is very much recognized in the context of religious education in the educational systems of different European countries (Rothgangel et al. 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c).

The Contribution of Religious Education to Coexistence in the Multicultural Society is a project currently being implemented at the Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb. It is in a way a realisation of the recommendations listed in the Council of Europe Signposts. The basic goal of the project is to investigate how much religious education in its different confessional/religious versions contributes to coexistence in a modern multicultural society, as well as the intercultural competencies of religious teachers of different denominations. In addition, the project seeks to provide the tools needed to define proposals for possible changes in the field of defining the curriculum of confessional religious education, and to define proposals related to educational materials for conducting confessional religious education in Croatia. The importance of such a research is evidenced by numerous documents, European studies and specifically everyday school and extracurricular experiences marked by the challenges of coexistence in a multicultural society.

**Author Contributions:** Both authors have contributed equally to the manuscript. Both authors have read and agreed on the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded by the Croatian Science Foundation, grant number IP-2019-04 3661.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study, in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

**References**


Razum, Ružica, and Marija Jurišić, eds. 2020. Interkulturalnost i religijsko obrazovanje u europskim dokumentima i kurikulumima/Interculturality and Religious Education in European Documents and Curricula, bilingual Edition. Zagreb: Catholic Faculty of Theology—University of Zagreb.


