

# Religion and the modern education

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## Abstract

The purpose of the research is to solve the paradox of religion integration in education, by the new balance between religion, philosophy and science, during the post communism transition. In the field of thinking, the process is the transition from ideology to integral thinking. It is realized through the re-evaluation of the topics of the integration of religion, transitology and integral though, education, inclusiveness, solidarity, new laicity and new secularity.

In the philosophical sense, integration is the objective process of being developed. This is understood as a return to identity towards a universal being.

In the context of the social being, the process realizes the opening and cooperative development of all mental, spiritual-religious, scientific, creative-artistic, economic, cultural, material and non-material political fields.

It includes the individual, the community, and all institutions of social life. The path of integration development is the transitive movement in a spiral form.

In Albania, with the fall of communism, freedom of religion was legalized according to the standards of European democracy. The rehabilitation of religious figures that had been condemned and persecuted by the totalitarian regime began.

The post-communist transition brought profound changes in the field of faith and religion such as the new dimension in the relationship of society with religion, new and unfamiliar attitudes of believers to religion, new relations between the state and religious institutions, new relations between education and religion in public institutions, opening of religious schools and increasing the influence of religion through the media and religious literature.

What is considered tolerance in Europe, in the Albanian case is *respect*. Albanians are the best model for religious tolerance (respect). There has never been a religious clash in Albania for any reason. Respect for the religious affiliation and religious belief of the other in the Albanian case is modeled as the guiding value of their identity and appears in everyday life as the acceptance of the other. For this reason, they are the best model of respect and acceptance of the other, regardless of religious affiliation. This is an ontological value, built over the centuries and continues to this day.

Albanians have not converted, but have adapted to a religious belief for economic and survival reasons.

Marriages with different religions and keeping two names (Christian and Muslim) are natural phenomena among Albanians. In Albania, there are in the family and tribe people with Christian and Muslim religions individuals with two names, Christian and Muslim: Kristo and Muhamed.

Albanians have lived in peaceful symbiosis with the Slavs in the centuries of the latter's influx into Albanian lands. They have also lived peacefully with other neighbors, Greeks or Romans. This is even though the neighbors have not always been peaceful with the Albanians.

**Keywords:** religion and education; integration of knowledge; rethinking secularism and laicity; religious tolerance; Albania

## **Introduction**

### ***Research Design***

*Socio-economic and political column.*

In the first column are presented the objective and subjective factors that have brought the necessity of the transition, from traditional thought and belief, to modern thought and belief.

These factors precede the stage of social history, the era of integration and globalization. In the case of the former communist countries, the collapse of the communist system was followed by the necessity of integration and Europeanization through the multidimensional transition.

*The second column is the technological and intercommunication one.*

Meanwhile, science continues to be somewhat slow to come to the forefront of great qualitative development.

The paradox between the two premises is being overcome through the new system of thought, the integration of values, and the democratization of social and political systems.

### ***Theoretical Background***

The philosophical basis of the research is the philosophy of integration are materialized in critical and integrated reflective thinking.

Judgments of thought claim to be affirmative and clearly express the organic and natural connection of knowledge with universal human values.

During the search, the phenomena are scanned, not according to the linear order of the straight line, but spread in different areas of human life and integrated with each other. Their movement is transitive and not through hopes that create gaps or cultural shock.

The study is based on knowledge and respect [tolerance] to the major religions of the world: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Christianity, Taoism, and Judaism. The first premise of the thesis is proven by human experience: "all religions are part of the culture of civilizations and are respected as such. They cannot be categorized as good religions and bad religions."

The principles for the integration of knowledge on religion, in the educational teaching process in the secular and secular school and in education, in general, are based on the experience of the Council of Europe which can be summarized as follows:

- religion is an important cultural fact (similar to other identity sources such as languages, history or cultural heritage);
- beliefs about the world and values must be developed gradually, based on real personal and social learning experiences;
- an integrated approach to spiritual, religious, moral and civic values must be encouraged.<sup>1</sup>

## **Methodology**

The research methodology is holistic. This means that the analysis is not done as a sum of individual parts, but through a general and integrated vision. As a result, from many premises, phenomena and facts, a synthetic and critical truth affirms. During the analysis process, multiple comparisons of data are developed through their dialectical connection. The latter is not just a cause-and-effect but is interdependence and intercommunication.

## **Rethinking secularism and laicity**

Secularisation<sup>(1)</sup> is often understood as a process in which religious thought, religious practices and religious institutions lose their impact on people's lives and on society as a whole. (Wilson, in Paul, 2017, pp. 78).

### *Hypothesis:*

*Due to the new dimensions of the rationality of the human mind, in the objective conditions of the unimaginable speed of the development of information technology and the slowness of scientific discoveries, the integration of religion in secular and secular education, in the global era, is a necessary requirement for progress.*

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<sup>1</sup> P. Ricoeur. 1996. The erosion of tolerance. In *Tolerance between Intolerance and the Intolerable*; Berghahn Books: Oxford, UK; pp. 189–202.

*The fall of totalitarian systems and the end of the Cold War create space for the process of integrating knowledge (knowledge) in the fields of religion, science, and philosophy.*

*In our society, the role and position of religion are sensitive in all spheres: in economy, politics, culture, morals.*

*The transition of society from communism to liberal democracy and the capitalist market economy is a phenomenon unknown in history.*

*While the progressive role of religion in the development and construction of civilized models of society has been proven. In the case of post-communist systems, this role is inalienable.*

The secular term in Albanian means “*segregation*”. It is understood that it is a strong, impenetrable division. There is no communication between religion and the state. There are two hostile sides, in the war between them. Religion and science are also hostile.

In the Western sense secularism is three-dimensional (M. Scherer, 2013). It is the restriction of religion from public life; separation of religion from individual beliefs, and decline in the face of other social, economic, political actors.

In these circumstances and in the conditions of post-totalitarian society and the transition to democracy, the reform in the field of education and the integration of religion with it is a necessity defined by the laws of development, or it is the only alternative.

In the context of education and religion, the time period from the cent. XIX to our time is called the “era of secularism”.

### ***End of the “secular era”***

The end of the secular era is considered the time of the end of the Cold War, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of state socialism in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe.

The content of this era was and is strongly influenced by the phenomena related to September 11, 2001 (the fall of the Twin Towers, USA) and other phenomena of international terrorism, which have misused religion in the interest of dark policies.

At the end of the secular age, some thinkers understand secularism as a state in which you may not believe and aspire to live fulfilled. (M. Kunker, 2015).

Others say that “the current definition of secularization belongs to history because science forces religion to lose its persuasive power soon”. (K. H. (Ina) Avest. 2019).

At the heart of modernity, according to Taylor, the desire to transcend the spiritual side will regain its strength, recognizing the truth that has value when we realize it independently individually. (Right to privacy).

The thinker articulates the idea that, recently, the spiritual needs of the people have not diminished but are finding new expressions after the implication and re-establishment of religious traditions. He values these situations as manifestations not only of linguistic expressions but also as the new language of humanity.<sup>2</sup>

Other thinkers consider the period in question as a “third state” of society and the rule of law, in which previous forms of religious life are dissolved and new ones are created.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Laic and secular vs atheist***

The term secular, in the Albanian language (A. Kostallari, 1980, pg 937) is understood as “without religion”. A layman is a person who has no religious faith and does not perform or respect religious rites and institutions. The communist party member was supposed to be a layman. This means that communist education was secular which understands that it was paternal education. The secular concept in the totalitarian socialist system is attached to other areas of social life: secular literature, secular art, secular schools, the individual with secular tendencies, etc.

### ***Historical context***

Laicism and secularism were included in the field of education and public communication in the twentieth century; as opposition to clericalism and in the non-clerical sense, not political, social, and public control.

During the cent. XX, like many categories of thought, these two categories were ideologies and politicized. Indoctrination and politicization peaked during the Cold War.

This means that secularism and secularism are distorted and their behavior in the original identity is required. “True secularism,” says Pope Benedict XVI “allows religious belief.” The state does not impose religion; on the contrary, it gives space to religions towards civil society, and therefore allows religions to be factors in building society.

Democritus and the Sophists secularized philosophical knowledge from mythology and religion. Aristotle’s philosophy of nature became dominant in the conception of

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<sup>2</sup> K. H. (Ina) ter Avest. 2019. There is a Crack in Everything-Education and Religion in a Secular Age. Special Issue Editor: University of Applied Sciences/ VU University Amsterdam, Netherlands.

<sup>3</sup> M. Kunker & J. T. S. Madeley. 2015. A Secular Age beyond the West: Forms of Differentiation in and around the Religious Field. The London School of Economics and Political Science

the world/universe. Beginning with the Council of Trent, Italy (1545-1563), Aristotle's views became the official framework of the church's religious views. This is why in this time period the cosmological dimension played a major role in balancing the contradictions in the Christian religion.<sup>4</sup>

Just as Archimedes discovered the law of equilibrium, Galileo discovered the law of free fall, so Aristotle first studied the equilibrium of being in general and of being social in particular. According to this philosophy, anthropology is human habits and their balance.

Aristotle can be considered the first secular thinker of Western civilization. With him began the phase of "thinking outside religion". Knowledge was no longer "sacred." Philosophy is directly related to civic life and, therefore, it "characterizes secularism" (J. P. Vernant, 1962).

Aristotle's rational method of thought defined the secular and secular character of culture and education in the West and the East when Christianity and Islam were widespread.

Human knowledge stems from the understanding of reality or nature; therefore, it is not supernatural. Religious knowledge stems from the authority of belief in supernatural power and books and scriptures.

Knowledge built through reasoning and observation is scientific because it is proven. Religious knowledge cannot be proven, but only believed.

Aristotle separated the state from religion and claimed that the ideal political state is the best proof of this thesis (Ross, Aristotle, p. 246).

However, after the closure of the Plato Academy, philosophy travels alongside religion. It was a journey during which the brutal confrontation between religion and philosophy and religion with science took place.

The second secularism in Europe took place in the 15<sup>th</sup> cent., when the culture of the elite of society was unified<sup>5</sup>. While secularism returned to the legal norm at the beginning of the cent. XX (France, 1905).

It is time to re-establish the new relationship between religion and secular education in society. The change was brought about by the objective factors of development, especially the qualitative changes in the education of the new generation in the first decades of the cent. XXI.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Habermas. 2010. Dialektika e sekularizimit. ISHM&IDK. Tiranë, pg 34-35.

<sup>5</sup> T. Kuzio. 2001. Politics. Journal Issue TOC. Vol. 21 (3), 2001, pp. 168-177

Religion itself requires fundamental change. "Learn about science, because science and theology are intertwined. Religious people will accept what they see in the science lab, scientists will hear what happens in the services and the word of religion, and both sides will talk about what they see and understand".<sup>6</sup>

In the second half of the cent. XX major religions have taken steps to reform themselves. In 1965 the Catholic Church accepted the principles of democracy and the rule of law. So did the Lutheran and Protestant churches in Germany.

The Islamic world has for years been moving towards a new approach to teaching the Qur'an. Even for years, Euro-Islam has been discussed as a reformed faith.<sup>7</sup>

Rethinking secularism and secularism is accomplished by projecting philosophy through the history of critical thinking and placing the product in the context of integration and globalization.

In Albanian, the words "secular" and "laicity" mean the separation of religion from science and the state. Separation is not synonymous with a lack of connection. When a married couple divorces, this is not a denial of any future relationship between them. Although separated, they find it necessary to have peaceful relations. Otherwise the uncertainty of the future reigns.

Secularism and secularism are strengthened through openness and acceptance of the other, through knowledge of religious beliefs, multiculturalism, and global integration. They "illuminate" the path of harmonious natural human development through three truths: religious, philosophical, and scientific truth. Philosopher Jürgen Habermas (90 years old) has defined the new vision of "secularism", distinguishing it from the term "secular". The secular man is an unbeliever. He takes an agnostic attitude towards religion.

"Today, secularism often relies on strict naturalism or scientifically argued". The philosopher's suggestion applies both to education in the secular school and to "believing citizens and religious communities that need to be systematically adapted. For this, the secular legitimacy of the civic community must include their faith as its premise". (J. Habermas, 2010).

In a democratic society, consensus between religion and secularism is a naturally achievable necessity.

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<sup>6</sup> M. Mazovet. 2000. The Balkans. From the end of Bizantinism to the present day. Weidenfeld @ Nicolson. Printed in Great Britain by Claus Ltd, St I vesplc. 2000, pp, 73

<sup>7</sup> K. Pritchard.2016. Nature, 537, 451. doi:10.1038/537451a, pp 1

The separation of state and school from religion is no enmity between them. It was/is the rebirth of the natural relationship between the three truths, since ancient rationality.

The state is neither atheist nor humanist. It is assessed by the level of democracy and representation. "The worldview neutrality of the state does not speak against allowing religious expressions in political life, if the advisory and ordering processes at the level of parliament, judiciary, ministries, and governing bodies remain clearly separated from the informal participation of citizens in communication and in the formation of public opinion".<sup>(8)</sup>

According to Habermas, the state should be more liberal in this regard, not forcing people to speak that language and in a way that interests the official public. The democratic state cannot limit the colors and nuances of public communication and turn to monologue.

"Even 'secular citizens' who view their fellow citizens with prejudice, because of their religious mentality, simply fall into the realm of a *modus vivendi*, losing the accepting base of the community of citizens".

So, "for everything to go well, both sides, each from its own point of view, need to be introduced to the interpretation of the circumstances of faith and knowledge, which will enable them an enlightened and self-reflective communication".<sup>8</sup>

The substance of the new thought on secularism and secularism lies in strengthening the immunity of society in the face of violent extremism. It is the "golden ratio" between the individual and the public, between belief and ideological indoctrination, in the field of communication and aims to prevent extremism of any kind.

The balance between public and private in our century works well if it includes objective factors of development. Globalization and integration are objective development movements that guarantee future and sustainability by moving in favor of the public.

Secularism, meanwhile, with more subjective elements, is moving towards privacy.

## **Integration of science, religion, and philosophy in the process of secular education**

### ***New understanding of integration***

The integration process creates space for the storage, development, and multiplication [multy identities] of identities of all domains.

Two or more identities can be integrated with each other and create new identities if they move towards each other in unlimited space and according to a curved trajectory.

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p. 37.



Identity A (AI), identity B (BI), and identity C (CI) move in the global space, at the same time preserving themselves as such and creating the common space for a new identity, which is a multi-plane identity [multiple identities] (MI).

Education (educatum, educere, lat.) means learning through schooling (education) and practicing, throughout life, to become a good and wise person. An educated person thinks critically and reflexively and is oriented by the most mature values of family, community, and society as a whole. In the process of formation and education, we cannot pretend not to understand today's reality. We are part of a world of 7 billion people when some believe in one god, some believe in many gods, and some do not believe in any.

Our approach differs from the study of religious beliefs and religions. In the secular school, the fact and the religious product are studied, regardless of belief or disbelief in a certain religion. Explanation and interpretation are done through the methodologies of different disciplines that do not aim to evaluate beliefs but recognize them as the focus of dialectical connections of belief with argument and proof. Thus, the approach provides cognitive, theoretical, methodological data, terminology, and substantial concepts interdependent with historical, economic, social, and cultural factors.

It is one of the ways of informing the student and helps and protects from the possible distortion of the connections of the religious world with the secular one. However, a broader consensus is required to achieve the goal "of teaching and learning about and about religion/religions and not religious devotion and instruction as such, nor teaching and learning in religion, because, although the dividing line between the two different approaches is clear, there is often ambiguity". (L. Peplin. 2009).

The support of the public opinion and the widest possible consensus for the new relationship between education and religion are indicators that the Albanian public school is on the path of strengthening secular and secular education according to the Constitution of the Republic of Albania and by the standards of the education system Western.

Opposition and debate are vital in a democracy. But, in this case, it is necessary to orient what and how it is debated. Through constructive dialogue, we can learn from each other and achieve the standards of the civilized world in time and quality. The media can make a valuable contribution to bringing public education closer to religion.

The relationship between religion and public education has taken a new turn during the first decade of this century.

Education in the public and private pre-university education system is secular and aims to create conditions and opportunities for students to build and develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values required by a democratic society.

Use of key religious terms and terms not directly related to religion or beliefs, such as religion, god, deity, cleric, Christian, Muslim, Islam, Islamism, Catholic, Orthodox, Bektashi, faith, saint, crusader, angel, devil, beyond, eternal, church, mosque, teqe, tomb, temple, fundamentalism, extremism, etc., not only does not harm the quality of formation of the new generation of the 21<sup>st</sup> cent.; but occupies an increasingly wide space in the school and in the public communication of our society. Youth write, read and listen to these terms without any selection through a variety of audio-visual and written tools.

Real education and virtual education are new terms of our century. Virtual life creates utopian hope for the future; real-life creates real faith and hope for the future.

The virtual world is “taught” through cyberspace, the Internet, worldwide web.

The real world is “taught” through schooling and books. Both paths are beneficial and one-sidedness would be dangerous.

In our time social media is occupying a large place in the process of educating youth, while not providing sufficient control over information. Users, especially school students, who read and look at inappropriate and illegal information on the website, experience situations that negatively affect the process of their formation and mental education.

In their families and communities, students are in constant contact with religious facts and experience them mentally and spiritually from childhood.

Holidays and various ceremonies, rites and customs in the family and beyond, books, movies full of other works of culture and art, electronic media, especially various portals, etc. are some of the stations of independent communication of students with religious realities and facts.

The school, as the only professional educational institution in a democratic society, cannot stand outside this objective development. It can neither root nor stop religion.

The requirement that knowledge of religion be considered an integral part of education is based on the content of our school curriculum.

More than in any age of history, our global age requires open-minded people, stable societies, avoidance of religious prejudice, conflict, and radicalism.

Learning knowledge about religion is not religious education. It is an organic part of secular education and schooling.

Belief in a religion is different from observation, from critical analysis of religious fact, and from rationalism. The content of this empirical knowledge is based on religious facts, which are present in everyday life.

The method of developing the educational process for religious topics is a scientific method based on the philosophy and methodology of educational sciences. Compared to other environments, the public school (classroom) is the safest space for informing students about religion, especially compared to the internet: Facebook, Twitter, Skype, etc.

The teaching-educational process is developed by teachers and not by clergy. The teacher is the most professional, safest, most responsible, and most trusted educator for learning knowledge about religion and beliefs.

The teacher constructs learning situations and directs the system of techniques for investigating religious facts and phenomena so that students build new knowledge. Together with the students, the teacher corrects or integrates the new knowledge with the previous ones and the students build and enrich personal and social values.

In the Albanian case, the basis of change is the original historical tradition of religious coexistence. Also, are the specifics of the Albanian society in the past and today, the regional peculiarities, as well as the experience of the successful western social and educational systems.

The space that lies between the field of religion, science, and philosophy includes the safest and most stable scientific-philosophical and religious knowledge of the human mind.

Such can be considered mathematical sciences and natural sciences as well as subfields of human knowledge.

## **The historical context of religions and beliefs in Albania**

### ***State atheism***

During the communist regime (1944-1990) the state not only did not accept the existence of religion but fought hard against it. The Constitution of Albania (1976) declared the Albanian country and people atheist.

The propaganda of the communist system accused religion of collaborating with the invaders and linked the backwardness of Albanians to religion and old customs.

In 1967 religious denominations and institutions forcibly ceased their activities. The revolutionary movement of the atheist youth was instigated and organized by the state of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

As a result, some religious institutions were turned into public spaces, some became museums, and others were completely demolished. 2169 cult objects (churches, mosques, and teqet) were destroyed. 217 clerics were imprisoned and some of them died in prisons or were shot.

During the totalitarian system, the field of religious allegiance narrowed because the ruling political ideology required maximum credibility. Meanwhile, from secular education, it was passed to atheist education. Politics declared religion the enemy of science and accused it of being the cause of backwardness and the obstacle to the modernization of society.

With the collapse of communism, the level of credibility and religious affiliation [Measures of religiosity and religious affiliation] remains problematic.

This indicator marks the meaning for the involvement of the individual in two directions of religious life: in daily belief and in participation in religious activities and institutions.

### ***Extension of religious belief in Albania***

The main religious beliefs that have been and are present in Albania are four: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Islamism, and Bektashism.

Albanians who are outside the state borders of Albania are members of different religious faiths.

In Macedonia they are of the Islamic, Orthodox, and Catholic faiths; in Kosovo, the majority belongs to the Islamic faith (92%) and the minority to the Catholic faith; in Montenegro, 70% belong to the Christian faith and in Chameria the majority belongs to the Islamic and Orthodox faith.

We must build knowledge about religious beliefs taking into account both the situation in Albania and the data on the relationship of believers with the population in the world.

The distribution of followers of religions in the world is presented: Christianity has 31.5%, Islam 23.2%, Hinduism 15.5%, Buddhism: 7.1%, popular (local) religions 5.9%, other religions 1%, religious unbelievers 16.3%.

So, the knowledge of religion must be extended to Hinduism, Buddhism (ethical religions) as well as other smaller religions such as Bahai, etc.

## **The current situation in Albania**

Studies on religion and religious beliefs in Albania have been few and only during the last two centuries interest have increased in the fields of history, philosophy, psychology, and anthropology of religion.

The relationship of religion with education in Albania is considered taboo and even dangerous. During the communist regime, secularism and secularism were equated with ideological atheism.

Currently, in pre-university education students acquire some historical and sociological knowledge about religion. This knowledge is given in the subjects "History", "Sociology" and "Civic Education".

There is still no development program in the formation of new teachers and the training of teachers in the system for their professional development.

During the school year 2016-2017, in ten schools of basic education (in lower secondary education) and upper secondary education, the development of knowledge on religion combined with the subject of civic education (citizenship) was piloted. Next, the topic of religion is developed in the sixth grade and in the tenth grade. Here are taken into account the transitions from one level of education to another level of the pre-university education system.

The volume of knowledge is included in ten topics/lessons developed by teachers of citizenship or history. Unclear situations have often arisen in public opinion and scepticism has been heightened in the approximation of religion to secular education in the public school.

## ***European experience***

From the data of the German Eckert Institute (GEI) for 180 countries around the world, we have singled out 95 of them. It turns out that during the school year 2015-2016 in 31 countries no teaching on religion took place. In addition to Albania, this includes other European countries, such as Ukraine, Montenegro, Kosovo, Latvia, Hungary, Iceland, Slovenia, Bulgaria, France. 55 countries, not only European, develop the teaching of religion as a subject in itself. Only in 9 countries, including European countries, such as Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland, the teaching of religion is developed as a combined subject with other subjects.

France, in the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" (1789), has declared the separation of state and public school from religion.

In 1905, state support for religion, religious education in schools, compulsion to believe, and the placement of religious symbols in public places and cemeteries were banned by law.

During the years 1941-1970 French secularism faced the wave of immigrants from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, who have strong traditions for Islam.

In the years 1970-1990 from 2003 girls wearing headscarves of the Islamic religion, (headscarves), 1256 were expelled from school.

In 2003, the State Commission (Stasi Commission) recommended banning religious and political symbols in the public school, equal respect for Christian, Muslim, and Jewish religious holidays; as well as appointed a specialist in the school dedicated to the knowledge of the Islamic religion. This recommendation was 'forgotten' due to the debate over religious symbols.

### ***Development trend***

Approximation of religion with secular education is an objective requirement of our time. Approximation means communication between the institution of religion and the institution of secular education through natural spaces and lawful instruments, enriching and preserving the respective identities.

The special missions of religion and those of education are accompanied in the path of orientation and construction of the values of civilization, in sustainable peaceful education, in the avoidance of ideologies, behaviours, and extreme radical attitudes, which threaten the present and the common future.

Human history does not recognize any generation or people that have not expressed different forms of religious belief. Religions are a natural part of human culture and products of the objective reality of human relations.

The role of secular education, as well as the role of religion, is to prevent extreme radicalization and democratization of relations in all aspects of life. Education and religion drive global acceptance and inclusion.

The functions of religion are essential in human education and extend beyond religious institutions.

Religious values, as principles based on religious practices, scriptures (books), and beliefs, serve as a guide for orienting each individual who is facing the challenge of life. They are an integral part of the value system that guides every individual, regardless of religion or belief.

Knowledge of historical and religious figures such as Zarathustra, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad and the acquisition of their values are not only sources of reference, but also positive models that improve the quality of education of all generations regardless of religion.

The education and training so far, not including the dimension of human faith, have created some gaps. Meanwhile, the process takes place in a mixed environment of educational philosophies, among which the philosophy of constructivism is evident.

The curricular framework of pre-university education of the Republic of Albania is based on competence building. Knowledge of religion further enriches the content of education in this system. This knowledge will bring to the student's attention the role and importance of religion in personal life and in the community. Knowledge focuses on historical data, perceptions of facts, and worldview development. Knowledge of religion will affect the competence of intercultural communication by reflecting on misunderstandings and ideological distortions, as well as on abuses of religion.

Today a new relationship of society and its institutions with religion (secularism) is required.

Secularism and secularism are strengthened through openness and acceptance of the other, through knowledge of religious beliefs, through cultural diversity, and global integration.

The picture of balance between public and private in our century is a reflection of globalization and integration, which are objective movements that enable development and guarantee prosperity and sustainability, moving in favor of the public. Meanwhile, secularism, having more subjective elements, moves towards privacy.

Equilibrium becomes stable if the content and form of secularism are reformed.<sup>9</sup>

In Europe and beyond, although there is no consensus on the modalities of approximation of education with religion, everyone agrees that secularism and secularism are strengthened when the school is close and communicative with religion, with different philosophical beliefs and convictions, as well as with legitimate religious and philosophical institutions.

“It is in the competence of each state to establish the basis of political identity also in relation to religion and beliefs,” says the Strasbourg Court.

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<sup>9</sup> J. Renn and P. Damerov. 2012. *The equilibrium controversy*. Max Plank Research Library for History and Development of Knowledge Sources. Printed Berlin, Germany

Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century serves the younger generation to be a natural part of the “new Europe”. “Old Europe” was founded by Catholic and Protestant reformist leaders who proclaimed their authority through the Pope.

Today the values of European civilization are promoted and developed through many education systems and in different social and cultural contexts. However, the teaching-educational process would continue to be deficient if it did not include knowledge of religion and beliefs.

The experience of successful Albanian social and educational systems has a positive effect on the rapprochement and communication of the Albanian secular school with religion and beliefs. Also, the change is based on the original historical tradition of the coexistence of the three major religions as well as the specifics of Albanian society in the past and today.

### ***Legality***

Approximation of education with religion preserves the secularism and secularity of education based on the Constitution of the Republic of Albania. Approximation means communication between the institution of religion and the institutions of education.

The change that occurs with the approximation of secular education to the religious worldview does not affect the secular legitimacy of the school because it is a natural movement of the process. Human understanding of the world is done philosophically, scientifically and religiously.

The purpose of our school is to build the competence of the student through learning scientific knowledge according to subjects/fields, through understanding the world in a scientific and logical (philosophical) way.

Meanwhile, the knowledge of facts, values, behaviors and religious attitudes, does not aim at religious education (learning religion) by the student. It is an opportunity to make comparisons and evaluations and to build critical thinking by finding the right measure of behaviors and attitudes by avoiding extremism of any kind. This means that the change we are making in education is in accordance with law no. 69/2012, dated 21.06.2012 “On the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania”. Articles 3 and 7 (point 1) of this law deal with the purpose and secularism of the pre-university education system in Albania. Also, the change is in accordance with letter “e” of point 2 of article 5 of law no. 80/2015, dated 22.07.2015 “On higher education and scientific research in higher education institutions in the Republic of Albania”, which sanctions that the state guarantees the secularism of public higher education institutions and the non-use of religious symbols by them”.



### ***Ways of integrating religion into the secular public school curriculum***

Knowledge of religion and beliefs in the pre-university education system can be developed in two ways:

Specific topics and integrated with the disciplines/fields of history, culture, sociology, philosophy, and civic moral education in the context of educational science. This alternative is risky because the student is required to build knowledge on religion and beliefs through many areas of learning. Complicated is also the qualification and training of teachers who develop various social disciplines and, as part of them, will develop topics related to religion and beliefs. In favour of this alternative is the fact that knowledge of religion and beliefs in the secular school is considered and developed as part of education through student education.

With separate subjects and/or with choices between subjects/fields of sociology, philosophy, culture, and civic education.

This alternative creates more opportunities for more specialized information in the field of religion, for better qualification and training of teachers, and for more useful orientation of the student and parent community. However, in high school, especially in the faculties of education, where teachers are trained, there is still no discipline in this field, which would also serve as a source of reference.

In the Albanian case, the second alternative is not based on any known and widely accepted tradition. Also, adding a new subject to the school would be a greater burden on students and would not encourage reducing congestion and relieving students of curriculum subjects.

It should be noted that the request to add a new subject and with it a relevant text is also encouraged by interest groups that carry out publishing activities, not only textbooks because they have a market provided in advance.

### ***Hour of learning knowledge about religion and beliefs***

The lesson for learning knowledge about religious facts and beliefs is built on form and academic content. So it is part of the process of scientific-educational formation. This means that its purpose is not to educate devotion to any religion and/or belief (religious education). In this lesson, no kind of sermon is developed, but critical scientific thought is constructed.

The teacher who realizes this lesson has the competence of critical thinking built on rational scientific truth and possesses the social values of European civilization, especially moral values.

The teacher has the ability to organize the teaching-educational process based on the scientific principles of pedagogy and didactics.

Teaching and learning methods in this area are diverse. These include classical explanations, observations, Socratic conversations, interviews, reflections, presentations, tests, practical works, etc. In all methods and forms, the teacher has the central role.

The teacher of knowledge about religion and beliefs must have the competence of “mixed” learning. “Mixed” learning is a combined application of different pedagogical didactics and theories: constructivism, behaviorism, cognitivist, (Driscoll, 2003). Each of them is based on a philosophy and is guided by its own method.

“Mixed” learning creates opportunities to present and combine classical tools and methods with the internet and digital media and with classroom situations that require teacher-student interaction, prioritizing independent thinking, research, and student creative work.

### ***The teacher develops knowledge about religion***

For the development of teaching in this subject/field, the most appropriate and useful are the teachers of social subjects, in particular of history, civic education, social sciences, and philosophy.

Teacher training, preparation, and training are built on two central pillars:

- The general formation of worldview, based on three truths: religious, philosophical, and scientific and in the ways of knowing the world.
- Specific, pedagogical, and didactic training, based on the science of education, experience, and tradition, not only Albanian.

Improving the quality of teacher education and training is a requirement that comes from the changes that have taken place and those that are expected.

The teacher of our time operates in the mixed field of the teaching process, in different social and cultural contexts and in multi-faith environments, enriching the identity of the European citizen, which is the most successful model among today’s models.

### ***The teacher masters the “displacement didactics”***

“The didactics of displacement” (Y. Chevallard, 1985) is an instrument through which the movement of theoretical knowledge from the academic level to the level and in the most appropriate form, realizing it in the form as understandable by pupils and students. This didactics shows the ways and means by which knowledge passes from

the “property” of scholars to the “property” of pupils and students. In short, it is the transition from scientific knowledge to knowledge to be learned.

The teacher can construct the teaching situation starting from religious truths (only from holy books). The purpose of the learning situation is not to prove the content of religious truths. Rather, they serve as a basis for constructing knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes, that is, values that serve the student in his or her life. This means that the question cannot be: “Is it true or not?” Questions may be: “How to gain knowledge of this truth?”, “How to act to be successful?”, “How to build personal civic competence?” etc.

### ***Religion/religious disbelief of the teacher***

Does the teacher’s religious belief or disbelief affect the process of integrating the religious fact into the public education curriculum, in the context of educational science? The teacher’s beliefs influence perceptions, judgments, reasoning and also affect his/her behavior and attitudes in and out of school. Meanwhile, it has been proven that, regardless of the influence of beliefs, what determines behavior are thoughts, conceptions, learning from the experience of community life and personal life.

The teacher’s behavior and his/her thoughts are interdependent and directly defined by the mission, role, conception, perception of the mission; from a sense of responsibility in accomplishing the task, in and out of school.

Much more balanced are the individual mental, physical and spiritual qualities and values of the teacher when he/she is in the student environment.

The influence of beliefs is also present in specialists in other fields of human activity: in medicine, law, and business, everywhere. And influence is not deterministic and fatalistic.

“In the world of thoughts, concepts are the most useful, because without them it is impossible to have a clear and well-defined thought” (H. Leis, 1999).

Exactly as above, the teacher who develops the teaching on the knowledge of beliefs and religious facts is formed with the competence of logical critical thinking and builds the logical connection between belief and knowledge.

For him, where knowledge ends, faith begins. The knowledge system is open to critical evaluations and attitudes, while beliefs are personal.

Knowledge is built on the Cartesian creed “*I think, therefore I exist*” (Cogito ergo sum), while beliefs are spiritual.

The impact of personal religious belief does not go beyond the natural limits of the professional. Politics also affects the teacher, but this does not mean that he is a politician. The influence of art, although it is a spiritual influence, does not make the teacher an artist, etc.

### ***Textbook for the field of learning about religion?!***

When we say that knowledge about religion and beliefs will be a separate subject, it means that the textbook will not have a subject religion and beliefs. The textbook covers the field of learning about religion. In the field are religious values and the ways of their construction and functioning. In the textbook and in the whole secular teaching-educational process, religious values are not in the function of devotion to any faith. They are part of the framework of oriented cultural values, critical thinking, and reflection, and service education with norms, principles, and moral laws.

An integral part of the field is also:

- religious truths,
- current and historical religious facts related to religion and beliefs,
- religious or secular objects and relics related to beliefs,
- historical, current, and periodic events related to religion,
- personalities and religious and secular authorities related to religion and beliefs,
- documents and religious, scientific, artistic works related to religion, etc.
- abbreviations of the themes of the sacred texts, but without aiming at their doctrinal treatment.

The textbook method for religion and belief is based on textbook standards. The textbook serves as a curricular tool that enables students to build key competencies, social and emotional competencies, how to combine knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the context of European citizenship, such as:

- participation in social life while respecting human rights and democracy;
- critical thinking, compassion, responsibility, solidarity, respect for others regardless of differences/differences;
- local and national action in the service of lasting peace.

### ***Religious books and the school library***

In the school library, as in any public library, there are religious books, as well as scientific, fantastic, artistic, political, moral, etc., according to the professional criteria of the library and following the legislation in force, as well as maintaining the equal ratio between all faiths.

In the presence of religious books in the library, the basic criterion is the quality of the book and the usefulness of its use by the student and the teacher. This means that not every publication can be filed in the library. Priority is given to sacred books, books by internationally renowned authors, encyclopedias, and dictionaries.

Books are used by teachers as reference sources for professional development as well as for religiously taught classes. Teachers, meanwhile, cannot recommend to students as reference books any books or pamphlets instructing the application of the religion's religious rites or rules.

### ***Participation in religious activities***

The teacher cannot organize and participate in religious activities, even when they are organized by pupils or students on their own initiative. This conduct required of him is not a restriction of the right of belief as an individual free to visit any religious institution he wishes and to perform certain rites. Teachers and all public school staff may not organize and participate in religious activities, including prayer. Of course, this is not about participating in national activities that may have religious elements and should be respected due to official protocol and civic etiquette.

Religious holidays are occasions when school students can learn about religion. On school premises, these holidays are not organized in the same way as in religious institutions or other facilities. Here students learn about the history of the holidays, values, and tradition. Religious symbols, music, readings, and works of art serve religious purposes or as sources of information, like any other curricular instrument. Religious holidays can in no way be used as a means to promote a particular religious belief.

*Can a religious cause serve as an excuse for a student to drop out of class or from a religion-related school activity?*

The teacher and the school principal should communicate with the parent and make the necessary clarification that the teaching and any school activity, inside or outside the school building, is not religious, that the identification of religious affiliation is not required, that the balance between the freedom of the child is strictly maintained, by considering the common interest of the parties for the well-being of the child.

The school can neither force nor expel because of religious beliefs. The school regulations have nothing to do with the trust of the student or his parents.

### ***Can the student express religious beliefs in school?***

Yes. The school respects the rights of students to believe, to engage in activities, and to freely express their religious beliefs.

Students are generally free to perform religious rites, read religious writings, declare their beliefs, and invite others to join the faith group they desire.

The teacher and/or any of the school staff may not ask the student to express their religious beliefs. In cases where the student does this on his/her own initiative, he/she should be advised to respect himself/herself, his/her peers, and the opinion of the school/class/group community, so that he/she and the members of the school community do not feel bad.

If student behavior is disruptive and/or coercive, it is prohibited. The student is not allowed to “fall on his neck” or put pressure on others, even his friends.

If the student is asked to express his/her religious views in a curriculum, subject/field, or learning activity, he/she has the right to do so during the class discussion, as part of a written assignment, or in an artistic activity, but this cannot be the subject of discussion.

Also, the student is not obliged to make a public declaration, orally and/or in writing, of religious affiliation, even when required.

As a rule, the curriculum and the teacher do not ask questions such as: “Do you believe?”, “What religion do you belong to?”, “Why do you believe?”, “Which religion is better?” etc.

### ***Student forgiveness and forgiveness angles***

The student, alone or in a group, is free to forgive if his action is not divisive and does not violate the rights of others. Forgiveness is personal and is done only at the initiative of the student. The student can be forgiven before the start or end of the lesson and only during an activity that is not organized by the school.

Meanwhile, other students cannot be forced to follow this individual action.

The student has no right to enslave anyone’s participation in religious exercises.

In public schools and universities, there can be no special corners or places for performing religious rites of any faith.

Even the placement of photographs, objects, or relics with religious content is done for artistic (aesthetic), cultural, i.e. non-religious purposes. At the same time, it must be balanced. Their placement is done according to the philosophy of the school mission, pedagogical criteria of content, and the form of decoration of the secular institution.

### ***Religious dress in public school***

There is no official uniform for pupils and students in the pre-university and university school system of Albania. The way of dressing is personal, under the taste of the individual and the fashion trend. While the teacher's dress is regulated according to the "Code of Ethics".

Today's modern clothing of Albanians is as much enrichment of the Albanian tradition, as well an adaptation to the economic, social, and cultural development and to the technology of western fashion. This is the spirit of educating the younger generation in the field of clothing even during schooling.

In the future, we encourage the Albanian tradition and culture integrated with European values in the field of clothing of pupils and students during schooling.

There has never been a debate about the dress of pupils and students in Albanian secular schools. Opening up the discussion would damage the social climate of understanding and solidarity. It would be a useless expenditure of social energies without any expectations in the service of stability and the future.

We will continue to work for the preservation and enrichment of tradition and heritage in the field of clothing and human appreciation "from work and not from jacket". The value of heritage even in the field of clothing is in full coherence with all religious values.

### ***Visits to religious institutions and holy places***

Pupils and students are free to visit individually, but also in an organized way, religious institutions and shrines. In cases where the teacher is part or organizer of these visits, he should also be in the role of guide, monitor, and not the applicant of any rite of passage.

The purpose of organized visits is cultural to recognize and cultivate the values of cultural heritage in the field of morality, architecture, science, etc. Visits and excursions to institutions, museums, holy places, etc. are not made for religious purposes. Pupils and students do not go there organized to listen to religious sermons or to practice or perform religious rites. Attending sermons, conduct, and whether or not to observe religious rites is a private matter for each individual, without being influenced by any organization in the context of the secular public school.

### **Guests in school activities**

School activities on school premises are based on the school's function as a community centre. Religious activities, including those sponsored by out-of-school donors, may not take place in the public school.

Can clerics be invited to the school for classes and other religious activities?

Clerics, as well as politicians, can visit the school and, of course, are welcome. They may communicate with students and teachers but are prohibited from organizing individual and collective political and/or religious activities.

The whole teaching-educational process in the school is organized, developed, and led by teachers in cooperation with student organizations.

### ***Source of information on religion and beliefs***

The religious truths of the holy books, the religious rites, and practices that religious institutions and believers follow, can be neither obligatory nor the subject of discussion and debate in the teaching-educational process in public education.

Religious holy books and philosophical and encyclopedic sources with internationally recognized authority can serve as a reference source for religious truths, and not just any uncertified source.

Also, in the case of religious holy books, the teacher must read and understand them in accordance with the age of the students and in the contemporary context of the Albanian language, the Albanian historical and cultural reality.

For example, when the religious doctrine of creation states that "Man is created by God", in the Albanian historical, cultural, linguistic context the most appropriate would be: "God made man".

### ***Knowledge and religion do not kill***

Religion is a social level, a cultural and personal force. Religion helps people how to eat, how to dress, how to connect, how to understand and how to value each other; to get married, to reorient towards values, to respect one's own and others' virtues, etc.

Knowing the culture and religion of another increases respect for him, prevents tendencies towards radicalism and terrorism.

Knowledge of culture and religion fills the space of ideology, which in the name of religion, incites murder and terrorism.



Knowing the other, he accepts it. Ignorance and isolation are grounds for rejection and lack of respect. Ignorance, intolerance, rejection, radicalism are the enemies of civilization and therefore of religion.

### ***Dialogue between religion and science***

Dialogue between them is an objective requirement stemming from the development of science, technology, and democracy in the rule of law in a world order society. Religion and science are two developmental spaces that have no insurmountable boundaries and that communicate between them. Their coexistence through dialogue is objective.

In the teaching-educational process, it is necessary to understand and apply the separation of religion from science and the state (secularism), as a basic constitutional principle of school activity. This division is not antagonistic. Between them does not lie the opposition of belief from science and vice versa, but it is the opportunity to prevent the collision of two truths by means of critical thinking and to walk the natural path of developmental parallels.

In our time, Darwin's theory of evolution and the "theory of creation" compete. The theory of creation is presented with the alternative as "theory of creative intelligence" (Intelligent design. ID). The theory of creation, along with the other forms in which it is presented, is religious doctrine and not a scientific theory. To this day, creation has not been legitimized by science. The book of Genesis, on which this theory is based, is a religious book and contradicts modern science.

To date, there is no scientific argument and scientific research method that proves the creative intelligence of a power (God) unattainable by the human mind. Moreover, the theory of evolution does not say anything about the origin of our universe, or the essence and meaning of life in it. She asserts that there is no contradiction in the idea that living and non-living beings have or carry the ability to change/move during their existence.

Evolution is not simply a matter of human development and populations. Denying it can have serious consequences for the development of our societies. Advances in medical research on cancer, on the fight against infectious diseases, such as AIDS, are impossible if the principles and mechanisms of evolution are rejected.

Also, we may not be fully aware of the dangers posed to biodiversity by climate change.

(Doc. 11375, 17 September 2007.EU)

The theory of creation undermines the separation of religion from the state (secularism) and undermines the formation of the new generation if it were to be included in the public education system.

In some countries, such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, the legislation prohibits teachers from discussing and giving arguments based on the scientific theory of evolution.

In Albania, the theory of evolution is taught in all public pre-university schools and universities. On its basis is built the formation and education of the teacher. This theory is also developed during the formation of professional teacher training throughout life.

The Assembly of the Council of Europe seeks to promote scientific knowledge by teaching the theory of evolution and opposing the theory of creation as a non-scientific discipline.

In some countries, not just European ones, voices have been raised in defence of creation theory with the aim of replacing democracy with theocracy.

Learning in school based on the scientific theory of evolution is important for the future of a democratic society. For this reason, and others, the theory of evolution will continue to have a central position in the curricula of the Albanian school in the future.

### ***The Big Bang hypothesis is scientific***

Most scientists agree that today's solar system dates back 4.5 billion years and was completed by planets and satellites about 100 million years ago.

Scientists think a massive 'explosion' has occurred as a result of the concentration of hydrogen and helium gases and spreading in all directions of matter. This is popularly called the Big Bang. Cold gases then condensed and, along with other elements, formed stars and planets. Earth was one of the planets formed.

The model called the "foggy hypothesis" was first developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> cent. by E. Swedenborg, I. Kant and P. S. Laplace. Subsequent development has been done by many scientific disciplines, such as astronomy, physics, geology, etc. With the skepticism it carries, this hypothesis also marked the separation of religion from science regarding the origin of the universe and the solar system.

Some believe that the earth has always been here, and that matter has always existed. However, no other hypothesis about the origin of the universe and the solar system up to our time has been scientifically proven. So the scientific hypothesis of Big Bang is the basis of the scientific formation of pupils and students in Albania.

## **Suggestions**

To anticipate change, the following is required:

- Facilities of education that form and prepare teachers in social subject profiles, especially for history-geography, civic education, and social sciences, should make changes in the curriculum by enriching it with modules that include the integration of science, religion, and philosophy in the process of education and secular education through the sciences of education.
- Institutions charged by law for the professional development of teachers during their lifetime to prepare and start the implementation of the training program and continuous professional development of teachers who develop knowledge about religion and beliefs in the pre-university school system.

## **Conclusion**

The integration of religious knowledge in the process of education in general and scientific formation through non-religious education is as much a requirement of our global age as it is a viable and useful alternative for a democratic society.

This process is accompanied by the construction of a new model of a thought system, which is integrated critical and reflective thinking. It is based on scientific, religious, philosophical knowledge as well as the most mature human values: oriented or not oriented.

The integration of religion with education is based on the pluralism of truths and their extension in the classical fields of knowledge: philosophy, religion, and science, as well as in other fields and sub-fields created by the process of differentiation of knowledge and the design of relevant disciplines.

This means that the integration of knowledge and truths takes place in parallel with their differentiation. An open education to these truths is realized through learning and solving life situations and makes one competent to face life.

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