



## COMMISSION 4

Welcoming the Other through

# Religious and Multi-Religious Education





## *Familiarizing adolescents with their respective faiths as “systems of responsibility”*

### **INTRODUCTION**

When tensions between religious and ethnic groups escalate to violence, the lack of knowledge and of a welcoming atmosphere combined with long-lasting prejudices lead some groups to fanaticize. It is one of the primary tenets of the Peace Education Standing Commission of *Religions for Peace* that education can break down such ignorance and prejudices, and, in so doing, counter animosities and enmities between different cultural and religious groups.

Religious education can do even more – as it offers assistance and direction to people seeking direction in their lives, helping them in their lives and helping them in their actions.

**Helping people find direction.** Religious education plays an essential part in cognitive learning. When people are well informed, use their knowledge critically and are able to question and analyse, they are less likely to be deceived. Pure ignorance, deliberate distortion and disinformation are all too often the stuff of politics today and, even in matters of religion, are used to create barriers and for defamatory purposes. When people understand the ways in which religious faiths relate to life and meaning, they are able to empathize with others' views and see through the mechanisms that cause ethnic and religious discord and fanaticism.

**Helping people in their lives.** Religious education teaches about the sources of life and of values that transcend superficial pleasures. It teaches how all living things are related and mutually interdependent. Religious education can give strength, support, comfort and courage.

**Helping people in their actions.** Religious communities can offer examples of living together in solidarity, living for one another, speaking up for the weak and disadvantaged – teaching us to cope with the problems of life with a sense of mutual responsibility.

### **I. CHALLENGES**

The task that emerges for education requires the commitment of the religious communities in cooperation with all people of good will. Young people will only be equipped for living together in a way that will ensure the continued existence of our planet if they respect their fellow human beings, feel responsibility for all the living as well as the inanimate world.

In the field of religious education three ways of learning can be distinguished.

1. **Learning religion** means to be educated and socialized in one particular religious tradition. This is the way of catechesis mainly carried out within the religious communities.
2. **Learning about religion** means to receive knowledge about religions in a neutral way. This would be the main task within public education.
3. **Learning from religion** means that interaction with religions can help the development of personal orientation and identity-building. This is relevant for education in religious communities as well as in public education. Religious education in religious communities has to take into account the pluralistic and often secularised contexts of the learners, and religious education in public schooling should provide an encounter with religions vis-a-vis living communities, rather than with neutral facts.

### CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS

The concrete contextual conditions for inter-religious and values education vary from country to country.

- › Some countries maintain a highly developed infrastructure where religious education and values education have a continuous history. This is exhibited in syllabus development, the production of textbooks and teaching materials and in university-level teacher training.
- › There are other countries where religious education is very weak. Teaching materials and syllabi are few or do not exist at all, and teachers have little or no opportunity to gain the necessary skills.
- › In the majority of countries, religious communities carry more responsibility for religious education than does the state. There are countries where religious communities and the state cooperate on issues of religious education, which can be fruitful. However, in some cases there is almost no control of the contents, aims and methods by state or independent pedagogical institutions.
- › Inter-religious cooperation concerning religious education in public schooling and also in the pedagogy of the religious communities themselves is still very rare. This is a crucial point for countries that still have segregated societies. However, in countries without tensions between religious groups, inter-religious cooperation concerning the presentation of different religions in textbooks and syllabi is mostly undeveloped.
- › There are still few examples of direct encounters with the various world religions in the pedagogical field, which could include, for example, visits to places of worship as part of “outdoor schooling.” Additionally, there is little recognition of the rich cultural heritage and influence of religious traditions in different parts of the world. Historical conflicts between and among religious communities should also be taught and discussed.
- › Research examining students’ identity development, as well as their religious and philosophical interests and questions, in a pluralistic society is just in the beginning stages and in only a few countries.



- › There are too few examples of learning on a “neighborhood” level, which could include religious education in schools, but also in cooperation between schools and religious communities.

Further challenges have been identified in the KAICIID project “The Image of the Other”:<sup>1</sup>

- › There are helpful recommendations by UNESCO and other educational bodies, but they are only available in a limited number of languages and are not sufficiently disseminated or used.
- › Several organizations currently working on intercultural and inter-religious education have a long-term commitment to working on perceptions of “the other”. However, not enough research and impact studies have been done to evaluate such initiatives or make them accessible to policy makers. There are far too little empirical studies concerning the convictions and interests of young people as relates to values, religions and world views.
- › There are many recommendations on an international level, but implementation is lacking, primarily due to weak commitment at national levels. There is no network for sustained dialogue between the multiple stakeholders in the field of intercultural and inter-religious education.
- › The educational realities in the different regions of the world and also within each region are very diverse, requiring multiple strategies and interventions to make changes effective.
- › Currently, all stakeholders face the challenge of too little exchange and cooperation.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR COLLABORATIVE ACTION**

- › Governments and their cultural authorities are asked to open their educational systems to basic religious and inter-religious learning.
- › Universities and educational institutions are asked for input on holistic approaches for values and tolerance education that includes religious and inter-religious elements.
- › Intergovernmental organizations are asked if they are able and willing to commit to a new approach to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.
- › Religious communities are asked what they can do to assist in the development of new models for open and welcoming encounters between and among religious and cultural groups.
- › All stakeholders are asked for improving exchange and cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> The following arguments are taken from the draft report of the KAICIID-project “The Image of the Other”. Interreligious and Intercultural Education. Best Practices in the Europe-Mediterranean Region. Working Session 22 May 2013.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- › *Is the problem sufficiently described? Are there other viewpoints to be recognized?*
- › *What seems to be the primary deficiency? Does this vary across contexts and environments?*
- › *Which of the stakeholders are the most difficult to convince of new endeavors in religious and multi-religious education?*

## II. INTERVENTIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

When working towards “*Welcoming the Other*” we should draw on the spiritual, ethical and social potential of religious communities. Religions are concerned with giving meaning to life, interpreting the world, and are not only focused on short-term goals.

Being committed to non-violence and respect for life, to solidarity and a just economic order, to tolerance and a life of truthfulness and to equal rights and partnership between men and women – these convictions are common in different religious traditions (and still often wait for realisation in the religious communities themselves). This means that religions have unique “treasures” to contribute to society that they could use in cooperation with one another and with all “people of good will”, rather than viewing other religious communities and world views as enemies or competitors. The fact that most religions are not nationally bound but are manifested through worldwide communities – as “global players” on the one hand and as advocates of the different contexts and cultures they live in on the other – should be seen as an advantage.

Tasks for religious communities in this respect are first to vitalize their own principles of belief in an open way that opposes intolerance. It is essential for religious/ethical education to assume the task of familiarizing adolescents with their respective faiths as “systems of responsibility”. When people feel at home in their own faith and when they are familiar with the roots of their own religion and culture, they can provide the basis for a serious dialogue.

At the same time, all religious/ethical education should be accompanied by a new approach to engagement that respects people of other faiths and their values and ways of life. Adolescents should be prepared for ways of living together without the burden of prejudicial barriers, in an environment conducive to listening to and learning from one another, opening up new horizons to all sides. This way of overcoming prejudicial barriers is an essential contribution to peace education, which is often a task taken on by religious communities.

It is important to recognize that prejudices towards others are founded in preconceived opinions. Trust will grow in dialogue only when dialogue partners can perceive that they are not being forced into a dogmatic scenario that does not correspond to one another's understanding of his or her faith. This means that dialogue partners must try to learn about the other's faith from the other's perspective



and, with sensitivity, seek out understanding through the religious traditions and writings of the partner. Each dialogue partner must respect the differences between them. Consequently, there is a great need to develop and strengthen religious and inter-religious learning in formal, as well as informal, education.

Some selected projects are described below in order to show the wide range of religious education initiatives already existing, but that, until now, have not been bound into an overall network. The projects presented cover different levels of engagement, dialogue and learning, and may help to systemize the efforts for “*Welcoming the Other*” through: 1) the development of teaching materials focused on religions and ethical values; 2) study programs for cross-cultural learning; 3) scientific studies pertaining to the field of textbook and media research and development; 4) dialogue groups focusing on Holy Scriptures, spiritual sources and inter-religious commitments within religious traditions; 5) youth seminars and exchanges in situations of religious-ethnic tensions; 6) initiatives of religious communities in cooperation with public institutions as for example city agencies, schools and academic institutions; and 7) building up regional inter-religious networks on Peace Education.

### **THE INTER-RELIGIOUS EDUCATIONAL WORK OF THE GLOBAL ETHIC FOUNDATION TÜBINGEN**

The Global Ethic Project, initiated by Professor Hans Küng, promotes a positive vision in contrast to Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis. From its inception, the Global Ethic Foundation has consistently attempted to make the substance of its work accessible to teachers and has developed pedagogical resources. The Global Ethic Foundation has offered courses and training sessions for teachers about the world’s religions, influencing syllabus development and textbook writing. (<http://www.weltethos.org>)

### **INTER-RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING AND SOLIDARITY THROUGH CROSS-CULTURAL EDUCATION**

The Adyan Foundation (Beirut/Lebanon: led by Prof. Dr. Fadi Daou and Dr. Nayla Tabbar; <http://www.adyanvillage.net>) provides courses, teaching and structured encounters of students and educators to:

- › Raise awareness on the grassroots level (Youth, CSO, FBO, etc.) on religious pluralism, geopolitics of religions and interfaith relations;
- › Introduce education on inclusive citizenship for religious diversity and coexistence into the national educational policies and programs for schools;
- › Empower teachers, trainers, youth leaders and policy makers in religious pluralism, multifaith education and inclusive citizenship;
- › Foster cross-cultural Arab-West dialogue and mutual understanding.

### **DEVELOP AND EXPAND INTERFAITH NETWORKS AND SPIRITUAL SOLIDARITY**

In partnership with Tischner European University (Poland), Gregorian University (Italy), Notre Dame University (Lebanon) and Ahram Canadian University (Egypt), Adyan developed and implemented in 2010/2011 its first e-course on “*Diversity and intercultural dialogue*”, gathering 18 students and

three teachers from the above-mentioned universities. The students developed, in Euro-Arab and Christian-Muslim groups, four projects that they were invited to present in an international conference on intercultural education and peace-building in Italy.

In partnership with Vienna University (Austria), Cairo University (Egypt) and Notre Dame University (Lebanon), Adyan developed in the fall 2012/2013 its second e-course entitled “*Religious minorities and public life in Europe and the Arab World*”.

Using the same methodology of cross-cultural education on religious diversity, interfaith relations and public life, Adyan then developed a formation program that targets young professionals, with the goal of turning them into “Leaders for Interreligious Understanding” (LIU). The LIU program gathered four CSO partners from Egypt (CEOSS), Lebanon and Syria (FDCD), and Denmark (Danmission) as well as Adyan. Thirty-one young professionals from Syria, Egypt, Lebanon and Denmark, and from a variety of professional backgrounds (i.e., politics, religion, media, CSO, education) graduated from the first program with the certificate of “Leader for inter-religious understanding”.

The young leaders then designed and implemented activities for their own professional networks to provide understanding among people from different religious backgrounds.

### **INTER-RELIGIOUS TEXTBOOK DEVELOPMENT – PERSPECTIVES FROM THE RESEARCH PROJECT “THE REPRESENTATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN TEXTBOOKS OF COUNTRIES WITH AN ISLAMIC TRADITION”** (led by Johannes Lähnemann and Wolfram Reiss)

The textbook presents the different religions that can help students achieve fundamental knowledge and an attitude of “*Welcoming the Other*.”

A specific goal of the project has been to systemize findings in a way that can be transposed to inter-religious textbook development. Consequently, a consultation process was initiated with colleagues from Austria, Egypt, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Iran, Jordan, South Africa, Switzerland and Turkey. A proposal for inter-religious textbook development was designed and, at a symposium during the X<sup>th</sup> Nuremberg Forum (2010), elaborated in detail – as possible guidelines for authors and publishers, for education authorities and curriculum planners<sup>2</sup> – standards showing how inter-religious issues should be handled in curriculum and textbook design, including:

- › Portraying the religions in an authentic, professionally sound way;
- › Developing a dialogue-orientated interpretation of religion and belief;
- › Portraying the religions and their importance in the lives of real people;
- › Conveying a differentiated view of history;
- › Taking account of the cultural heritage and contextuality of the religious communities;
- › Dealing openly with the topical issues of mission, tolerance and inter-religious dialogue;
- › Finding common ground in ethics;
- › Considering the life conditions of the students and the relevance for religious learning;
- › Portraying religions vividly and age-appropriately.

<sup>2</sup> J. Lähnemann: Interreligious Textbook Research and Development: A Proposal for Standards – In: M.L. Pirner/J. Lähnemann (Ed.): *Media Power and Religions. The Challenge Facing Intercultural Dialogue and Learning*. Frankfurt/M. 2013, p. 147-159.



It is important that the encounter with the world of religions is open in such a way that teachers, as well as students, are not forced to accept a specific religious viewpoint. The multiplicity of perspectives offered within the religious traditions, as well as the critical view from outside should be guaranteed to encourage vivid, enriching and critical learning.

**OPEN DOORS / HOPEN DEUREN** – a project of *RfP* Belgium (<http://www.wcrp.be/100-portes-deuren-doors/index.htm>), led by Yolande Iliano – Co-founder, Coordinator.

The project is an example of informal learning, within the context of cooperation among city authorities, schools and religious groups, based in the world of the child's imagination and inspired by the idea of "doors" and the many physical and abstract associations this theme aroused in children of all social, cultural, and philosophical backgrounds.

The aim of this project is diversity education and contains the following elements:

- › Leading to better knowledge of oneself;
- › Looking at the diversity of interpretations, to discover the Other as different without value judgment or hierarchy;
- › Educating for a culture of openness;
- › Underlining the enrichment gained by diversity;
- › Combating generalizations, categorizations, stereotypes, discrimination and any expression of same through violence;
- › Encouraging action and universal commitment.

Activities start with observation and interpretation of five paintings. This leads children to begin to reflect on and come to grips with self through art, as interpretation is the prime indicator of self-knowledge. The learning process then leads from a personal, individual view to a wider view of community, culminating in the universal. The project starts from a picture (and other activities) to encourage the discovery of the Other without value judgment or hierarchy and underlines the enrichment gained by diversity. Additionally, the project focuses on possible incentives of committing to peace as an universal citizen.

In Antwerp this project was set up with the enthusiastic cooperation of 600 pupils and their teachers from all types of schools, and not less than 15 cooperating groups and religious communities. This project idea and concept could easily be adopted by other countries and cities, especially where inter-religious groups or councils already exist.

### **THE "LATIN AMERICAN INTER-RELIGIOUS NETWORK ON PEACE EDUCATION"** (RILEP – <http://.erb.unaoc.org>)

The "Latin American Inter-Religious Network on Peace Education" is an initiative of *Religions for Peace* Latin America and the Caribbean that gathers representatives from the main communities of faith in the region. The objectives of RILEP are:

- › To promote peace education in religious communities, particularly in their educational frameworks, through mutual understanding and fraternity, overcoming all kinds of prejudices;



- › To establish a permanent space of liaison for the purpose of facilitating inter-religious exchange and training of educators in issues of peace for Latin American religious communities; and
- › To use information and communication technologies (ICT) to promote a culture of peace, from an interfaith and Latin American perspective.

The RILEP was established in 2004 by *RfP* Latin America and the Caribbean with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Since its founding, the RILEP has held four meetings of religious educational organizations in Latin America. The first was held in Santiago de Chile, on 16–17 November 2004, the second in Buenos Aires, on 14–15 December 2005, the third in Rio de Janeiro, on 12–16 September 2007, and the fourth in Montevideo, on 1–5 November 2009. The latter two events were supported by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and World Vision.

*RfP* Latin America and the Caribbean and UNESCO are continuing to promote the RILEP as a key stakeholder for mobilizing a culture of peace within the religious education of Latin America. They are strengthening the National Groups of RILEP in Argentina, Brazil and Chile, to develop activities for students of different religious educational institutions, devoted to mutual understanding and joint social action, and based on solidarity and brotherhood.

**EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE INTER-RELIGIOUS COORDINATING COUNCIL IN ISRAEL** (<http://www.icci.org.il>) led by Rabbi Dr. Ron Kronish

The Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI), established in January 1991, is comprised of more than 60 Christian, Muslim, and Jewish institutions and organizations. ICCI also serves as the Israeli affiliate of *RfP* as one of the Israeli members of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ).

It is a great challenge to build bridges between Israeli and Palestinian people due to the existing physical and mental barriers and hurts of past and present. With that in mind, the “Face to Face / Faith to Faith” project focuses on the development of youth leadership with the goal of promoting learning about the Other and recognizing the narratives and the experiences of the Other.

For the past 11 years, ICCI, in partnership with the Auburn Theological Seminary of New York and local groups in Northern Ireland, South Africa, and the U.S.A., has offered a dialogue and leadership program for Jewish, Christian and Muslim youth. The program includes attending a two-week summer intensive experience in the U.S., as part of a comprehensive year of dialogue and action projects in Jerusalem. Upon returning to the Middle East, the “Face to Face” participants engage in bi-monthly dialogue sessions, follow-up activities that focus on “getting to know the Other in Jerusalem,” and community service and leadership training. The program culminates with a project designed and led by the youth in order to bring the lessons they have learned back to their communities and to put their leadership skills into action. In order to affect more people, ICCI also facilitates a dialogue group for parents of “Face to Face/Faith to Faith” participants, works with the participants’ high schools, and maintains an active network of alumni who continue to work for peace and coexistence.



This year (2013), ICCI is embarking on a completely revised “Face to Face” program in the region, with youth leadership from East and West Jerusalem, which will have more impact on the community, following an intensive summer camp experience in Israel this summer.

“Palestinians and Israelis for Interreligious Dialogue and Action”, ICCI’s Alumni Community for graduates of the youth and young adult programs, commenced its activities in 2011. There are now over 200 graduates of the youth and young adult programs of the last 12 years. The program aims to provide ICCI alumni with a long-term framework for engaging together in dialogue and social activism.

Other organizations, projects and initiatives with multi-religious education impact in the Holy Land and in the Middle East include:

- › The educational work of the **Peace Village Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salam** where Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel – Jews, Christians and Muslims – live together (<http://nswas.com>).
- › **The Interfaith Encounter Association**, consisting of 50 religiously mixed groups that regularly meet on both sides of the “Green Line” in Israel and Palestine (Director: Dr. Yehuda Stolos – <http://interfaith-encounter.org>).
- › **The Arab Educational Institute in Bethlehem** – a Palestinian organization that furthers education, peace building and dialogue in the Palestinian cities of Bethlehem, Ramallah and Hebron (Director: Fuad Giacaman – <http://www.aeicenter.org>).
- › **The School Talitha Kumi in Beit Yala** (<http://www.talithakumi.org>) and **the Schneller Schools in Amman/Jordan and Khirbet Kanafar/Lebanon** (<http://www.schneller-school.org>) in which Christian and Muslim students of all denominations are educated together, learn together and about each other and cooperate for the future of their countries.

## OTHERS

There are many more projects that have a learning dimension and help in the promotion of “*Welcoming the Other*”. Many, but not all, of these projects offer examples of programs promoting common action for human rights, the ending of violence and protection of the environment. The below are just a few examples:

- › **The “Restoring Dignity” project** of RfP’s Women of Faith network<sup>3</sup> is an international initiative (with meetings, training, exhibitions, presentations and a vivid toolkit) working out what the world’s major faith traditions teach, each in its own way, about the inviolable dignity of the human being as rooted in the Sacred. While respecting religious differences, the “Restoring Dignity” project draws on the commitment and resources of faith congregations, institutions, communities and individual believers to bring an end to violence against women and girls.

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3 <http://religionsforpeace.org/file/resources/toolkits/restoring-dignity-toolkit.pdf>

- › **The “Arms Down” RfP Youth Campaign<sup>4</sup>** is gathering signatures to ask the United Nations to: 1. Abolish nuclear weapons, 2. Stop the spread and misuse of weapons, and 3. Use 10 percent of military budgets for the Millennium Development Goals.
- › **The “Spirit in Education Movement” (SEM)** in Thailand, initiated by Sulak Sivaraksa, is an alternative college founded in 1995. It offers a spiritually-based, ecologically-sound, holistic alternative to mainstream education. Its philosophy is rooted in Buddhist wisdom and a deep concern for ecological sustainability and social justice. The founders realize that mainstream education in South East Asia is not in tune with the realities of the changing world. Consequently, SEM has provided many courses promoting interaction between alternative thinkers of the West and the best-minded of Asia.

The projects summarized above teach us that educational activities need to be contextualized. The problems and challenges of each specific environment have to be analyzed, the framework of formal and informal educational possibilities has to be taken into account, and resources have to be carefully examined.

#### **POINTS OF DISCUSSION IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE COMMISSION COULD BE:**

- › *Are there more “religion-specific assets” that are not named in this paper?*
- › *Are there other types of projects for learning about each other, learning together and learning in co-operation?*
- › *Are there projects that have undergone a valuable evaluation process?*

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<sup>4</sup> <http://armsdown.net>



### III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MULTI-RELIGIOUS ACTIONS

The project examples discussed above show the wide range of activities that are implemented on various levels and contexts and highlight how much more is done and how much more is possible than is commonly known by the public, or even by religious communities. In order to inspire religious communities, inter-religious councils and groups to further action, continuous and professional networking is needed, through

- › Initiating systematic approaches to cross-cultural and inter-religious exchange, as well as evaluations of methods, experiences and outcomes of religious and multi-religious learning;
- › Encouraging new actions in the specific religious and educational contexts of the respective regions, countries and districts;
- › Looking for opportunities of collaboration between religious communities, inter-religious councils and the stakeholders of public education in order to incorporate religious and multi-religious learning in syllabi, teacher training and the development of textbooks and educational media;
- › Cooperating with institutions and promoters of intercultural education (UNESCO, Alliance of Civilisation);
- › Develop educational programs.

The different branches and levels of the *RfP* family should engage in education according to their specific strengths and the structures of educational possibilities in which they can and do work:

- › At the global level, *RfP* representatives, in cooperation with stakeholders like UNESCO and the Alliance of Civilisations, should advocate for the need for and possibilities of religious and multi-religious education.
- › At the regional level, the Latin American Inter-Religious Network on Peace Education (RILEP) could be an example of how to promote peace education in religious communities, particularly in specific educational frameworks, through mutual understanding and fraternity, overcoming all kinds of prejudices.
- › At the national level, the collaboration between religious communities, inter-religious councils/groups and the stakeholders of public education should improve curriculum development and teacher training as well as the educational programs of the religious communities themselves.
- › At the local level, inter-religious groups should be the initiators of meetings, dialogue and cooperation between the religious communities. These activities, themselves, also act as educational ways of “*Welcoming the Other*”.

- › The Women of Faith network could widen its range of campaigns, drawing on the example of the project “Restoring Dignity” and taking into account the prominent activities of women in religious affairs worldwide and the need for advocacy to address their often marginalized and neglected security and rights needs.
- › The youth network, through their multi-religious meetings and youth camps, provide a special opportunity for inter-religious learning. It is often difficult to engage young people in long-term projects and memberships, because many are struggling to create successful lives for themselves through education, training, and new jobs. Common activities and projects can be a means to experience the possibilities of multi-religious collaboration.

**POINTS OF DISCUSSION IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE COMMISSION COULD INCLUDE:**

- › *How can we initiate stronger networking within the RfP family and in cooperation with other stakeholders for religious and multi-religious education?*
- › *How can we articulate the need for religious and multi-religious education in secular contexts?*
- › *How can we proceed in contexts where there are segregated societies?*
- › *How can we encourage a stronger engagement of youth in the fields of multi-religious encounters and cooperation?*



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