

RelBib

Bibliography of the Study of Religion

<https://relbib.de>

Dear reader,

This is an author produced version of the following article. This article has been peer-reviewed and copyedited but does not include the final publisher's layout including the journal pagination.

Author:	Rota, Andrea
Title:	“Religious Education between the State and Religious Communities“
Published in:	Religious education politics, the state, and society. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag
Editor:	Jödicke, Ansgar (Ed.)
Volume:	Religion in der Gesellschaft; Bd. 35
Year:	2013
Pages:	1 – 18
ISBN:	978-3-89913-954-9

The article is deposited under the terms of the Creative Commons License [CC BY-NC-ND](#).

The article is used with permission of [Ergon Verlag](#).

Thank you for supporting Green Open Access.

Your RelBib team

Andrea Rota

Religious Education between the State and Religious Communities^{*}

In: A. Jödicke (Ed.), *Society, the State, and Religious Education Politics*, Würzburg : Ergon, collection « Religion in der Gesellschaft », 2012 (sous presse)

Religion, State and the Public Sphere

Since the confutation – both on theoretical and empirical grounds – of the classical secularisation theory promising the progressive fading of religion, the public significance of religion in contemporary societies has become an important topic for the study of religions. In what is today considered a classic key text, José Casanova (1994) in *Public Religions in the Modern World* argues that modernisation does not necessarily imply the privatisation of religion and its disappearance from the public sphere. According to Casanova, under certain conditions, Churches and religious communities can still be important actors in civil society. The actual possibility of and the practical conditions for this participation are controversially discussed among sociologists and political philosophers (among others, see: Rawls 1993; Habermas 2001, 2005). However, as British sociologist David Herbert (2003) points out, descriptive and normative assumptions often overlap in these discussions and, therefore, further empirical research is needed in order to better grasp the role played by the religious communities in today's society. It is in support of such argument that this paper will seek to contribute further.

Considering the debate that has accompanied the recent reforms of religious education in Switzerland as well as in other European countries (see: Willaime 2005; Jackson, Miedema and al. 2007) and in Québec (see: Estivalèzes in this volume), it is not hard to see that religious education in state school has a very powerful symbolic charge that goes well beyond the small amount of hours dedicated to this subject in the weekly schedule (see Jödicke 2004, 2009). Indeed the State-run school itself holds a very peculiar position in society. To quote the words of the French philosophers Paul Ricœur (1995, p. 195): “The school is situated in a middle position between the State, which provides this public service [...] and civil society, which delegates to it one of its most important functions: education”.¹ Due to such position, state schools are bound to be the “battlefield” not only for competing pedagogical approaches or economic interests but also between opposite normative conceptions of “good living” and different solutions for the management of this diversity (see: Willaime 1993, Kälin 2000).²

Religious education, in particular, is in the intersection between the interests of the State and those of religious communities. On the one hand, religious education can be an important instrument of the State's “politics of religions”. Due to its power over public education, the State can have a strong impact on the presence of religious communities in the public sphere, for instance by deciding which religions are taught at school or which communities should be allowed

^{*} This article draws on data collected within the research project “Religious Education between State and Religious Communities” under the direction of Ansgar Jödicke. The author wishes to thank Ansgar Jödicke for the inspiring discussions and precious advices during this research.

¹ All translations from French are mine.

² In Switzerland, public schools are public-funded, State-run school open to all pupils and free of charges. It is with this meaning that I shall use the expressions “public schools” and “state schools” in this article. This use differs from the current meaning in the United Kingdom.

to use school classrooms. However, the State should not be pictured as an autonomous entity, disconnected from other social actors. Instead, its activity must be seen as the result of administrative procedures and political and pre-political discussions, negotiations and conflicts in the public arenas (see: Cefai 2002, Gurau 2006). On the other hand, religious education is a central concern for religious communities. As discussion partners of the State in the matter of its “politics of religions” and as collective carriers of a symbolic system they strive to reproduce (see: Jödicke 2011), religious communities have an evident interest in this field. Even though not every religious community has actively taken part in the processes leading to the reorganization of religious education in schools, these reforms modify their sphere of action, at least indirectly, and stimulate them to think about their educational practices and their relations to the school.

Because the focus of my research is sociological rather than pedagogical, I shall refrain from defining *a priori* different forms of religious education according to didactical categories. Instead I will use the expression “religious education” to define every type of lesson or encounter that deals with religion both at school and within the religious communities, leaving the task of defining and redefining its contents, aims and orientation to the different social actors.

This contribution is structured as follows: After a short presentation of the Swiss federal system and its historical implications for religious education (2) and some methodological considerations (3), I will show that in Switzerland, starting in the mid-eighties, this school subject is at the centre of numerous discussions across the country, characterized by similar argumentative patterns and leading eventually to similar reforms (4). An overview of these debates and reforms will provide the background for my next point, where I shall present some implications that the new configuration of religious education has for different religious communities (5), whose attitudes I shall present in a typology (6). Finally, I will draw conclusions on the participation of religious communities in the public sphere (7).

Swiss juridical framework

The organisation of religious education classes in state schools is influenced to a large extent by the juridical framework set out by the State. As an expression of the national history with its social, political, and religious traditions, these rules not only regulate several practical aspects of the lessons, but also institutionalize a particular conception of the public role of religion and religious communities and their relationship with the State. From a historical point of view, religious education in Switzerland is what jurists call a *res mixta*, i.e. a field where the State and the Churches share responsibilities in order, usually, to achieve a common goal (see Bräm 1978, p. 331). Therefore, the organisation of religious education reflects to a large extent the forms of the Church-State relations. In this domain, because of the federal system, the Swiss legislation combines a liberal and a communitarian system in what the political scientist William Ossipow (2003) calls a “double logic” of Church-State relations. On the one hand, at the federal level, since 1874 the Swiss Constitution has protected the universal freedom of religion and conscience. For particular historical reasons (see: Späni 1997; Criblez 1999; Criblez and Huber 2008), religious education is explicitly mentioned in the federal Constitution and, in its tenor of 1999, the article on the freedom of religion states: “no one shall be forced [...] to follow religious teachings”.³ This formulation does not preclude the possibility of providing religious education classes in public schools. However, pupils have the right to be excused from participating. On the other hand, the

³ Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation of 18 April 1999, article 15, paragraph 4.

organisation of the school system and the relations between the State and the Church are the responsibility of the cantons (i.e. the States composing the Swiss Confederation), as stated by articles 62 and 72 of the Federal Constitution:

Art. 62, 1st. paragraph: The Cantons shall be responsible for the system of school education.

Art. 72, 1st. paragraph: The regulation of the relationship between the church and the state shall be the responsibility of the Cantons.

This regulation enables the cantons to make a “positive discrimination” of some communities granting them juridical or financial privileges, as long as the freedom of religion is not violated. Among the possible privileges, in most of the Swiss cantons, there’s also the possibility to provide religious teaching at school. This situation leads to a very different configuration of religious education depending on the cantons and as such allows an interesting comparison between the empirical cases within the same national framework to take place.

Research field and data sample

The Swiss Confederation is made up of twenty-six cantons divided in three major linguistic regions.⁴ Whilst in my initial research I took into consideration all of the seven French-speaking cantons and one Italian-speaking canton for the purpose of comparison, it was through more intensive research that my attention began to focus on four in particular. These cantons were chosen in order to provide the largest possible variety of Church-State relations, confessional traditions, and religious education models. After briefly retracing the religious and educational history of these cantons, I analysed the recent political discussions on religious education and conducted over 70 semi-directive interviews with government officials as well as with representatives of various religious communities at both local and regional levels. However, within the limits of this contribution, I will narrow the field to just two cantons, Fribourg and Neuchâtel, and discuss a few passages of five interviews with members of different religious communities.⁵ This smaller sample provides nevertheless the basis for developing a more general argument and allows me to show some typical trends and attitudes.

The canton of Fribourg and the canton of Neuchâtel represent two among the most different situations in Switzerland. Neuchâtel has a strong protestant background, even though today, mostly because of the immigration during the Sixties, the Catholics are as numerous as the Protestants. The conflicts between the State and the Protestant Church in the 19th century did have a strong impact on the organization of the religious education in the canton. Under the influence of the liberal ideals conveyed, among others, by Ferdinand Buisson, a young exile well known to French historians, religious education was excluded from state school programs in 1872. The following year a major schism took place within the Protestant Church, a part of which wished to be free from the control of the State. In order to facilitate the reconciliation between the two branches of the Church, in 1941 the separation of Churches and State was decided and the new cantonal Constitution of the year 2000 explicitly affirms the secular character (*laïc*) of the State.

⁴ These linguistic regions are the German-speaking, the French-speaking and the Italian-speaking. A small minority in the western part of the country speaks a fourth national language, the Romansh.

⁵ For a detailed discussion of all collected data, see Rota 2011.

Nevertheless, the Churches are allowed to use school classrooms for free for their religious teaching before or after school time.

By way of contrast, the canton of Fribourg is historically a “stronghold” of the Catholic Church. Since the 19th century, the emphasis on Catholicism in the public life of the canton has been a way to resist the centralist and liberal idea coming (predominantly) from the Protestant parts of the country. In this respect, religious education played a central role. Catholicism was constitutionally declared “the religion of the majority of the people” until 1982. Since then, both the catholic and protestant Church have had a public law status⁶ and are separately responsible for religious education lessons at school. In secondary schools, their teachers receive a salary from the State. In 2004, the right of the Churches to organize their religious education in state schools has been enshrined for the first time also in the (renewed) cantonal Constitution.

Recent political evolutions of RE

The different cantonal frames of religious education have institutionalized distinct compromises between the liberal ideas that shaped state schools in Switzerland since the mid-nineteenth century and the dominant Churches of each canton. These frames crystallized around the turn of the 19th century and continued without major changes throughout the 20th century. Starting in the mid-eighties, however, it is possible to observe the emergence of social and political actors demanding that the traditional religious education be replaced with a “religious culture” class (*enseignement de culture religieuse*) addressed to all pupils. Despite cantonal nuances, the reform propositions all show a common trend both in their practical consequences and in their legitimizing discourse. Fribourg and Neuchâtel provide us with good examples.

The canton of Fribourg

In 1989, a teacher of religious education and religious studies at a renowned *Collège* (High school) in Fribourg published a book with a preface by future cardinal Christoph Schönborn whose title is *Dieu à l'école (God at school)*, in which he denounced the inefficacy of the post-'68 catechetical orientations and the risk of the European society losing its spirituality. As a remedial action, he suggested the introduction of a course of religious studies in the canton's middle and high schools intended for the pupils exempted from the catholic (and protestant) catechism, though stressing the difference between these two approaches (De Coulon 1989).

Four years later, the cantonal Council for education, then presided over by this very same High School teacher, addressed a similar suggestion to the Department for public education adopting a more radical tone: the new discipline should be compulsory for all pupils.⁷ The Council justifies this demand by the constant decline in the number of pupils attending catechism and the consequent fear of an endemic “religious illiteracy” among the young generations. This lesson, according to the document, should prevent society from losing its “Christian roots” which are important both for “our children”, in order to preserve a part of their identity and for the children of “other cultures”, in order to better understand the culture welcoming them. It should also support the pupils in their “search for meaning”, allowing them to make informed religious choices and

⁶ Since 1990, the public law status has been extended also to the cantonal Jewish community.

⁷ Conseil de l'Education du canton de Fribourg, L'éducation religieuse dans les cycles d'orientation, Fribourg, 20th august 1993.

providing an orientation in the modern “religious supermarket”, where “cults and occult movement threaten the young people”. The Council also objects to the idea of a *laïcité* closed to all discussion of religion at school, but at the same time, insists on the importance of a distinction between the State and the Church’s tasks. The State alone should be responsible for the new subject.

This project was dormant until 2002, when it was revived and elaborated on. Starting in 2005, a new lesson called “Ethics and Religious Cultures” was introduced as a compulsory alternative for the pupils who did not wish to attend the Churches’ catechism lessons in the first two years of middle school and as a compulsory subject for all students during the last year.

The canton of Neuchâtel

In 1996, a member of the Neuchâtel’s cantonal parliament asked the government if the introduction of a comparative study of religions would be possible despite the separation of Church and State. To support her demand, she argued that the total lack of any religious culture among young people left them defenceless against dangerous cults. The *principe de laïcité* should not stop the State from preventing these risks, while fostering religious tolerance. For this purpose the State should provide the pupils with objective information about major religions, ethics and personal and social rights.

In the same year, the cantonal Protestant Church, sharing these concerns – but also stressing the importance for children to be able to think about the meaning of life – proposed that the government collaborated, along with the other Churches and the representatives of various religious communities, on the development of a state-supervised religious education clearly separated from the Churches’ catechism. After some setbacks, in 2003 a new “Education to Religious and Humanist Cultures” (ERHC) was introduced as part of history classes, similar to the French model. In his preface to the new (though short-lived) manuals expressly written for this school subject, the cantonal minister for public education states:

“These manuals and the ERHC have been carefully prepared and written paying much attention to the criteria of objectivity, neutrality and respect for everyone’s convictions, according to the principles of *laïcité* that has always guided our school. [...] Yes, the dialogue between cultures passes also through mutual tolerance and understanding, through the awareness of one’s roots and the respect for the others ways of thinking.”⁸

The introduction of these lessons marks the reappearance of a religion-related topic in the state schools of the canton of Neuchâtel after more than 130 years.

Practical and argumentative trends

Even though these two cantons differ noticeably as regards to their historical, confessional and juridical frameworks, the reform projects presented above show common trends in the practical organisation of religious education classes as well as common legitimizing arguments supporting the proposed reforms. In both cantons, the reform projects demand the introduction of a religious education class under the supervision of the State. Though different significations are attributed to

⁸ Beguin [2003], p. 4.

Christianity and other religions, the State's classes should provide information about numerous religions. While the collaboration with the Churches is not excluded, the State – and not the Churches – should have the fundamental responsibility for these lessons. The presence of the Churches at school is not completely abolished; however their direct influence is weakened by the introduction a competing offer.⁹

The aim of the reforms is to introduce a religious education system that is addressed to all pupils. Because eventually no exemption possibility should be granted, the planned offer must not be a “religion” lesson but a lesson on the topic of religions. As the two cantonal examples show, on a discursive level this distinction is often made by stressing the difference between the State's classes and the previous offer of the Churches. Hence, the insistence on the State assuming the responsibility for religious education does not have merely organisational implications, but also symbolic ones. From the perspective of the proponents of the reforms, a lesson under the supervision of the secular State implies its separation from the sphere of religion. However, as we shall see, the reality behind this reassignment is more complex.

The cases presented indicate that these reforms are actually grounded in the crisis experienced by the traditional Churches since the Sixties (and the related decrease in participation in religious education classes), in the increasing religious plurality and in the trend toward more individualized forms of religiosity. It would however be hasty to interpret the reorganization of religious education as an *automatic* consequence of these changes in the religious landscape and in individual religiosity. Such changes are received, interpreted, and problematized by social actors sensitive to these issues. Thus it is not surprising to find, among the promoters of those reforms, people close to the traditional Churches. The reforms are the outcome of this interactive-discursive process in the public and political arenas.

In the debates, the portrayed consequences of these changes are often wrapped up into the concepts of “religious ignorance” or “religious illiteracy” (*analphabétisme religieux*). These notions are based on the premise that young people have lost touch with a religious culture and that this loss represents a risk for the individual and for society. However, from an analytical point of view, this phenomenon cannot be considered self-evident, since the assessment of “ignorance” presupposes, at least implicitly, a normative definition of indispensable knowledge. A closer analysis shows a multifaceted social construction of “religious ignorance” assembling at least four different dimensions, all of them present in the cantonal examples presented above:

- First, a cognitive dimension emphasising the lack of factual knowledge among young people. This knowledge is associated for instance with the understanding of art and literature.
- Second, a cultural dimension, pointing out the loss of a common cultural identity derived from the Christian tradition as a (secularized) shared heritage. This dimension often presents a programmatic undertone, the influence of Christianity on the European civilisation being presented not only as a historical fact, but also as a defining premise of a political and social project.
- Third, a normative and ethical dimension, in the form of a warning against the increasing disappearance of common values and the subsequent risk of social disintegration.

⁹ Jödicke and Rota 2010 propose for descriptive purposes the term “schulischer Unterricht zum Thema Religion in der Verantwortung des Staates” (school lessons on the topic of religion under State's supervision).

- Fourth, an existential dimension advocating the importance of religiosity as a fundamental human characteristic: while avoiding any form of indoctrination, the State should guarantee the conveyance of a basic “religious sensitivity”.

One can argue that these dimensions not only imply different didactical conceptions of religious education, but also reflect different understanding of religion and its role in society. However, the differences between these four dimensions are almost never explicitly discussed in public and political debates. The concept of religion at the foundations of the new lessons under the responsibility of the State appears thus to be “blurred”.

The following question then arises: how do religious communities, as partners of the public authorities, as traditional agencies of religious socialisation and as social “carriers” of specific religious symbolic systems, react to the presence of these lessons?

Religious communities’ reactions to the new RE configuration

As pointed out in the introduction, the reorganization of the religious education classes at school affects all religious communities irrelevant of their direct participation in the reform process, since it affects a sphere of action close to their traditional sphere of competences. In different ways, this process set new challenges to the religious communities who, in order to meet them, have to rethink their practices and find new interpretations to make sense of their relations to society and public institutions. In this respect, four major issues can be identified.

- The first issue concerns the internal configuration of the religious teachings organized by the religious communities themselves. A religious community has various practical possibilities to organize its religious education and a class in the state school is but one of them. In fact the majority of the religious communities teach its young members within its own community structures. Therefore, to understand the importance that a religious community attributes to its presence in the state school, it is necessary to situate this particular offer within the whole range of the educational activities offered by that community. This might include, for instance, catechism in the parish, the Talmud-Tora in the synagogue or the Quran lessons in the Mosque. I propose the term “general economy of religious education” to describe this range of offers and its internal organization.
- The second issue regards the effects of the introduction of a State religious education to the “general economy” of a community. As a working hypothesis, it is possible to assume that the religious communities will perceive the new courses as disruptive elements, since the State manipulates (symbolic) resources, which, until then, were under their sole control.
- However, the religious communities can also try to influence the school. This raises the third issue: by assigning the responsibility of religious education in public schools to the State, the reform projects will attempt to deal with religious topics independently of the specific interests of the religious communities. Consequently, the religious communities that wish to participate in school are led to explain the reasons for and the terms of their presence without directly referring to their particular needs. Similarly, reasons for not participating in school can also emerge.
- Finally, in the process, the religious communities are likely to present, at least implicitly, their “definition of religion”. Obviously, what is meant by this term is not a theological, sociological or otherwise formal definition of religion, but a more or less complex

characterisation of religion functional to the different religious education concepts of the community and to its self-understanding as a public actor.

In order to present different conceptions of the religious education among the religious communities, I will sketch the portraits of five of my interviewees addressing these four issues more or less directly. The interviewees are:

- GJD: pastor of the Protestant Church of the canton of Neuchâtel
- NSO: administrator for the Catholic Church in the canton of Fribourg
- MYC: priest of the Catholic Church in the canton of Neuchâtel
- GGP: administrator for the Protestant Church in the canton of Fribourg
- FBS: spokesman for an Islamic community in the canton of Fribourg

These portraits should not be considered as examples of institutional positions; neither do they fully express the plurality of the individual attitudes. I chose them because they approach some typical positions that can be found in different contexts and among different interviewees.

GJD, protestant pastor, Neuchâtel

In Neuchâtel, pastor GJD tells me that the Protestant Church proposes a religious education class in the majority of the canton's middle schools, although this takes place outside of school hours. She explains that since the school traditionally didn't provide anything on the subject of religion, the aim of these lessons is to teach some basic knowledge of the foundational texts of Christianity and other religions. Though an "existential dimension" is often present, these lessons are clearly distinct from the catechism in the parish. When I ask her if the introduction of the new state-supervised Education to religious and humanist cultures has influenced parochial catechism, she answers "no", because the two courses are very different. Nevertheless, the new State lesson influenced the Church's courses at school. She says:

"When the Education to religious and humanist cultures was introduced, people [close to our Church] in several schools argued that our courses on 'basic knowledge of faith' at school should be discontinued and more existential questions should be approached."

Since the school now provides the basic knowledge about religions, GJD tells me, the Church wants in fact to discontinue their religious education classes and offer instead an ecumenical Chaplaincy that could intervene in the course of history lessons, at the teacher's request. According to my interviewee, some history teachers noticed that pupils almost inevitably ask questions about "the meaning". The teachers themselves often cannot answer these questions or are not even supposed to. Therefore:

"We thought that it could be interesting for us to present this offer. It is essential to let teachers know that it is not our intention to make any form of wild proselytism. But, I mean, we would explain to the children how Christianity actually answers this question of the meaning and thus go a bit further."

GJD presents the Church as the expert in the field of existential questioning and stresses the interest for the pupils of getting to know the answers which Christianity gives in response to such questions. Hence the Church goes "a bit further" than the history teacher, though refraining from

proselytizing. In this regard, GJD notes that under the agreements with the State, these contributions must be ecumenical.

“I think that the State does not really want something too confessional, well, and too engaged in the communication of faith. They would rather prefer something more in the order of reflection.”

According to my interviewee, an ecumenical approach should avoid conveying confession-related doctrinal content, which she links closely to the transmission of faith. The Churches would thus meet the governmental requirements related to religious education. GJD is quite confident that the State’s authorities will welcome this new project.

NSO, catholic administrator, Fribourg

NSO, administrator for the Catholic Church in Fribourg, tells me that at primary school, the Catholic Church uses school hours and classrooms to organize its catechism lessons. There’s no parochial teaching organized for the children of that age. However, the situation is quite different when it comes to the Church’s lessons in middle school. According to NSO, these lessons have a more “cognitive approach”:

“It is not, well, it’s neither centred on the celebration nor on commitment, but it aims rather to provide basic education. [...] Thus, the aim is to discover, to understand, to learn. That is why we use the term “religious education”. This is the title of the programme. We do not use the term catechism.”

In this respect, my interviewee notes that at primary school, the religious education teachers are volunteers and the State just provides the classrooms, while at secondary school, the religion teachers are paid by the State. At least implicitly, this has an influence on the organisation of the lessons.

NSO explains that even though the lessons at school are quite different from those in the parish, where for instance the Confirmation is prepared, some link between the two still exists. He remarks that when the new courses of Ethics and religious cultures were introduced, the Church sent a letter to the families reminding them of the importance of choosing the catholic course in order to get access to the Confirmation. However, he stresses that it was more a recommendation than an obligation.

Still, when I ask him if he considers the new Ethic course to be a competitor to the catholic one, his answer is negative. In a hypothetical scenario where catholic religious education at school should disappear, the Ethic lessons could even replace it, he argues. But then he remarks:

“Nevertheless, it is true that, as a Church, we would like confessional religious education to remain in schools. It is almost our duty to maintain the Churches’ place in school.”

[AR] *“Can you explain it more clearly? This duty to maintain this place at school is interesting.”*

[NSO] “Well, this is an opportunity for the Church to maintain a relationship with young people or at least a large majority of young people. It would be as if we miss an opportunity to be

present [for them], wouldn't it? In my opinion there should be no competition between the two courses, because they should rather be complementary, shouldn't they?"

NSO's statements show some internal tensions regarding the impact of the new state-supervised lessons. He remarks that the Ethics class and the catholic religious education are not so different. Despite this, it is part of the Church's self-understanding of its duties "to be present" for the large majority of children. To discontinue its own courses at school is therefore not an option for the Church.

<i>MYC, catholic priest, Neuchâtel</i>
--

The position held by MYC is quite different. He tells me that the Catholic Church has no connection with the school anymore, although legally it could use the classrooms for free. One of the main reasons for this is the lack of resources both financial and in terms of staff. This forced the Church to concentrate its teaching efforts on one domain only, choosing the parish. When I ask him if, provided hypothetically that the State would help the Church, it would be interesting to re-establish connections with the school, his answer is all but enthusiastic. According to him, the majority of his parishioners do not regret the absence of the catechism at school. On the other hand, the activities in the parish are highly valued, the proof being that if something should interfere with the parochial catechism, "as by divine Providence" the families themselves would spontaneously organise new offers in this domain.

The introduction of the new Education to religious and humanist cultures is not really an issue for my interviewee. These lessons should indeed help foster tolerance and prevent the development of religious ghettos, he concedes, but this is a general task of the state school. More generally, my interviewee is quite sceptical about any state-supervised religious education. Some teachers, he points out, are not believers at all and they do not take any interest in the subject: they prefer to replace it with a math or literature class. He also notes that:

"Talking about religion is always very delicate for someone who is not rooted in that religion, you know? This is somewhat a problem inherent in school. They speak on the level of knowledge. At the opposite, the religious dimension is primarily a matter of relationship [with God]."

According to MYC, speaking about religion at school is problematic in itself. The language of school and the language of religion are different and one cannot really replace the other. Therefore the presentation of religion at school is, to some extent, inevitably distorted:

"A knowledge, knowing that one thinks like this or like that... And then you are forced to simplify things, you are often almost obliged to caricature religions in order to fit them in a school program. By doing this, you eliminate the hearth, the essence of religion."

Given this situation, he thinks that the school will not be very effective in the conveyance of Christian values and faith. In any case he does not rely much on the school for such purpose, and for this reason he believes that parochial catechism is absolutely fundamental and will never be put into question.

GGP, administrator for the Protestant Church, Fribourg

At the beginning of our interview, GGP points out that in the canton of Fribourg, the Churches are entitled to organize their RE classes at state schools and she stresses that “each Protestant pupil of the Canton is entitled to one hour of catechism every week”. Even though most of the teaching is done at school, the connections with the community are of great importance, both in theory and in practice:

One of our concerns is to say something that speaks to a group that represents, on a smaller scale, the community or the Church. For these children that gather once a week, [the class] is in some way a miniature of the Church, you know?

GGP presents the school as the first place for the religious socialisation of the children as members of the religious community. In this respect, she considers the link between the classroom and the parish to be intrinsic to the process of learning a religion, since in her opinion it would simply make no sense to discuss in class topics such as the Lord’s Supper without actually celebrating it afterwards. This also explains why there is almost no coordination between the Church’s lessons and the State’s religious education: the two classes are considered to be too different. GGP explains that in the latter, the pupils are not asked, for instance, to believe in the tales of the Bible. Instead, even though no one shall force the children to believe anything, the aim of catechism lessons is to transmit religious convictions, not just religious knowledge. For this reason, GGP admits that sometimes the school is not the best place to teach religion.

However, the Protestant Church has good reasons for not renouncing its lessons in state schools:

It is clear that since we are a minority, the more we “fade away”, the more we get ignored. To keep a foot in the door of the school allows us to be more visible in the religious landscape. Because politicians always think only about the Catholic Church, you know?

To GGP, the possibility of organizing a RE class in state school has indeed a political value, since it helps to protect the interests of the Protestant church in a predominantly Catholic Canton. But being at school also means meeting tough didactical requirements and for this reason the Protestant Church is introducing a new pedagogical training for all catechists. GGP points out that 20 years ago these lessons were taught by some mothers during their free time, without any particular preparation. This is no longer possible:

Today the school, the school environment has dramatically changed. [...] And the pressure of the parents on the teachers to have better qualified catechists is also increasing. And we are more credible, of course, if the catechists are better trained. Now we are more credible also to the eyes of the parents.

Even without an explicit request from the school’s authority, GGP stresses the need to meet a professional standard that is generally expected in public schools and the effort of her Church to meet that goal.

FBS spokesman for an Islamic community, Fribourg

The introduction of a religious education class under the supervision of the State is not just an issue for the Christian Churches. FBS, spokesman for an Islamic community in the canton of

Fribourg, tells me that the religious education for their children takes place entirely in the mosque, where they learn Arabic and study the Koran. When we come to talk about the new Ethic and religious cultures class, he points out that at no time was the Islamic Community ever included in the discussions, and that he regrets this very much. FBS remarks that on the one hand, competent members of the Islamic community could help improve the quality of the program, and on the other hand, because of their involvement, the lessons would be better accepted by the members of the community. Furthermore, including the Muslims in the discussion would be an important sign of social and institutional recognition. As FBS puts it:

“Being an actor is different from being a spectator. This changes the situation completely. [...] Both children and adults would know ‘I am a part of something, I do something, I have responsibilities to the school.’”

However, the main demand expressed by FBS on behalf of his community is the possibility of organizing religious education classes for the Muslim youth, especially in primary schools. Young Muslims, he notes, obviously do not attend the Christian catechism and other school lessons provide only very basic notions about Islam, notions that every Muslim child already knows. “Just as there is catechism for Christian children, why not offer a course that talks about Islam?” he asks. He claims that these courses should be consistent with Swiss school standards: they should be “something serious” and both academic and pedagogical competences should be required of teachers. As far as the relation of these courses with the teaching in the mosque is concerned, FBS remarks:

“Well, I think that the two courses should be different; they should be complementary so they do not step on each other’s feet. All of this is hypothetical. [...] What I observe is that for the moment we have not had an opportunity to really think these things through and to develop an educational project.”

FBS suggests that the distinction between the two teachings should not be limited to a greater professionalization of the school lessons, but that they should be somehow “different”. However, he admits that this point has not been fully reflected upon yet. In this respect, a communication channel with the government is very much in demand. To justify this claim, besides the need for recognition, FBS also points out the contribution of such courses to society in general. They could be a way for young Muslims in the West to better understand and build their religious identity, thus avoiding a potential dangerous feeling of disorientation:

“In my opinion [this lesson] would help steering some kids away from delinquency or other dangerous behaviours. This course could be an instrument for regulation, reassuring both the children and their families.”

FBS stresses the positive influence of Islamic religious education at school for the young Muslims as a mean to guarantee their pro-social behaviour by offering them a reassuring frame. Nevertheless, concerning the possibility of its actual introduction, he says that he is in a state of disheartenment.

Typological considerations

The five examples that I presented can be associated with three interpretative patterns (*Deutungsmuster*), three typical ways of understanding the role of religion and religious communities at school and, more generally, within the public sphere.

Type 1: Society-oriented religious education

The first two portraits, GJD and NSO, can be considered as instances of a first interpretive pattern. In the description of their “general economy of religious education”, the Churches arguing along this pattern insist on the differences between their religious education classes at school and the catechism that they organize in the Parish. The distinction between the transmission of doctrinal contents in the parish and religious education focused on biblical history and life morals reflections (*Lebenskunde*) at school has a long tradition in the liberal theology and pedagogy of the Reformed Churches (see: Späni 2003, Jödicke in this volume) and after the Second Vatican Council, a similar “division of labour” made its way into the Catholic Church too (see Klöcker 1996, Mendl 2007). Precisely for these historical reasons, connections can persist between religious education “during the week” and “Sunday school” – to use traditional protestant terms. Yet this distinction gains a new importance in the light of the recent reorganization of religious education at school. As the aim of the reforms is to discontinue the forms of “religious” teaching associated with the work of the Churches, it becomes harder for them to legitimize the link between parish and school while explaining the purpose of their presence at school. Therefore the distinction between the reproduction of the symbolic system in the parish and the exposition of a more “generic religion” at school becomes crucial. In fact, when addressing their lessons at school the Churches following this interpretative model present Christianity as an element of the “culture” or as a resource for the individual and collective living, bracketing off most of the doctrinal and faith contents. In this respect, they insist on the compatibility between their offer and the general aims of the secular state and present their courses as a “service” provided to the school and to society.

This argumentation also shows how religious education under the responsibility of the State can represent, for some Churches, both a cooperation opportunity and a potential competitor. In their discourse, these Churches are poised between the necessity to lighten the presentation of their symbolic system, in order to fit it in the school, and the risk, by doing so, of losing visibility being shadowed by the State’s lessons. In effect, from their perspective, the differences between their offer and the new courses are quite small and this makes it more difficult for them to “stick out”, to be recognizable. In this respect, presenting the Churches as religion or “meaning” experts can be a way for them to affirm their specificity and maintain control over the definition of religion.

Type 2: Community-oriented religious education

The catholic priest from Neuchâtel, MYC, represents a second interpretation pattern. The emphasis here is set on the reproduction of the religious community and symbolic system (though ecumenical contacts are not per se excluded). Religion is defined as something that cannot be approached in a rational, theoretical, reductionist way, but must be lived. The introduction of state-supervised religious education does not perturb the communities arguing along these lines because they consider these lessons as something completely different from what they do.

However, the opinions on this matter can be quite diverse, ranging from the scepticism of MYC, to sincere approval, to open hostility when the State is deemed to have no competence in the matter of religion. The main attitude seems to be a benevolent indifference that accepts the good intentions of the State to foster tolerance, though refraining from any kind of direct or indirect involvement, since cooperating with the State would imply accepting some compromises conflicting with the self-understanding of the community and its understanding of religion.

Type 3: Emerging-affirmative religious education

Finally, both FBS and GGP could be assigned to a third argumentation type, situated somewhere between type 1 and 2. The possibility of organizing its religious education classes at school is considered as an important attestation of public recognition and as a means to ensure the attention and consideration of the state authorities. The (proposed) aim of these religion lessons is to socialize the children in their religion. Religious education under the responsibility of the secular State is deemed of no use for this purpose and little interest is dedicated to its form and contents. In this respect, this type is similar to type 2.

Nevertheless the classes at school are not intended as a simple transposition of the offer in the community. First, the presence at school has an influence on the teaching in the sense of a greater professionalization, which is necessary to meet the expectations of both the authorities and the parents. Secondly, the demands for social recognition and institutional participation shape the perception that the community has of itself and its religion. The emphasis on the ethical elements of religion and its regulative power as services to society, for instance, can be seen as a way to reinterpret religion in order to present it as a resource in the public sphere, thus approaching the dominant views concerning religion education.

At this point, questions concerning the relation between “parish” and school, which are unavoidable for the first type presented, also arise in the communities using this third interpretative pattern. Still, these reflections are relatively nascent, since for some religious communities the adjustments to their offer at school are rather recent and for others the possibility of organizing such classes remains an unfulfilled wish.

Conclusion

In this contribution, I argued that in Switzerland the reorganisation of religious education in state schools follows a common trend across the country smoothing out the differences between cantons. Because of the transformations in the religious landscape, the State has become a major actor in the field of religious education by assuming the responsibility for compulsory classes about different religions addressed to all pupils and aimed to serve specific civic purposes of toleration and integration. These new lessons enjoy a broad consensus among the political and social actors and, with few exceptions, have been introduced without any major opposition. Considering this trend, it is not surprising that “religions and ethics” class are present in both the French- and German-speaking inter-cantonal curricula which have been prepared in the recent years and which are now being progressively implemented in the schools.¹⁰ All this suggests that

¹⁰ These curricula, called “Plan d’étude romand” for the French-speaking part of the country and “Lehrplan 21” for the German-speaking part are the outcome of a wider effort toward an inter-cantonal school harmonisation voted by the Swiss people in 2006.

religious pluralisation and secularisation represent a new challenge for the federalist management of religion in the public sphere. Although the debates on the future of religious education at school are mainly cantonal, shared interpretations of the socio-religious changes can foster harmonisation and centralisation processes thus limiting the autonomy of the cantons in this matter. Historically, public education is a bastion of the federalist policy. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to expect similar developments to occur – under the influence of different social, religious or political interest groups – in other domains concerned by the public presence of religion and its regulation.

The introduction of a religious education system under the responsibility of the State also implies the redistribution of the institutional competences between State and Churches. The cantonal case studies show that, where it is deemed necessary, some privileges granted to the religious institutions have been shrunk or abolished. Also in terms of their legitimizing discourse, the courses of the State are supposed to be distinct from the lessons previously organized by the Churches. Nevertheless, the reforms of the religious education system are not per se antireligious and, in the public debates, the positions openly hostile to religion are marginalized. Thus, the consensus around the State's religious education classes appears to be based on the crossing paths of two interpretative patterns: on the one hand, the distinction between the action of the State and the action of the religious institutions; on the other hand, a multifaceted understanding of religion, where cognitive interests are mingled with identity, moral and existential concerns. Discussants resorting to these interpretative patterns often refer to pedagogical and theological concepts derived from liberal Protestantism, such as, for instance, the notion of culture-oriented religious education and an existential-anthropological definition of religion. However, the origin of these conceptions is not recognized in the debates and these ideas are no longer perceived as "religious".

This leads to an almost paradoxical situation where religion in the public sphere is more present and less present at the same time. It is more present in that it becomes the subject of a regular class meant for all children, acknowledging it as an important part of individual and social life. Less present, because the practices and discourses that are perceived as being "explicitly religious" – mostly because they are related to the activities of the religious communities – are excluded from the school's everyday life. From this, it is possible to theorize the formation of a "grey area" between the secular sphere and the conventional understanding of religion framed by the transmission of a specific set of doctrines and practices, where religion is addressed with the semantics of culture, morals, philosophy or individual interiority. It is within the limits of this "grey zone" that religions are still entitled to recognition in the public sphere.

This new situation motivates religious communities to find new solutions to organize the education of their youth and their action in the public sphere. The three types presented in this contribution permit understanding the principal interpretative patterns along which this process occurs. The empirical data reveal that the reaction of the individual religious communities to the reform projects varies from canton to canton. It is not possible to describe a uniform reaction on the part of "the catholic Church" for instance, nor on the part of the communities with a particular juridical status. Still, through abductive reasoning (see: Strübing 2004, pp. 44-48) it is possible to identify a group of "typical carrier" for each type (see: Weber 1972, pp. 285ff).

The first typical argumentative pattern is usually adopted by the historically dominant Church of a canton (e.g. by the Catholic Church in the canton of Fribourg, but not by the Protestant Church in

the same canton). For many centuries this Church has had an influence on the local social life, has contributed to the creation of the public institutions and has been responsible for the religious education of the vast majority of the population. Because of its historical roots in the territory, this Church usually has a high degree of internal differentiation which eases its adaptation to new social conditions. In order to maintain a general social relevance, it is prepared to give up some elements of its symbolic system when entering the public sphere. At the same time, it has the social and political resources to negotiate its public position without having to passively accept the State's policies.

At the opposite end, the religious communities arguing along the second interpretative pattern do not have the same negotiation power. Furthermore, they are not open to compromise when it comes to defining their religion, which they expressly link to specific experiences, symbols and practices. For these reasons, entering the public sphere could be more difficult for them. However, they are often not interested in a public role in the first place. They are usually established minorities like (orthodox) Jewish communities or Evangelical Churches, but also minority communities within the traditional Churches.

Finally, the "typical carrier" of the third interpretative pattern are communities issued from the recent immigration waves – Islamic and Christian Orthodox communities – but also Catholic or Protestant Churches that are minorities in a given canton. These communities strive to gain or to maintain a public visibility, while providing services oriented mostly toward their members. Their success will also depend on their ability to find a balance between their traditional religious identities and a conception (and presentation) of their religion, which is both adapted to the public sphere and accepted by the dominant society. The attitude of the government, in particular towards the immigrant groups – particularly as regards their inclusion or exclusion from the debates, but also the dialogue concerning teacher training (see: Rudolph, Lüddeckens et al. 2009) – will be pivotal in this respect.

In conclusion, this contribution sought to show how religious education can be an instrument to analyse the role attributed to religions and religious communities in contemporary societies. The results confirm to some extent Casanova's thesis about the need for religious communities to accept their "disestablishment" order to play an active role in the public sphere. Indeed, the case of religious education in Switzerland illustrates the decreasing institutional presence of the Churches in public schools, though they maintain a role as consultants for the State. However, the empirical data also permit nuancing the "deprivatisation thesis" stressing the diversity of the path chosen by the religious communities as well as the different significations attributed to religion in the public sphere. This invites us to consider the development of public religions not only as a consequence of structural and macro-historical changes, but also as a process where social actors play an active role and deal with new situations through meaningful (*sinnhaft*) actions.

Cited literature

- Béguin, Thierry [2003], *Jeter les bases d'un véritable dialogue des cultures*. Preface to: *ECRH: les Hébreux*, [s.n] [s.l].
- Bräm, Werner Kurt (1978), *Religionsunterricht als Rechtsproblem im Rahmen der Ordnung von Kirche und Staat*, Zürich, TVZ Theologischer Verl.
- Casanova, José (1994), *Public Religion in the Modern World*, Chicago, Chicago University Press.
- Cefaï, Daniel (2002), *Qu'est-ce qu'une arène publique? Quelques pistes pour une approche pragmatiste*, in: Cefaï, Daniel and Joseph, Isaac, *L'Héritage du pragmatisme. Conflits d'urbanité et épreuves de civisme*, La Tour d'Aigues, Editions de l'Aube, 51-82.
- Criblez, Lucien (1999), *L'articlesur la formation dans la Constitution fédérale du 24 mai 1874*, in: Hofstetter, Rita and Magin, Charles and al. (Eds), *Une école pour la démocratie: naissance et développement de l'école primaire publique en Suisse au 19e siècle*, Bern, P. Lang, 263-286.
- Criblez, Lucien and Huber, Christina (2008), *Der Bildungsartikel der Bundesverfassung von 1874 und die Diskussion über den eidgenössischen "Schulvogt"*, in: Criblez, Lucien (Ed), *Bildungsraum Schweiz. Historische Entwicklung und aktuelle Herausforderungen*, Bern, Haupt, 87-122.
- De Coulon, Jacques (1989), *Dieu à l'école: les enjeux spirituels de l'éducation*, Lausanne, Favre
- Habermas, Jürgen (2001), *Glauben und Wissen - Rede zum Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 2001*, Frankfurt a.M. , Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, Jürgen (2005), *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, Frankfurt a.M. , Suhrkamp.
- Gurau, Alexandru (2006), *Pour une analyse des politiques publiques portant sur la religion*, in: Côté, Pauline and Gunn, Jeremy T. (Ed.), *La nouvelle question religieuse. Régulation ou ingérence de l'Etat?*, Bruxelles, P. Lang, 17-29.
- Herbert, David (2003), *Religion and Civil Society. Rethinking Public Religion in the Contemporary World*, Aldershot, Ashgates.
- Jackson, Robert and Miedema, Siebren and al. (2007), *Religion and Education in Europe. Developments, Contexts and Debates*, Münster, Waxmann
- Jödicke, Ansgar (2004), *Religionsunterricht in Europa*, in: Friedli, Richard and Schneuwly-Purdie, Mallory (Eds), *L'Europe des religions*, Bern, P. Lang.
- Jödicke, Ansgar (2009), *Das Verhältnis der römisch-katholischen und der evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland zum Ethik-Unterricht am Beispiel Berlins*, in: Delgado, Mariano and Jödicke, Ansgar and Vergauwen, Guido (Eds), *Religion und Öffentlichkeit*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 221-241
- Jödicke, Ansgar (2011), *Die "Religionsgemeinschaft". Religionspolitik als Stimulus für religionssoziologische und religionswissenschaftliche Begriffsbildung*, in: Baumann Martin and Neubert, Frank (Eds), *Religionspolitik- Öffentlichkeit - Wissenschaft. Studien zur Neuformierung von Religion in der Gegenwart*, Zürich, Pano, 37-58.
- Jödicke, Ansgar and Rota, Andrea (2010), *Unterricht zum Thema Religion an der öffentlichen Schule*, Final report for the National Research Program 58 "Religion, the State, and Society", online publication: http://www.nfp58.ch/files/downloads/Joedicke_Schule_Schlussbericht_def.pdf.
- Klöcker Michael (1996), *Der Paradigmawechsel der römisch-katholischen Erziehung und Bildung*, in: Kaufmann Franz-Xaver and Zingerle Arnold (Eds), *Vatikanum II und*

Modernisierung. Historische, theologische und soziologische Perspektiven, Paderborn, Schöningh, 333-352.

- Mendl Hans (2007), *Katholischer Religionsunterricht - ein Längsschnitt*, in: Lachmann Reiner (Ed), *Geschichte des evangelischen Religionsunterrichts in Deutschland*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verl., 331-364.
- Ossipow, William (2003), *La double logique des relations Eglise / Etat en Suisse. Une perspective de théorie politique*, in: *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 121, 41-56.
- Rawls, John (1993), *Political Liberalism*, New York, Columbia University Press.
- Ricoeur, Paul (1995), *La critique et la conviction. Entretien avec François Azouvi et Marc de Launay*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy.
- Rota, Andrea (2011), *L'enseignement religieux de l'Etat et des communautés religieuses. Une étude de la présence des religions en Romandie et au Tessin*, Thèse de Doctorat, Fribourg, Université de Fribourg
- Rudolph Ulrich, Lüddeckens, Dorothea and al. (2009), *Imam-Ausbildung und islamische Religionspädagogik in der Schweiz ?*, Final report for the National Research Program 58 "Religion, the State, and Society", online publication: <http://www.pnr58.ch>
- Späni, Martina (1997), *Umstrittene Fächer in der Pädagogik. Zur Geschichte des Religions- und Tununterrichtes*, in: Bertscher Hans and Grunder Hans-Ulrich (Eds), *Geschichte der Erziehung und Schule in der Schweiz im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Bern. Haupt, 17-55.
- Späni, Martina (2003), *Forschung gegen Offenbarung? Ein Beitrag zum Rezeptionsverhältnis von Theologie und Pädagogik im 19. Jahrhundert*, in: Oelkers, Jürgen and Osterwalder, Fritz and Heinz-Elmar Tenorth (Ed), *Das verdrängte Erbe. Pädagogik im Kontext von Religion und Theologie*, Weinheim, Beltz, 147-170.
- Strübing, Jörg (2004), *Grounded theory: zur sozialtheoretischen und epistemologischen Fundierung des Verfahrens der empirisch begründeten Theoriebildung*, Wiesbaden, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Weber, Max (1972 [1921-22]), *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck.
- Willaime, Jean-Paul (1993), *Univers scolaires et religions en Europe de l'ouest*, in: Willaime, Jean-Paul and Vincent, Guy (Eds), *Religions et transformations en Europe*, Strasbourg, Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 381-395.
- Willaime, Jean-Paul and Mathieu, Séverine (2005) (Ed), *Des maîtres et des dieux: écoles et religions en Europe*, Paris, Belin.