Why Religious Education should not be Exclusively Religious

Cliteur, P.B.; Franken L., Loobuyck P.

Leni Franken
Patrick Loobuyck
(Eds.)

Religious Education in a Plural, Secularised Society

A Paradigm Shift

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Paul Cliteur

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1. Introduction

In our religiously and ideologically divided world, there seems to be one conviction that atheists, agnostics, religious believers and even religious fundamentalists unanimously subscribe: religion is back on the agenda. The "secularisation-thesis" has been refuted (e.g. Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2009; Stark, 1999) and there is a lively debate on the issue of religion in public life (e.g. Trigg, 2007). Moreover, also the adherents of sociological secularisation, have to admit now that religion does not disappear and still has influence and relevance, not only for individuals but also in the cultural and political arena of the society (cf. Habermas, 2006). What this all means for public policy, state education and international relations is still less clear. Some people advocate a comeback of religion in public policy; others try to explain why the reverse should be the case.

In this contribution, I want to deal with religious education as a part of the state school curriculum. As this book makes clear regarding this issue, there are several options that can be defended. One of the options is a system with confessional – or as Friedrich Schweitzer calls it in his contribution, "denominational" – religious education. Another option is the rejection of all the state-supported religious education, as in France (for discussion, see Van den Kerchove in this book). Education in the field of religion is a private matter. It is within the family that religious education has a legitimate place, not in state education. It is also possible, though, that religious education is maintained as a subject on state schools but that the *contents* of the subject should be objective and based on religious studies (see Jensen in this book). As such, religious education becomes less *religious*, than it is used to be in confessional schools. In this chapter, I want to clarify why I am in favour of the latter.

An important reason for this seems to me that we live in a world of religious extremism and religious polarisation. In such a world, critical analyses of (and critical comments on) religion should not only be welcomed, but also seem to be indispensable. The world in which we live today is very different from the world we lived in roughly twenty years ago. Today's world is a world challenged by religious extremism or religious fundamentalism. This has important implications for the way we think about the relationship between state and religion. More attention for a "secular outlook" (Cliteur, 2010) on life is an important countervailing power to the religiously oriented life- and worldviews.

Before addressing the topic of religious education in state schools, we have to make clear in what way the state can deal with religion. Inspired by Brugger (2007), I distinguish five models of thinking about the relationship between

state and religion. Those models are respectively: (1) Political atheism; (2) the religiously neutral state; (3) multiculturalism; (4) state church or one religious *Leitkultur;* and finally (5) theocracy. I will start with an analysis of those five models.

2. The Five Models Briefly Introduced

2.1 Political Atheism

The first model of "political atheism" could also be labelled as "totalitarian atheism". In this model, atheism is a state doctrine. Atheism is not regarded as the private conviction that God does not exist or that the reasons for believing in God's existence are unconvincing and therefore we had better suspend our judgment. Instead, it is regarded as an official state policy, aiming to eradicate all sympathy for religious ideas, and the idea that God exists in particular. The adherents of political atheism make a plea for an atheist state that has to foster atheist convictions in its citizenry. This requires a tremendous power of the state, of course, and therefore, the connection with totalitarianism is evident. The state has to control the minds of its citizens in the finest detail, exactly like what happened in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949).

Political atheism is just as objectionable as the ambitions of the Catholic Church in the time of the Inquisition (abolished as late as 1820) or – to a lesser degree – in the period during which the Church tried to suppress freedom of thought with an index of prohibited books (1559-1966).

Although the atheist state existed for a considerable time, it was not as long as the period of Catholic suppression of free thought. The atheist state was inaugurated in 1917, with the Russian Revolution, and ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent demise of the Soviet Empire. The attitude of the state regarding religion was strongly influenced by the writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883). According to Marx, religion was false consciousness. Criticism of religion was an essential part of social criticism, Marx (1977, p. 9) writes in his notorious introduction to *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie.* Man creates his religion, religion does not create man.

Marx's criticism has been used in Stalin's and Lenin's work, which made this critique an essential part of state activity. The state has to free people from the pernicious illusions that religion creates. The state has to liberate people from religion for the same reasons a modern state looks after the health of its citizens (see Froese, 2008).

In this respect, there is an important difference with contemporary Western authors, presenting atheist positions in the public debate. Contemporary atheism as advocated by authors such as Richard Dawkins (2006), Sam Harris (2005), Christopher Hitchens (2007), Daniel Dennett (2006), Victor J. Stenger (2009)

and others (they are brought together under the banner of "the New Atheism") is not meant as a state policy. For the authors mentioned, atheism is a private conviction. This "private atheism" respects the right of every citizen to choose a religion, but also to reject a religion or even all religions. The state has only a limited function: guaranteeing that every citizen is free from fear in expressing his religious feelings and preventing the indoctrination of children with violent ideologies. The state should also make it possible for religious criticism to be voiced. The state must protect its citizens against the aggression of those prepared to use violence. The state should thus hold the "monopoly of force" and combat all (religious) fanatics using violent means to spread their ideology.

2.2 Political Secularism

The *second* model is the religiously neutral state. The most well-known brand of this model is the French *laïcité.* The French republic is even organised around this principle. The commission Stasi reported that all democratic states respect liberty of conscience and the principle of non-discrimination, but only the French republic is based on *laïcité* as a fundamental principle (Stasi, 2004, p. 21). *Laïcité* is based on three indissoluble values (Stasi, 2004, p. 21): freedom of conscience, equality before the law, and the neutrality of political power. *Laïcité* is by no means an abridgment of freedom of religion. On the contrary, it is the central presupposition under which freedom of religion can flourish. *Laïcité* makes it possible for every individual citizen to choose for himself what choices to make with regard to his spiritual and religious life (Stasi, 2004, p. 21). The equality before the law prohibits all discrimination or force and the state does not give privileges to any of the spiritual creeds.

The model of *laïcité* has roots in European history, going back to ancient Greece, the Renaissance and the Reformation (Ducomte, 2005, p. 6). It is intimately connected with the Edict of Nantes (1598), issued by Henry IV in order to give the Calvinists of France (Huguenots) substantial rights in a country that was predominantly Catholic (Stasi, 2004, p. 25).

The movement of laïcité aims at realising what I have dubbed "political secularism" (Cliteur, 2010, p. 172-281). It is more often characterised as secularism tout court. It is the explicit aim of political secularism not to choose for or against religion. The state will remain "neutral". All religions (as far as they do not advocate violence) may be represented in society, but none of them has a privileged position. Upholding religion is not a task of the state (Vianès, 2004, p. 163ff.).

In a system that operates under the banner of *laïcité,* the state is not allowed to make favourable propaganda for religion, but also upholds a ban on financing churches or other religious institutions. The pretence of political secularism is that within this approach, the state does not manifest an *anti*-religious outlook,

as its critics want us to believe, but a *non*-religious stance. The commission Stasi distinguishes between two models of *laïcité*. The first is combative and anti-clerical. This was defended by Émile Combes. The second is more concerned with the separation of Church and State and considers all spiritual options with equal respect. This second approach, which is more liberal and tolerant, goes back to Jules Ferry, Jean Jaurès and Aristide Briand (Stasi, 2004, p. 27).

This element of political secularism also advocated outside of France, of course. Especially the USA have a strong tradition of separation (Madison, 1999). However, despite this ressemblance and due to history, the USA has clearly another approach concerning the place of religion in the public sphere than France. The Turkish model of Ataturk, who read more in Rousseau than in the Qur'an and who demanded of his ministers that they would read Descartes (Sorman, p. 151, 278), is another example of political secularism. Those three empirical manifestations of the religiously neutral state show considerable differences and we should thus not identify the *ideal* of the religiously neutral state uncritically with one of its empirical manifestations (cf. Kuru, 2009).

2.3 Multiculturalism

The third model is the "multicultural" or "multireligious state" (See Modood, 2007, ch.4; Parekh, 2000; 2008). This model intends to treat all religions equally by helping them equally. In other words, the state does not favour Christianity over Buddhism or vice versa, but the state treats Christianity on an equal basis with Buddhism. If Christianity gets state subsidies for its preachers, the maintenance of its churches or the organisation of its chaplains, Buddhism can claim subsidies as well. If Christianity gets its religious institutions financed by the state, all religious denominations can claim this. The adherents of the multicultural state see this as "equal treatment" (Napel & Theissen, 2009).

The question is, of course, whether this is always correct. Quite often, equality is not fully implemented by the law and due to historical reasons, one religion is still the *primus inter pares* or the first one among equals. This is for instance the case in Belgium for Catholicism (Torfs, 2005; Franken & Loobuyck, 2011). Moreover, helping all the religious life- and worldviews equally can still imply unequal treatment towards non-religious world views. This problem may be partially amended, of course, by making secularist positions part of the multicultural model. But then still problem lingers that the whole society is subdivided in religious life-stances and all commonality withers away. Especially in a time of fragmentation this is a serious problem. In this time it is not "diversity" we have to foster, but unity, commonality of purpose.

Sometimes the third model is characterised as "pluralism" or the "pluralist state", but that is somewhat misleading because political secularism (the second model) aims to serve pluralism as well. The choice seems to be between "sponta-

neous pluralism" or "not state-supported pluralism" (second model) on the one hand and "state-organised pluralism" or "accomodationism" (third model) on the other hand.

2.4 State Church or Religious "Leitkultur"

The *fourth* model is the established church. In this model, state and religion have an intimate connection in upholding the public order. This does not imply that other religions than the official religion are suppressed, but they do not have priority. This discrimination is usually justified on a historical basis. The religion that was first realised on the territory of the state gets more attention and enjoys special privileges, as is the case with the Anglican Church in the United Kingdom.

The idea that one specific religion can have a special or privileged position in the state has recently resurfaced in the idea of a religious *Leitkultur.* In the Netherlands, for instance, this idea can be found within political parties as the CDA (Christian democrats) or PVV (Party of Freedom). The idea is that the Netherlands, like other Western cultures, are deeply influenced by Judeo-Christian culture. This historical fact is given a special meaning in the sense that adherents of the third model proclaim that these historical roots may determine contemporary identities of Western states.

The word *"Leitkultur"* or "leading culture" originated in the German political discourse from 2000 onwards, and was introduced in 1998 by the German scholar Bassam Tibi in his book *Europa ohne Identität: Leitkultur oder Wertebeliebigkeit*. Tibi came originally from Syria, but is engaged in an international career. Although he is the one who coined the concept *"Leitkultur"*, Tibi seems perturbed by the way his concept has been misunderstood or even hijacked by others, in particular by politicians who ignored his European framing of the concept.

For Tibi, *Leitkultur* should refer to a necessary "European dominant culture" of human rights and democracy. *Leitkultur*, in the sense Tibi coined the concept, referred to a consensus on civilised European values as secular democracy, individual rights (not: *collective* rights), civil society and (religious and cultural) tolerance (Tibi, 2001, p. xvi). However, Tibi's concept was hijacked by Christian-democratic politicians to refer to the Judeo-Christian roots of European culture and it was also restricted by some to "German *Leitkultur*", something that was deeply repugnant to Tibi, who rejects all "Sauerkraut- (oder Sauerbraten-)mentalität" (Tibi, 2001, p. xiii). Instead, the concept *Leitkultur* should refer to a democratic, non-religious, non-ethnic, political "civilisational" identity (Tibi, 2001, p. xiv). Only in this sense could the concept *Leitkultur* be helpful in the context of a successful integration of newcomers (well to distinguish from assimilation).

Tibi calls his own book on this subject an "Enlightenment-book" *("Aufklärungs-Buch")* and refers to Kant and Hegel as sources of inspiration (Tibi, 1998, p. xvii).

2.5 Theocracy

The *fifth* model is theocracy. This is the opposite of political atheism. There is one religion that is favoured above the other religions and the other religions are suppressed – often with law and force. This model radicalises the tendency inherent in the model of the state church. Examples are Saudi Arabia and Iran.

3. Religious Education and Secularism

Presented in the order I have described above, there is an increasing influence of religion on the sphere of the state. Political atheism (model 1) excludes all influence by all means available. Political secularism (model 2) tries to neutralise the state. Multiculturalism (model 3) interprets "neutrality" as giving aid to religion in general. The idea of the State Church (model 4) opts for one specific religion on historical grounds. And theocracy (model 5) prescribes one religion and tries to suppress all other religions by force.

It hardly needs saying that religious education in state schools will get a completely different dimension when based on the different models. In a theocracy, religious education is nothing other than the inculcation of the religious dogmas of the dominant creed. Under political atheism, religious education cannot but be substituted by the indoctrination with the marxist-leninist propaganda. religious education based on the multiculturalist model tries to show the value and equal beauty of all the religious creeds. Court ideologue here would be Karen Armstrong (1993, 2009).

Thinking about religious education in state schools requires reflection on the models of state/religion-relations. One of the starting points of my reflection on religious education is that the organisation and content of religious education must be seen as heavily dependent on what model of state/religion-relations is the best under the circumstances we are living in today. As I will try to make clear in what follows, the model of the *secular* or *religiously neutral state* is the most appropriate and this has much to do with the resurgence of religious extremism. According to Eric Kaufmann (2010), religious fundamentalism is on the rise and this must be taken seriously (see also Steyn, 2006; Berlinski, 2006; Goldberg, 2006) It is thus also against the background of religious extremism and religious fundamentalism that we have to think about religious education.

From the secular perspective, religious education can under the present circumstances only gain legitimacy under two conditions:

1. It may not be the case that *one particular* religion is placed above other religions.

2. It may not be the case that the religious position *in general* is placed above non-religious positions.
   Thus, basically, religious education may not degenerate into a public relations campaign for one religion in particular or show bias in favour for religion in general in comparison with the non-religious position. In other words, religious education has to comply with the principles of the secular or religiously neutral state. There are, however, many misunderstandings about the nature of secularism, so let me continue by making some remarks on secularism.

4. Traditional Secularism and Secularism Renewed

The misunderstandings can best be illustrated by an analysis of an article by the British philosopher Julian Baggini. I agree with Baggini (2005-2006, p. 205) when he writes that "secularism is not a doctrine of unbelief, but of state neutrality towards matters of belief". It does not "privilege any one form of belief or non-belief". Moreover, secular governments and politicians do not invoke religious authorities to defend their policies. Instead they speak to principles "that all the population can share irrespective of their belief or non-belief".

But then he continues with an interpretation of secularism that is, to my mind, deeply inimical to the true core of the concept and we have to guard that this new conception of secularism (presented as "secularism renewed") does not undermine this important political ideal.

Based on a multiculturalist inspiration, Baggini makes a distinction between "traditional secularism" and a kind of new secularism that he defines as "secularism renewed". His own kind of secularism would allow religion its place in the "public domain" (Baggini, 2005-2006, p. 208). Apparently, Baggini seems to think that "old secularism" *denies* that religion has a place in the "public domain". This seems to me another misunderstanding. Traditional secularism or old secularism has never denied that religion has a rightful place in the public domain in the sense that citizens have the right to defend their religious views against the views of other citizens. The only thing that secularists deny is that you can claim *financial funding* or other preferential treatment by the state for your religious views.

"Secularism renewed" in the sense coined by Baggini has different dimensions ranging from wearing religious symbols in the public domain to other important and tricky questions. In the following I will single out one specific issue: the question whether secularism requires what has been called "respect" for religion. Inspired by the work of Bhikhu Parekh, Baggini insists that "mere tolerance" of diverse beliefs is not enough. According to Baggini (2005-2006, p. 207) secularism requires not only tolerance, but also respect and genuine acceptance. He wants to "discuss differences openly and in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding". Now, open discussion is fine and respect *for the person* is a firm

basis of contemporary ethics (explicitly argued for by Immanuel Kant). But "respect" for the *visions* that people entertain can easily smother a free debate (interesting observations on this topic are made by Rushdie, 2010).

Therefore, Baggini's renewed secularism is a mistake because it would undermine the whole idea of secularism. Nobody can demand "genuine acceptance" of whatever worldview from his fellow citizens. That is precisely what secularism based on the notion of tolerance rejects. The key to a pluralist society is that everyone has the right to dissent, the right to deny what someone else affirms. That is the whole idea of a free discussion. Demanding "genuine acceptance" violates this essential characteristic of a free society. Especially religious education should not be misused as an instrument to inculcate "respect" for the religious position in comparison to non-religious worldviews.

5. Secularism and Criticism of Religion

My misgivings can well be illustrated with reference to one of the examples Baggini presents. Baggini (2005-2006, p. 208) writes that an author such as Richard Dawkins is "too dismissive of religion". He also thinks that Dawkins "underestimates the extent to which religion of a less bone-headed variety has an enduring appeal which cannot be dismissed as a mere vestige of a less sophisticated past." In addition, he contends that secularism is up to the task of granting the respect and recognition believers are demanding.

A quotation that is provided by Baggini to illustrate something that the "new secularism" should not endorse is a sentence by Richard Dawkins extracted from an article in *The Guardian* (15 September 2001). Dawkins wrote: "To fill a world with religion, or religions of the Abrahamic kind, is like littering the streets with loaded guns. Do not be surprised if they are used." (Dawkins, 2001; Baggini, 2005-2006, p. 208). Dawkins's critical vision certainly contradicts the interpretation of religion by many contemporary theologians, but what is wrong with that? There is absolutely nothing against the comparison of the Abrahamic religions with loaded guns. It may not be in accordance with the way most people experience the essence of their religion, but there is nothing wrong with the comparison. What Dawkins argues for is doing research into the sources of violence within the Abrahamic religions. This is a legitimate topic for social research and many contemporary authors are addressing these issues (Juergensmeyer, 2003; 2008). Trying to get these issues of the agenda is no contribution to scientific progress. Denying Dawkins the moral right to say and defend his thoughts would amount to nothing less than a declaration of the illegitimacy of the whole atheist and secularist tradition. If the new secularism that Baggini wants to argue for, would become the standard, whole parts of the tradition of philosophy (Nietzsche, Spinoza, Voltaire, Holbach and many other thinkers) would become obsolete.

As an avowedly atheist author, Baggini confronts us with puzzling comments. His "secularism renewed" cannot be reconciled with the definition of what he himself defines as the essence of secularism. Secularism is about *neutrality* towards religion, not about *respect* for religion or *sympathy* for its devotees. Secularism should also not be confused with friendliness towards believers or mistaken for politeness; it is – according to Baggini's own definition – about neutrality.

Now, let me not be misunderstood. I do not wish to deny the value of politeness or friendliness or sympathy, but I think it is essential not to deflate secularism into something it is not. Secularism has to protect criticism of religion, also when this criticism is considered as impolite or rude by the adherents of this religion.

Moreover, we must ask why we should make an exception for religious ideas. Why not write about the "Abrahamic religions" in the same vein as we write about Marxism, liberalism, communitarianism or whatever other creed people have assented to? What Marxists, libertarians, followers of John Stuart Mill or whatever other ideologue or philosopher can legitimately demand from us is that we "tolerate" their ideas. But if they would demand from us "genuine acceptance" of their ideas, this should make us very suspicious and it would be an unreasonable demand. The same is true for religious issues. Secularism must "tolerate" the opinions of Richard Dawkins and the vision of Karen Armstrong. Controversial opinions must be tolerated, not accepted nor respected. It does not matter whether those opinions are to be found in Dawkins's bestseller *The God Delusion* or in the bestseller of all times: the Hebrew and Christian Bible. Demanding "genuine acceptance" for self-appointed holy books violates the sound principles of a free society.

In short, if Baggini wants to proclaim as an element of his new secularism that religious ideas are being granted the respect that they deserve, this is a mistake. That does not mean that I think religion *does not* deserve respect. What I mean is that it is the essence of secularism that *some* people may think and proclaim that religion deserves respect, while *other* people may think and proclaim that it does not. Secularism is a plea for an open space for discussion, not for scapegoating some ideas as "disrespectful" only because you do not agree with them.

6. The Implications of Free Debate on Religion for the State Curriculum

Baggini's interpretation of secularism has also consequences for the topic of religious education within the state curriculum as I hope to make clear in the remainder of this contribution. But let me first say something about religious education in general.

The Dutch scholar Siebren Miedema quotes his colleagues Gerard Dekker and Hijme Stoffels with regard to religion. With "religion" or "worldview", they mean "a more or less coherent and consistent whole of convictions and attitudes in respect with human life" (Dekker & Stoffels, 2001, p. 33 – quoted in Miedema, 2006, p. 113). In those types of definitions, religions and worldviews are identified or at least presented as closely similar. This approach has far-reaching consequences for the topic of religious education, as one may expect. The philosophy of Spinoza comprises also a "more or less coherent and consistent whole of convictions in respect with human life" and should therefore be part of religious education as well. The same is true for the philosophy of Plato or Nietzsche. Religious education would in this case be hardly distinguishable from philosophy as a subject on the school-curriculum. We may also further differentiate, as Miedema (2006, p. 113) does, by distinguishing between religions or worldviews *with a God concept* (Christian, Islamic, Hinduist) and others that do *without* a God concept (e.g. Buddhism, humanist or atheist life stances).

The main discussion is about the way the traditional or historical religions have to be treated within the state-school curriculum. Therefore, in the background we should always keep in mind the question how to treat the religions with a God concept, in particular the Abrahamic religions. Should they be given a certain priority status simply because of their historical role in shaping the Western mind and politics? In short, how should Christianity, Judaism and Islam be treated? Do we have to show them a priori "respect"?

With regard to this topic, Miedema (2006, p. 114) makes a distinction between:

- the public domain of state and society (the *macro* level)
- the social domain of social associations, school, church, organisations, and clubs (the *meso* level)
- the private domain of family, individual and personal life (the *micro* level)

I welcome this distinction, as every secularist should do, but would like to go a little further. From a secularist perspective, it is essential to make a new distinction within the realm of the macro level (the first level). On this macro level we find "state" and "society", both lumped together under the notion of "public domain", although state and society are different entities. Actually, for the purposes of sound constitutional thought, "society" has many characteristics in common with the last category – the private domain (micro level). You may e.g. not only pray in your own bedroom (the sacred room of "privacy"), but also on the street, in the open air and thus – in the heart of the public domain.

For this very reason, religious worship, but also *evangelism* (bringing the 'good news') are constitutionally protected. Of course, religious services in the public domain have to be subjected to certain restrictions and rules (the traffic may not be obstructed, for instance), but in general, manifesting your religious preferences in public is allowed within a free society. Only because of this freedom, evangelising is possible. However, society is different from the state. This is

especially relevant with regard to the confusing and controversial topic of wearing religious symbols in the "public domain". Here, protagonists and antagonists wage war against each other (see Teitelbaum, 2010) without making the crucial distinction between state and society. Secularism opposes wearing religious symbols *within the state,* but certainly not *within society.* Society is the realm of religious pluralism. The French philosopher Alain Badiou, writing about the debate on wearing religious symbols on state schools contends:

> "D'aimables républicaines et républicains arguèrent un jour qu'il fallait une loi pour interdire tout foulard sur les cheveux filles. A l'école d'abord, ailleurs ensuite, partout si possible. Que dis-je, une loi? Une loi!" (Badiou, 2004)

This is a caricature of an important constitutional debate, unworthy of a serious philosopher. Badiou knows perfectly well that the discussion was on wearing religious symbols in state schools *("l'école"),* not in society *("partout").* He gives his accusation an air of legitimacy by proclaiming that forbidding religious symbols in the schools is only a beginning and a general prohibition will follow soon. But this is speculation. The secularist tradition makes a sharp distinction between state and society. The state should be religiously neutral, but in society citizens may manifest their religious alliances. Their freedom of religion or – as the American constitution guarantees – the "free exercise of religion" is at stake.

The state should *integrate*, on the territory of the state, the community of citizens into a harmonious whole. This presupposes a shared consensus on certain basic values. Here, religion comes into play. Under the present circumstances, none of the great historic religions can play the role of integrating factor for the population at large. This makes all advocating of "religion" as a unifying factor so misguided. Politicians who flirt with the notion of "religion" as the source of social cohesion never tell us *what religion* is supposed to fulfil this role. Moreover, under the present circumstances, no historic religion *can* fulfil this role. In an age of religious extremism and religious polarisation, it may even be safely contended that religion plays a divisive role nowadays (cf. Harris 2005, Hitchens, 2007). Religion welds the religious group together (Catholic Christians, Protestant Christians, Sunnite Muslims, and Shiite Muslims), but divides the community at large (the national community). I hope this simple statement of fact will not be interpreted as "offensive" for religious feelings; it is certainly not meant to be. It is a simple historical and sociological generalisation and can be verified by every unbiased observer who sets him- or herself to the task.

It is often referred to that religions can have positive functions. Religion can be, in the words of Miedema, "a source that shows itself also positively in individual responsibility, a strong concern for other people and concrete practices of solidarity" (Miedema, 2006, p. 115). I do not want to deny this. Yet I think this misses the point. What we need under the present circumstances is a concern with *shared reasons* for certain kinds of solidarity. What a secularist answers to

religious believers who use religious arguments in a political debate is simply: "I am not convinced by your arguments." He does not say: "You are not allowed to use these arguments." And what a secularist proposes is: "Might it not be a good idea to use a non-religious vocabulary to decide the political and moral questions that affect us all: a Moral Esperanto? (Cliteur, 2007; 2009).

7. The Implications of Secularism for Religious Education

Finally, a few words about what this implies for religious education in state schools. In the United Kingdom, religious education was made a compulsory school subject in 1944 (White, 2004). This was partly done to support the moral values underlying democracy. Already from the 1930's onwards, Europe saw the increasing influence of totalitarian systems of belief – Nazism, Fascism, and Communism. After the Second World War, another justification of religious education came to the fore: it had to do with understanding and respecting other religions and beliefs. Since the secularisation of the nineteen sixties of the 20th century, some commentators asked: why educate people in a subject that has less and less relevance? What White (2004, p. 151) remarks for the UK is relevant for many western European countries: only a minority of the British people firmly believe in God and if the secularisation trends continue, "organised Christianity is likely to die out in Wales around 2020; and in England by 2060."

However, after 9/11, new critical voices of religious education were heard. Religions have a tendency to support violence, so why educate young people in ideologies that might later have negative consequences? Nonetheless, I think religious education can still have a place in the state-school curriculum. However, after 9/11, religious education *cannot be the same subject* as it was before. religious education can only have a legitimate place within the state-school curriculum when religion is not only presented from its most rosy side. Religion can be a force for good but also for evil. I think Jacqueline Watson (2008) is right that children can also learn from atheism and other explicitly non-theistic worldviews and ideologies. Schools should thus not only present the Karen Armstrong-vision on religion, but also that of Richard Dawkins. Just as the freedom of religion comprises nowadays the freedom to be critical of religion, religious education should also open the possibility of a critical evaluation of the role of religion in society. Bertrand Russell's *Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization?* (1930) or his *Why I am not a Christian?* (1927) must be part of religious education, just like Chateaubriand's *Génie du Christianisme ou Beautés de la Religion Chrétienne* (1802).

With all due respect for Baginni's views on "secularism renewed", we should be careful not to loose the good elements of traditional secularism. So no "genuine acceptance" of worldviews, but "tolerance" and free debate – and this is also true for religious education in state schools. Only on the basis of real religious

neutrality can religious education within state-schools make a contribution to a harmonious society in which religious and non-religious citizens can live together within the confines of the law. Moreover, also the importance of a secular and religiously neutral state must be an essential part of religious education in schools. Because only based on (the acceptance of) *this type of neutrality,* we may hope that religious extremism can be countered by arguments and hopefully will lose the struggle for the hearts and minds of the new generation.

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