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Baseline Study
Religious Education (RE) in France



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IERS Project. *Intercultural Education through Religious Studies*

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Document: Baseline Study. Religious Education (RE) in France

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1. State, religion and RE

According to the French Constitution (1958), article one, "France shall be an indivisible, secular (*laïque*), democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion. It shall respect all beliefs (*les croyances*)" (Conseil Constitutionnel 1958, official translation).¹ *Laïcité*, a word often said to be untranslatable, means that the State is neutral in religious matters and the public services is non-religious but also that the State guarantees the free exercise of religious worship (Willaime 2007b, 87).² Relations between State and religions are based on the law of 1905 on the Separation of the Churches and the State³, which states, that the Republic "ensures the conscience of freedom" and "guarantees the free exercise of the religions (*cultes*)" under the limits of a democratic public law and order (article 1). The law also states that the Republic does not recognize or subsidize any religions, all though exceptions is given in the case of expenses of chaplaincies in public institutions and in the preservation of historical monuments and religious buildings owned by the State, the *départements* or local authorities.⁴

France has about 63,4 million inhabitants, out of which 8,8 % are categorized as immigrants, with the highest percent from African countries (Algeria, Morocco)⁵. It is, like in many other countries, not easy to find exact figures about the religious landscape in France. It is not legal to include questions about religious affiliation in national census, and those statistical figures that can be found are often in need of to be qualified significantly. According to some statistical figures the majority of the

¹ <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/english/constitution/constitution-of-4-october-1958.25742.html>. Last accessed April 5, 2016

² See Willaime, 2007 for a more detailed outline of the State, religion relation and religion education in France.

³ This law does not apply to the *départements* of Alsace and Moselle, which in 1905 were under the rule of Germany, and does not apply to most of French overseas territories, for example the *département* of Guyane where the Catholic Church is the only „recognized religion“ (*culte reconnu*).

⁴ <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT00000508749&fastPos=1&fastReqId=1194187241&categorieLien=cid&oldAction=rechTexte>. Last accessed April 5, 2016

⁵ Statistical figures from INSEE, http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=NATTEF02131. Last accessed April 5, 2016.

population still declare itself Roman Catholics (51% in 2007) while 31% declares itself non-religious. The second largest religion is Islam (around 6-8%) followed by Protestants (3%), Jews (1%) and Buddhists (1%), Orthodox Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses (above 100.000 followers).⁶

A consequence of *laïcité* so far has been the omission of religion education (RE) as a subject in its own in the public school system. The public school has since 1882 been separated from the Catholic Church. Exceptions are found in the Alsace and Moselle *départements* in which Catholic, Protestant and Jewish confessional RE is integrated in the school system.⁷ According to French scholars of the study of religions (Willaime 2007b, 91, Van den Kerchove 2011, 58, 2013, 156), 'religious issues' (*faits religieux*)⁸, although not entirely absent in the teaching of other school subjects, were largely sidelined in the schools up to the 1980 's where the issue was placed on the public and political agenda by different voices and associations. Following some of the conclusions of a report by Philippe Joutard (1989), commissioned by the then Minister of National Education, Lionel Jospin, religious issues were given more weight in the national curricula for some of the existing subjects in the secondary school. A new report, the so-called Debray report (2002) commissioned by the former Minister of National Education, Jack Lang, also stressed the necessity to teach about religious issues in school, and some of these recommendations about national curricula and teacher training programs were followed. This report as well as the Joutard report concerned only the secondary school level, but initiatives towards integration of religious issues on the primary level have also followed.

This development can be seen as a part of what Jean-Paul Willaime calls 'secularization of *laïcité*', meaning a development of *laïcité* as an alternative system to religion towards a "regulating principle for the pluralism of both the religious and non-religious convictions existing in civil society" (Willaime 2007b, 89). The French

⁶ U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2007

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2007/90175.htm>. Last accessed April 5, 2016.

⁷ For an account of the situation in Alsace-Moselle, see Hourmant and Willaime, 2014.

⁸ The term 'fait religieux' was proposed by Régis Debray and later adopted by the French National Education authorities.

Government stresses *laïcité* as a positive value in the French society and has in 2013 published the *Charte de la laïcité*, a charter with fifteen articles with the aim to provide support to those involved in education in order to teach the children and students about the positive value of *laïcité*. One of the articles states that "no subject is theoretically excluded from scientific and educational questioning. No pupil may cite a religious or political belief to challenge a teacher's right to broach an issue on the program." (Circular no 2013-144 of 6. September 2013).⁹ This charter thus also indicates how to approach religious issues in education.

2. The educational system and overall framework

The French educational system is centralized around the State, which is responsible for the organization, funding, recruiting and training of teachers and the national curricula for all levels. Since 2014, the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Research have been merged into *Ministère de L'éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la recherche* with one Minister responsible for the education system. Besides public schools in which the majority of the pupils are enrolled (80%), private schools also exist, most of them 'under-contract' with the State and therefore obliged to follow the national curricula. Only very few pupils (0,3%) attend 'non-contract' private schools.¹⁰ Education is compulsory between 6 and 16 years and organized in five years in elementary school (6-10 years old), four years in *collège* (lower-secondary school) between the age of 11-15 and the first year of *lycée* (upper-secondary school). Lower-secondary school (*collège*) is organized in four classes: *sixième*, *cinquième*, *quatrième* and *troisième*.

⁹ <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid73666/charte-de-la-laicite-a-l-ecole.html>. Last accessed April 5, 2016. An English translation can be found on https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/France:Fundamental_Principles_and_National_Policies.

¹⁰ For an extensive overview of the French education system, see Eurypedia <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/France:Overview>

Three types of upper-secondary school exist: General, technical and professional schools. General and technical schools (*lycée général et technologique*) prepare pupils for long-term higher studies or higher technological studies (3 years) and professional schools (*lycée professionnel*) prepare for labor market or higher studies (2-3 years). General and technical upper-secondary school are organized in three classes: *seconde* (first year), *première* (second year) and *terminale* (final year). Some of the compulsory subjects in the first year are French, History-geography (in technical schools: History-geography-civic education), Modern languages, Math, Physics-chemistry, Earth and life sciences, Civic, legal and social education and History of the arts (a cross-curricular subject). In the second and final year of upper-secondary school, students select one of various specialized "series" which have different curricula and subjects.

After reforms of the initial teacher education 2010 and 2013, teachers in elementary and secondary schools are now educated at *Ecoles Supérieures du Professorat et de l'Éducation - ESPEs* (Schools of Education), which are integrated into Universities. They now must hold a Master's degree and have passed the competitive teaching examination for *Professeurs des Écoles* (primary school teacher) or one of the examinations for secondary education. As mentioned above, some of the recommendations in the so-called Debray report were followed. One of them was the establishment of the *Institut Européen en Sciences des Religions* (IESR) as a division of *École Pratique des Hautes Études* (2006) with the aim of bridging the gap between studies of religion and teaching of religious facts in primary and secondary schools. Another result is the integration of religious facts into the teacher education. The situation differs from university to university; some offers short modules on religious issues while others integrate religious issues in existing subjects. Workshops, materials and teaching materials are also developed in order to strengthen the teachers' ability to teach about religious issues (Willaime 2007b, 96, Van den Kerchove 2011, 62).

In 2006, the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research issued the 'Decree dated 11 July 2006' (The common base of knowledge and skills), based on the 'Guidance and Curriculum planning law for the future of schools of 23 April 2005'. It lists the common base of knowledge and skills the pupils are to acquire at the end of their compulsory education. One of them is *Culture Humaniste* (humanist culture), which, by the way of providing "common references for understanding" helps "build a sense of belonging to the community of citizens, develop rational opinions, prepare each individual to develop his/her own culture and determine his/her openness to the world" (SCÉRÉN-CNDP 2006, 37, official translation). This is based on knowledge of geographic and historical references, the latter including:

the history of mankind (characteristic founding events that help situate them in relation to each other by connecting facts, whether political, economic, social, cultural, religious, scientific and technical or literary and artistic), as well as braking points (SCÉRÉN-CNDP 2006, 37, official translation).

The pupils shall also "be prepared to share a European culture" through (inter alia) "knowledge of the main texts of Antiquity (the Iliad and the Odyssey, stories of the founding of Rome, the Bible)" and understand unity and complexity of the world by a primary approach to

- human rights;
- diversity of civilizations, societies, religions (history and contemporary spheres of dissemination);
- religion in France, Europe and throughout the world through the study of founding texts (notably, extracts from the Bible and the Koran) using a secular approach respecting consciences and convictions (SCÉRÉN-CNDP 2006, 38, official translation).

This common base of knowledge and skills are implemented in the national curricula for the different levels and subjects of the compulsory school.¹¹

¹¹ These common references are now in a process of revision (2014) by a commission.

3. Religious facts in national curricula for History in lower-secondary school

According to the French scholar of the study of religion and RE, Anna Van Den Kerchove (2013), religious facts are mostly dealt with in *collège* (lower-secondary school), particularly in *Histoire*.¹² This baseline study of France will therefore include History in lower-secondary school, although the baseline study only centers on upper-secondary schools in the other participating countries. The national curriculum for the *Collège* is the 'Bulletin officiel spécial n° 6 du 28 août 2008' with minor later revisions. In addition to the curricula for the various disciplines, the Ministry also issues official pedagogical tools called 'Ressources pour faire de la classe au collège' (Ressources) which complements the curricula. These explain the curricula, include scientific knowledge about the various themes, concepts and issues, pitfalls to avoid and also offer bibliographies as well as ways to implement multidisciplinary projects. In these Ressources, religious facts are included more often than in the national curriculum (Van den Kerchove 2013, 159). History is part of the program 'Histoire-géographie éducation civique'. The overall aims of History are to consolidate, expand and deepen the pupils' knowledge about a common historical culture and develop their analytical-critical and intellectual skills in order for them to understand the world and be able to live in a free society (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale 2008a, 2-3).

3.1 Religious facts in *classe de sixième* (first year)

Religious facts are most present in the history lessons of *classe de sixième* (6th year of compulsory school, first year of *collège*). The focus is the ancient world and the beginning of the Middle Ages. Pupils are to learn about the following topics: 'The Ancient East'; 'The Greek civilization'; 'Rome'; 'The beginnings of Judaism and Christianity'; 'The Christian empires of the Middle Ages' and 'Eyes on a distant world' (Han China or India of the 4th and 5th centuries). In the topic 'Ancient East' the

¹² See also Van den Kerchove (2014) for a critical analysis of religious facts in History in lower- and upper secondary school (in French).

teacher shall choose between a site and a monument of Mesopotamia or of Egypt. The Ressources mentions the sacred function of writing as a central element in this topic and the possibility to study and compare various buildings, including temples, ziggurats, tombs, necropolis and also study the Mesopotamian king, his power and relation with a divine world (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2008a; 2009a). 'The Greek civilization' is studied in three themes of which two of them include religious facts in the curriculum. One is 'the foundation of Greece: cities, myths, pan Hellenism' where the pupils shall have knowledge about the cities and colonization, the Iliad and Odyssey as testimonies of the mental universe of the Ancient Greece and about the pan Hellenic sanctuaries. The contents are, *inter alia* extracts from the Iliad and the Odyssey and examples of ceramics or sculptures and studies about Delphi or the beginning of the Olympic Games, including their religious functions. The second theme 'the city of Athens (5th - 4th century): citizenship and democracy' includes knowledge about the religious, political and military dimensions of the Athenian democracy and unity. Through a study of the frieze of Parthénon, the pupils are expected to be able to tell about the Athenian festival of the Panathenaia and explain its religious and social role.

'Rome' has two themes. One is 'the beginning and end of the republic: foundation, organization, politic and conquest' which includes knowledge about the legends of Aeneid, Romulus and Remus. The other is 'the empire: the emperor, the city, the Romanization' where the pupils shall have knowledge about some of the important aspects of the Roman empire, *inter alia* the cult of Alexander the Great and the monuments, shrines and statues of the Urbs. According to the Ressources, the religious aspect is however but one of several aspects the teachers can choose from in the study of the cult of the Emperor (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2009b).

Religious facts are pre-eminently given in the topic 'The beginning of Judaism and Christianity' which makes up 20 % of the 41 hours dedicated to History at this level. The approach in these themes can be characterized as historical-cultural, stressing an analytical-critical approach through the contextualization of the beginning of these

religions and their sacred texts and stressing the difference between the scientific-historical point of view and the Biblical-religious point of view. The curriculum for the study of the beginning of Judaism reads (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2008a, our translation):

Knowledge

- Threatened in their existence by powerful empires in the 8th and 6th centuries BC, the Hebrews of the kingdom of Judah put in writing their traditions (the first books of the Bible).
- Some of the grand narratives of the Bible are studied as foundations of Judaism.
- The destruction of the second Temple by the Romans (70) precipitates the diaspora and leads to the organization of the Rabbinic Judaism.

Approaches

- The study begins with the contextualization of the writing of the Bible (the imperialism of the Mesopotamian empires, King Josiah, exile to Babylon).
- Selected narratives from the Bible: the story of creation, Abraham and his descendants, Moses, the Kingdom of David and Salomon...
- The study leads to a map of the diaspora.

Skills

Know and use the following:

- Palestine, Jerusalem on a map of the Roman empire
- Beginning of the writing of the Bible: 8th century BC
- Destruction of the second Temple 70

Tell and explain:

- Some of the grand narratives of the Bible of significance to religious beliefs
- Describe and explain the diaspora

The importance of the historical-cultural contextualization of the Biblical narratives is also stressed in the Ressources. According to this document, the objective of the course is to identify the historical conditions for the emergence of the religious

beliefs and their development in relation to geopolitical, social and cultural context as well as understand these beliefs through a study of some of the most important texts. It is also stressed that the biblical texts must be supplemented with non-religious historical sources, and the teacher is informed of pitfalls to avoid, *inter alia* a presentation of the stories and mythological figures of the Bible as historically proven facts and to confuse Hebrews with Jews. The Ressources also mentions how the theme can contribute to 'History of arts' through including different artistic creations and material traces of the ancient Jewish world (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2009c).

The curriculum for the beginning of Christianity reads (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2008a, our translation):

Knowledge

- Christians are dealt with in the framework of the Roman empire until the moment where the texts to which they refer are put in writing (letters of Paul, the Gospels).
- A few of the grand narratives of the tradition (New Testament) are studied as the foundation of Christianity.
- Relations between Christianity and the Roman empire are explained: persecution and mission (2th – beginning of 4th century). Establishment of an imperial Christianity due to Constantin the Great and the organization of the Church (4th-5th centuries).

Approaches

- The study begins with the contextualization of the beginnings of Christianity, derived from Judaism and developed in the Greek and Roman world. Roman sources to locate the appearance of Christians.
- The character of Jesus and his teaching is studied through some excerpts of the Gospels.
- The study is based on excerpts of texts, an episode of persecution, the role of Constantin the Great or an example of Christian art.

Skills

Know and use the following:

- Palestine, Jerusalem, Rome, Constantinople on a map of the Roman world in the 4th century
- Jesus died around 30
- Writing of the Gospels: 1st century
- Edict of Milan

Tell and explain:

- Some of the grand narratives of the New Testament of significance to religious beliefs
- An episode from the Christianization of the Roman Empire
- Describe a Christian basilica

Again the historical-cultural approach is stressed in the curriculum and the Ressources. The Ressources, as in the case with Judaism, encourage the teacher to distinguish between the Christian point of view on the formation of Christianity and a historical account and invites the teacher to focus on the development of Christian communities through texts and archaeological sources rather than via the Christian story of origin. This historical-cultural approach can also be seen in the listed content in the Ressources. One example is the study of the first communities through the letters of Paul and Roman sources which should be located in a political and geographical framework. (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2009d).

In the topic 'The Christian empires of the Middle ages' the pupils shall gain knowledge about political, cultural and religious aspects of the Christian empires of the East and West based on examples of historical characters, events or works of art. The Ressources mentions the limited scope of this topic, and encourage strongly that the teachers focus on only few examples that characterize the two empires. In the last topic 'Eyes on a distant world' the teachers can choose between a theme on Han China or India in the 4th and 5th centuries. Religious facts are not mentioned in the curriculum for the theme on Han China, while the curriculum for the theme on India includes knowledge about how Indian art of Hindu and Buddhist inspiration are

codified and worshipped, and the teacher can choose to focus on a Hindu myth or site from the time of the Gupta dynasty. The Ressources on these themes puts more weight on religious facts and mentions as possible contents in the theme on China the role of the emperor as the "son of heaven" and the three streams of thought (Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism) that are born or imposed in the Han China. The Ressources on India also mentions the co-existence of religious and philosophical movements and the epics in the Hindu tradition as possible contents areas, that can be studied through religious sites and arts and/or extracts from the Bhagavad Gita or Ramayana. These contents areas can, according to the Ressources, also provide a better understanding of today's China and India (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2009e).

3.2 Religious facts in History in *classe de cinquième*

History on the next level of lower-secondary school (7th year of compulsory school) covers the period from the Middle Age to the beginnings of modern age. It opens with a topic on 'Beginnings of Islam' in 7th to 9th century (10%) and continues with 'The feudal West, 11th - 15th century' (10%), 'Eyes on Africa' (10%) and 'Towards the Modernity late 15th - 17th century' (40%). The curriculum for 'Beginnings of Islam' reads (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2008a, our translation):

Knowledge

- Muslims are discussed in the context of the conquest and early Arab empires, in which Islamic tradition is written (7th - 9th century).
- Some of the narratives of the tradition (Koran...) are studied as foundations of Islam.
- The extension and the religious and cultural diversity of medieval Islam are presented at the time of the Umayyad empire or the Abbasid empire.

Approaches

- The study begins with the contextualization of the beginnings of Islam. It is based on historical sources, the story of an event (the conquest of Palestine-Syria, Egypt...) or a character.
- The texts (Qur'an, Hadith and Sunnah, Sira) are dated in relation to this context. They address the character of Muhammad.
- The study is conducted from the urban life (Damascus, Cordoba, Baghdad...) and/or characters (Moawwiya and Ali Haroun el Rachid...). It includes the submission of a mosque. It leads to a map that will locate the medieval Muslim world compared to its neighbors.

Skills

Know and use the following:

- The Muslim Era: 622
- The extension of Islam at the time of the Umayyad and Abbasid empire on a map of the Mediterranean area

Narrate and explain

- An episode of the Muslim expansion
- Some significant episodes in the Muslim tradition of beliefs

Describe

- A mosque (Medina, Damascus, Cordoba...)
- A city (Bagdad, Damascus, Cordoba...)

The approach to Islam reflects the contextualizing historical-cultural approach used also in the teaching of the formative period of Judaism and Christianity. The Ressources stresses that the teaching must clearly distinguish between the sources and narratives of the foundation of Islam in the Muslim tradition on the one hand, and non-religious historical sources and facts on the other. This also means that military and political conflicts, power and conquests in the formative period of Islam are important contexts to be addressed in a form suitable for the students. The Ressources also stresses the need to clearly distinguish between Arabs and Muslims, between Islam of today and Islam in the beginning and between Islam as religion and Islam as civilization (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale 2010g). The military and

political conflicts and power aspects are also dealt with in the topic 'Eyes on Africa', where the students shall gain knowledge about the Muslim conquest and expansion in North Africa and East Africa.

Religious facts are part of two themes of the topic on 'The feudal West, 11th - 15th century'. One theme is 'The place of the Church' which according to the national curriculum covers three areas of knowledge: aspects of religious feelings, efforts of the Church to guide conscience (dogmas and practice, fight against heresies, inquisition) and the economic power of the Church and its social and intellectual role. The points of departure are examples of:

- an Abbey and its religious agenda
- a Romanesque Church and Gothic cathedral including their religious, artistic, social and political aspects
- a work of art: statues, relics, frescoes, psalms
- an important religious individual (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2008, our translation).

The Ressources stresses the need to avoid to study only the Church institution and reduce the place and role of the Church to expression of the religious elite or to represent the medieval Church as a distinct aspect separated from other social-cultural-political aspects. The Ressources suggest that the teacher can include popular expression of faith and the intellectual and educational role of Universities, the cathedral schools and monasteries. Another theme is 'The expansion of the West' including the economic, religious and political aspects (the Reconquista and the Crusades). The pupils shall have knowledge about the First Crusade (1096-1099) and the geographic expansion of Christianity in Europe and the Mediterranean area in 11th - 14th century and be able to tell and explain an episode of the Crusades and the Reconquista (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2008a, our translation). The last topic 'Towards the Modernity late 15th - 17th century' centers in one theme on the cultural, religious and scientific upheavals in the period. One of the areas to be covered is the "religious crisis" and challenge to the unity of Western Christianity which led to reforms and confrontations between Catholics and Protestants in

Europe. The students are to gain knowledge about "the reforms and wars of religion in 16th century" and be able to "tell a significant episode of the reforms (in the lives of Luther, Calvin or a Catholic reformer) and explain its consequences" (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2008, our translation). According to the Ressources the teaching should include both the religious and political aspects of the reforms and conflicts. The second theme deals with the establishment of the "Absolute King" in the context of religious conflicts in the 16th century and the Edicts of Nantes 1598 which put civil peace and the authority of the King above religious confessions.

3.3 Religious facts in History in classe de quatrième and classe de troisième

Religious facts only appear few places in the national curriculum for History in the last two years of lower-secondary school (8th and 9th year of compulsory school) and often only as a matter of choice. In *classe de quatrième* (8th year) the focus is the Enlightenment and Industrial Age, partly covered in a topic on 'The revolution and the empire'. In one theme of this topic, the teacher can choose to include the proclamation of freedom of conscience in 1789 and the religious tensions before and after the Concordat of 1801. Thus 'religious facts' are inserted in a frame of political developments and struggles. This is also the case in the topic 'The 19th century'. The students shall in one theme about the industrial age gain knowledge about the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* 1891 (Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor). The curriculum also mentions that the industrialization lead to economic, social, religious and ideological upheavals as well as to the development of major religious and ideological ideas (liberalism and socialism), but without giving further details. The Ressources only mentions religious facts with a reference to the rejection of socialism by the Catholic Church while it still manifested a concern for social action. In the second theme on 'The development of French politics 1815-1914' the pupils shall explain the historical importance of the separation of Church and stat.

A new curriculum on *Histoire-géographie-éducation civique* in *classe de troisième* (9th year) was put in force at the beginning of the school year 2013-2014. This now

integrates the Ressources and links with the teaching in upper-secondary school. History deals with the world since 1914 with a focus on international and national political conflicts and developments. The national curriculum does not explicitly mention religious facts, but some of the themes could include this aspect, and the Ressources does mention religious issues in some of the themes in a frame of political conflicts. In the first topic 'World wars and totalitarian regimes (1914-1945)' the students shall study and compare the totalitarian regimes of Stalin and Hitler. The study of Hitler and Nazism includes anti-Semitism, persecution and genocide of the Jews. Topic two 'Global geopolitics (since 1945)' can also include some religious aspects in a theme about decolonization. The teacher can choose between three possible cases: India, Algeria or Belgian Congo which all to a certain extent, according to the Ressources, must touch upon religious issues. In the case of India, the study includes the clashes between Hindus and Muslims leading to the creation of two states, India and Pakistan. The Ressources also mentions, in the case of Algeria, the social and economic inequalities between Europeans and Muslims, and in the case of Belgian Congo, the role of Catholic missionaries in the powerful colonial administration. Another theme is 'Geopolitics in the contemporary world' with a focus on the geopolitical developments since the fall of the Communist bloc and the rise of globalization. The Middle East is one of the areas to be studied as a region of geostrategic importance and complexity, and, according to the Ressources, as an area with a mosaic of religions, holy places of the three monotheistic religions, political Islamism and political instability inherited in part from the colonial period and cold war. The last topic is 'Politics and society in France'. One theme centers on the state-politics in the World War II. In the description of the "regime of Vichy", the Ressources mentions that the ideology of this regime was in agreement with the values of the Catholic right and took part in the radicalization of Nazi anti-Semitism. (Ministère de l'éducation nationale 2014).

4. Religious facts in History in general and technical upper-secondary school

As it is the case in the lower-secondary school, religious facts are mostly present in History classes in the upper-secondary school. In general and technical upper-secondary school, religious facts became part of the History program from 2010 and onwards, particularly in the last year of compulsory education, *classe de seconde* (first year of lycée). The national curriculum for the History-Geography program is the 'Bulletin officiel spécial n°4 du 29 avril 2010', supplemented with the official guidelines Ressources. Using an intercultural approach, the aims of the program are that the students acquire knowledge about the past and attain the ability of reasoning and critical thinking as a basis of citizenship in the contemporary world.

4.1 Classe de seconde

The curriculum for History in 2nd class focus on "The Europeans in the history of the world" and consists of five themes: 'Europeans and the settlement of the world's population' (4h), 'The invention of citizenship in the ancient world' (7-8h), 'Societies and cultures in Medieval Europe, from the 11th to the 13th century' (8-9h), 'New geographic and cultural horizons of Europeans in the Modern Times' (10-11h) and 'Revolutions, liberties and nations in the dawn of the modern era' (15-16h). The first topic does not deal with religious issues. The second topic 'The invention of citizenship in the ancient world' has two themes: Athens 5th-4th century BC and Rome 1st-3rd. Religious facts are not mentioned explicitly in the curriculum, but the Ressources mention the religious aspects of the political life and cult of the cities which could be dealt with in History of Art (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale 2010b; 2010c). Topic three 'Societies and cultures in Medieval Europe, from the 11th century to the 13th century' has as the main topic Medieval Christianity, which according to the curriculum should include one of the two examples:

- An element of the religious heritage (church, cathedral, artwork...)
- An aspect of the multiple dimensions of the conversion to Christianity in Europe (evangelization, integration, exclusion, repression...) (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2010a).

According to the Ressources, the focus in this theme is on the central medieval period, in which the institution of the Church was renewed. This is highlighted in two dimensions: 1) the importance of religion and the Church in different areas of the economic, social and cultural life and 2) the growing intolerance towards religious dissent and minorities (including Jews) as an effect of the strengthening and influence of Christianity and the Church. The Ressources also states, that the two possible examples mentioned in the curriculum shall meet the objective of the program, "which is to observe the religious fact in a dynamic perspective: structuring, deepening and dissemination of the faith, but also resistance and repression" (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale 2010d, our translation). Although the Ressources warns against neglecting the attitude and performances of believers and only focus on the Church as an institution, this topic seems to center on the historical-political aspects of Medieval Christianity. Besides this topic, the teacher can choose either to deal with rural societies and cultures (life of peasant communities, feudality) or urban societies and cultures (urban growth, a study of two European towns from different cultural areas). These topics will also most likely include Christianity and the Church, and could also, according to the Ressources, include a study of a town where the Muslim influence was strong.

Topic four 'New geographic and cultural horizons of Europeans in the Modern Times' also includes religious facts in the curriculum. One theme is the 'Discovery of a larger world', which deals with the contacts between European and other worlds. A compulsory content is "from Constantinople to Istanbul: a place of contact between different cultures and religions (Christians, Muslim and Jewish)" The teachers can then choose between 'Men of the Renaissance' which includes a study of a reformer's life and his role in the expansion of Protestantism or 'The development of a new scientific spirit' (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2010a, our translation). A focus on religious facts related to conflicts, as in the case with the Ressources on Medieval Christianity, can also be found in the Ressources on the topic on the 'Discovery of a larger world'. In this it is stated that:

In addition to political and physical data, religious and cultural dimensions should also be taken into account when dealing with the European conquest: the conviction of Europeans that they should interfere in the fate of others and were chosen for this accompanies the paradoxical feeling of discovering the wonders of the rest of the world (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2010e).

At the same time, the Ressources also points to the study of the development from Constantinople to Istanbul as an example of a place where religious communities lived side-by-side.

The study of a reformer's life should according to the Ressources highlight the following points (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2010f, our translation):

- The character before the spiritual reform: The study must be placed in the religious climate of the time. The "religious revivals" cannot be limited to be results of the reformation, but is also part of a religious impetus of a Christian pedagogy and a wish for a return to the original sources in a context of challenging the Church of Rome (...) The way to reform came by way of Humanism for many (...)
- The upheaval in Christianity which resulted in the religious and institutional division was caused by a succession of events (...)
- The territorialization of denominations is part of the political conflicts in the 16th century. This relates to the utilization of the religious aspirations by the princes and their links to the reformers and actions in favor or against the reformations.
- The social dimension of religious commitments: Thomas Müntzer's vision soon conflicted with that of Luther, who asked the princes and nobles to suppress the peasant uprisings. Calvin expressed the same hostility against the Anabaptists in Münster. The insistence on the ecclesiastical and social order soon became an element of the Reformation, which contributed, together with the Catholic Reformation, to a process of "social disciplination" that was part of the development towards modernity.

4.2 Classe de première and Terminale

In second and third year of upper-secondary school, the programs differ between the different types of schools and also between the different specializations chosen by the students. Religious facts are only mentioned few times in the national curriculum for History in *Première* (second year of upper-secondary school) and are absent in the national curricula for the different programs of *Terminale* (last year) for the general upper-secondary school. The teaching in History in *Premiere* centers on the 20th century and has five topics: 1) 'Economic growth, globalization and mutations of the society since the mid-19th century' (9-10 hours), 2) 'The wars of the 20th century' (16-17 hours), 3) 'The century of totalitarian regimes' (10-11 hours), 4) 'Colonization and Decolonization' (7-8 hours) and 5) 'The French and the Republic' (15-16 hours). In 'Wars of the 20th century' the annihilation of the Jews and Gypsies in World War II and the terrorist attack 9/11 2001 is mentioned as contents, but the Ressources do not focus on religious issues connected to these events. The last topic 'The French and the Republic' mentions "the Republic, religions and *laïcité* since the 1880s" as one area to be covered. According to the Ressources, the focus should be the capacity of the idea of a Republican to evolve and respond to changes, *inter alia* changes in social structures, affirmation of women and diversity of religions. The topic on the Republic, religions and *laïcité* includes, according to the Ressources, analyses of the character of *laïcité* in the texts of the founding fathers of the Republic or discussions on the law of 1905 and a study of the development of *laïcité* since the beginning of 20th century. The Ressources points out that *laïcité* has been discussed periodically, most often in connection with the school, and is confronted by transformations during the last thirty years, for example the balance between religions and individualization of religion, as highlighted in the case of the veil in 1989. According to the Ressources, the study of this development can focus on the school, which serves as the "main challenge of the struggles between the defenders of *laïcité* and the Catholic Church" (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2011a, our translation).

5. Religious facts in other disciplines in general and technical upper-secondary school

Religious facts only occur in very few places in the national curriculum for other disciplines in general and technical upper-secondary school. Religious facts are mentioned in the compulsory disciplines French in second year (*Première*) and Civil, juridical and social education in final year (*Terminale*), but are also present in the curriculum for the transdisciplinary subject area History of Art. Religious facts can also be found in Philosophy, which is an elective in *Terminale* in general upper-secondary school and a compulsory discipline in *Terminale* in technical upper-secondary school.

French

French is a compulsory subject in the first and second year of general and technical upper-secondary school. Religious facts are only mentioned one place in the national curriculum for the second year (*Première*). One of the four study objects common to all general series in general and technical upper-secondary schools is 'Novel characters, from the 17th century to the present day' which shall include, *inter alia*, a selection of texts that reflect on the functions and meanings of the theatre in the Greek and Latin world: Studies of the birth and evolution of tragedy and comedy and the religious and civic dimensions of the theatre (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale 2010f).

Civil, juridical and social education (ECJS)

Religious facts can be found in one theme of the subject *Enseignement commun d'éducation civique, juridique et sociale* (ECJS) (Civil, juridical and social education) in the final class *Terminale* of the general series in upper-secondary school. The theme is called 'Pluralism of beliefs and cultures in a secular Republic'. The focus is the discussions about the acceptance of diversity in the public space and the claims of identity and cultural expression of the individual on the one hand, and respect for the collective framework of the Republic on the other. The curriculum suggests that

the teacher works with some of the following debates: 1) History and actuality of *laïcité*, 2) Sectarian/cultic and radical religious movements (*Dérives sectaires et intégrismes*) and 3) Common culture and cultural diversity. The theme on 'History and actuality of *laïcité*' includes "examples of recently asked questions in school, on the relationship between public and private domains, on the neutrality of teachers and programs, on obligations of students and families". These examples should lead to the reflection on the existing relationship between Republic, *laïcité* and society (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2011b, our translation). According to the Ressources it is important to study the solutions adopted in French society where the plurality of religious beliefs and their coexistence are guaranteed within the framework of *laïcité*. This includes respect of the main religious festivals but also basic requirements like authorization by local authorities for ritual slaughter, construction of places of worship, organization of Jewish parts of cemeteries, Muslims or Buddhists in cemeteries and pilgrimages. It is stressed, that *laïcité* is not the negation of religious expression, but rather promotes the plurality of beliefs and guarantees freedom to have, change or not have a religion. The Ressources also suggests to study the way religion is taught in school as one example of a French solution or to compare how different countries deal with the issue of religion in public life. The aim of this theme is to "define accurately the principles of the separation of politics and religion and neutrality of the State" in order to strengthen the student's knowledge and reflections about *laïcité* as "not only a product of the French national history, but a value and a principle pertaining to human rights" (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale 2012a).

This positive view on *laïcité* is contrasted with the explicit negative view in the curriculum on sectarian and radical movements expressed in the theme 'Cultic/Sectarian and radical religious movements'. The curriculum reads:

The sectarian aberrations can be understood as the result of groups using philosophical, religious or therapeutic masks to conceal objectives of power, influence and exploitation of followers. As fundamentalism, they lead to intolerance and isolation. The reality and the impact of these phenomena in

contemporary French society, the mechanisms and discourses activated are to be studied. In what ways are they likely to threaten democratic freedoms? What instruments may the Republic use in order to contain the dangers and protect itself against them. (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale 2011b, our translation)

The Ressources suggest an approach structured in four phases (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale 2012b, our translation):

- Study of definitions. This may, according to the Ressources, include analyses of parliamentary debates and adopted texts, in particular the law About-Picard, 12 June 2001 that has extended a protection of individuals against psychological or physical pressure in order to alter his/her judgment, acts or abstentions which are seriously detrimental, and the possibility of punishments of persons who abuse minor or vulnerable persons. The study may also include the analysis of the mechanisms and speeches being implemented in specific cases e.g. testimonies of victims, methods used to create a mental destabilization or promises of healing.
- The extent of the phenomenon. The Ressources point to the difficulty of the definitions, which led the French Government to rely on a set of criteria to characterize the existence of 'cultic aberrations', and thus poses the question of the assessment and measurement of the phenomenon in society, as likely to be identified as vectors of aberrations often under the guise of psychological training, counselling etc. This study may, according to the Ressources, include analyses of surveys about public opinion about sects and the motives of those who become followers of these or analyses of reports of the role of money.
- A discussion on the means used to control sectarian or 'cultic' behavior. The Ressources suggests as the end of the theme a discussion about the question: "how to reconcile the fight against alienating acts with respect for civil liberties and the principle of secularism without imposing a kind of 'thought police'?"

As can be seen from the above excerpts of the curriculum, the inclusion of religious facts in ECJS centers around discussions about secularization and religious freedom and ways to deal with "sectarian/cultic and radical religious movements". The aims can be characterized as giving the student's juridical and cultural knowledge in order to understand the positive value of secularization and the negative aspects of cults and radical movements on the one hand, but it also strengthens the student's ability to reflect analytical-critical on the principle of secularization and its challenges.

History of Art

History of Art is an interdisciplinary subject compulsory in all types of upper-secondary schools and is thus linked to or part of the teaching in the other subjects. In upper-secondary school the topic is given twenty-four hours and is based on three pillars: the historical periods, the six large artistic fields and the list of themes. The historical periods cover the 16th to 18th century (*Seconde*), 19th century (*Premiere*) and 20th century to our time (*Terminale*). The list of themes is divided into four fields: 1) Anthropological, 2) Social and historical, 3) Technical and 4) Aesthetic. Religious facts can be found in two of the topics in the Anthropological field: 'Arts and the sacred' and 'Arts, societies, cultures'. The former topic includes studies of:

- Art and the grand narratives (religions, mythologies): versions, avatars, metamorphoses etc.
- Art and the divine: its manifestation (representing, tell, show, discuss etc.); its challenges. The expression of religious feeling (meditation, worship, communion, emotion, ecstasy etc.) and its transmission.
- Art and beliefs (magic, witchcraft, superstitions, legends etc.).

The latter topic includes:

- Art and (body, communities, religions, social classes, membership etc.), languages and symbolic expressions (religious, civil and ceremonial costumes,

military; coats of arms, emblems, allegories; banners, flags, trophies, National anthems, patriotic songs etc.)

- Art and cultural identities: diversity (landscapes, places, attitudes, folk traditions), cohesion (usages, customs, daily practices, songs, legends, etc.), particularities (vernacular arts, regionalism, folklore, minorities, Diasporas, ghettos etc.)
- Art and the other: viewpoints (exotic, ethnocentrism, chauvinism etc.); exchanges (dialogues, mix, crossing); interbreeding. (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2008b)

The teachers can freely choose from the list of themes and topics, and the inclusion of religious issues or facts thus depends on the teachers and teaching in the other subjects.

Philosophy

Philosophy is an elective subject in *Terminale* (final class) of the general upper-secondary school and a compulsory subject in technical upper-secondary school. Religious facts are mentioned in the curriculum, but how and to which extent this area is included depends on the teachers. The subject shall, together with other disciplines, contribute to the development of the students' ability to analyze, give them a taste of concepts and a sense of intellectual responsibility and thus contribute to form autonomous minds with a critical consciousness of the contemporary world (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2003). The curriculum consists of a list of five topics, concepts, core concepts and authors which serves as a framework from where the teacher can choose. Depending on the students' specialized series in *Terminale*, some of these vary. One of the topics to be found in all series is 'culture' and consists, *inter alia* of the concept 'religion' and the core concepts transcendent/immanent and believe/know. Some of the possible authors to be chosen are religious philosophical thinkers like Augustin, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, William of Ockham, Søren Kierkegaard and Emmanuel Levinàs. Religion is not mentioned as a concept in the Philosophy curriculum for the

technological upper-secondary school, but "reason/belief" are listed as concept under the topic of 'truth'. The list of the authors is the same (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2005).

6. Concluding Remarks

France has been characterized as a unique case in Europe, belonging to the category of those countries that have no RE in the public school (Willaime 2007a). In the last twenty years, there has been a growing political, professional and public focus on the necessity to give 'religious facts' a higher profile in the school, and religious facts have been introduced into the curriculum for various disciplines, especially History in the lower and secondary school within the principle of *laïcité* as the overall frame.

This approach to RE as expressed in the national curricula and the Ressources has various characteristic features. As noted by Anna Van Der Kerchove (2013), the inclusion of religious facts in History in lower-secondary school in the national curricula is characterized by irregularity when it comes to quantity at different levels. This means that the pupils learn the most about religious facts in the first two years of lower-secondary school and thus primarily about religions and religious aspects in ancient times i.e. ancient Egyptian, Greek, Rome, India or China and in the formative period of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as well as Christianity in the Medieval period. In Ancient Greece and Rome, the curriculum makes room for including myths, rituals, artistic expressions and religious ideas as these religious aspects are interwoven with the political and social culture in this period. This is also the case with the study of the Middle Ages, where the pupils shall not only learn about the social, economic and political role of the Catholic Church but also about the religious sentiments of people. However, the overall frame is cultural and political history and the approach, particularly evident in the study of the formative periods of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, can be characterized as analytical-critical, stressing the need of historical-cultural contextualization and the distinction between an insider and outsider perspective. In the last two levels of lower- secondary school, religious facts

are only mentioned in the Ressources, and only as aspects of international and national political struggles, wars and developments since 1914. Thus religious facts or 'religions' in the Modern and Contemporary Age are only dealt with in lower secondary school in a context of political, cultural and social conflicts.

These characteristics are also to be found in upper-secondary school. But how and to what extent religious facts are included in History or other disciplines also depends on the choices made by the teacher. As in the lower-secondary school, it is mainly when dealing with Ancient times or the medieval period, that the curriculum and the Ressources include or make room for a study of religious traditions. This can be found in the first year of History, where it is possible to include religious material expressions (Art in Ancient Greece and churches and art in the Medieval Age) or the theological-dogmatic impetus as one of several causes behind the Reformation (one of two options). In French, the students also learn about the religious aspects of the Ancient Greek theatre, the tragedies and comedies. When dealing with the centuries after the Middle Ages, religious facts mostly connected to cultural-political discussions, conflicts or war. In History the teaching includes the religious dimension of the European conquest of other parts of the world in 15th- 16th centuries. In the second year of upper-secondary school (Première), prosecution of Jews in the wars of 20th century and discussions about secularism and religion in contemporary France is part of the teaching. The latter is also a focus in Civil, juridical and social education (ECJS) in the final year of upper-secondary school, where the teacher can choose to teach about the discussions about secularism and religion in public schools or on how the Republic can deal with "sects and radical movements". The curriculum and the Ressources of this subject stresses secularism as a positive strategy to deal with cultural and religious diversity in a liberal-democratic society and Human Rights frame. It is especially the interdisciplinary subject History of Art that makes room for including studies of religious material expressions and sentiments, but still this depends on the teachers. In Philosophy it is also possible to study religious philosophical thinkers or philosophical discussions related to the concept of religion.

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