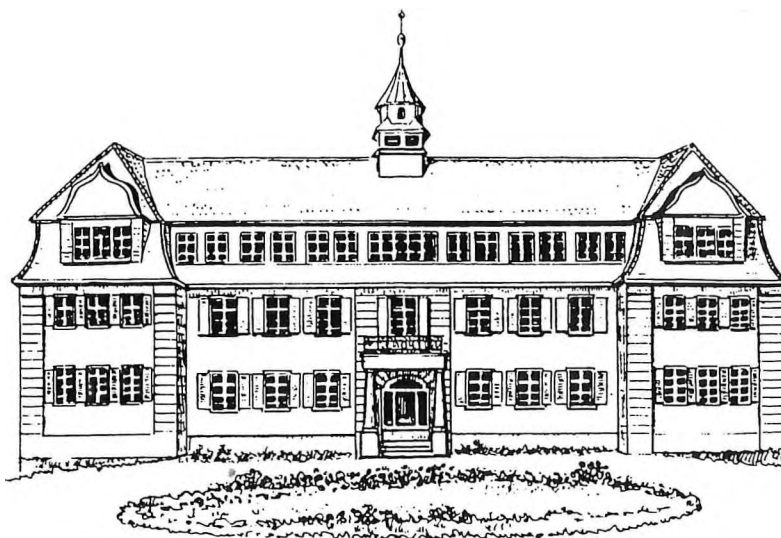




## Studying religions in social sciences at school

65th European Teachers' Seminar  
Donaueschingen, Germany, 24-29 October 1994

### Report



Council for Cultural Co-operation  
Teacher Bursaries Scheme

The **Council of Europe** was founded in 1949 to achieve greater unity between European parliamentary democracies. It is the oldest of the European political institutions and has 33 member States<sup>1</sup>, including the 12 members of the European Community. It is the widest intergovernmental and interparliamentary grouping in Europe, and has its headquarters in the French city of Strasbourg.

Only questions related to national defence are excluded from the Council of Europe's work, and the Organisation has activities in the following areas: democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms; media and communication; social and economic affairs; education, culture, heritage and sport; youth; health; environment and regional planning; local democracy; and legal co-operation.

The **European Cultural Convention** was opened for signature in 1954. This international treaty is open to European countries that are not members of the Council of Europe, and it enables them to take part in the Organisation's programmes on education, culture, sport and youth. So far, 43 States have acceded to the European Cultural Convention: the Council of Europe's full member states plus Albania, Belarus, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, the Holy See, Latvia, Monaco, Moldova, Russian Federation, Ukraine

The **Council for Cultural Co-operation (the CDCC)** is responsible for the Council of Europe's work on **education and culture**. Four specialised committees - the Education Committee, the Standing Conference on University Problems, the Culture Committee and the Cultural Heritage Committee - help the CDCC to carry out its tasks under the European Cultural Convention. There is also a close working relationship between the CDCC and the regular conferences of specialised European ministers responsible for education, culture and cultural heritage.

The CDCC's programmes are an integral part of the Council of Europe's work, and, like the programmes in other sectors, they contribute to the Organisation's three overarching policy objectives for the 1990s:

- the protection, reinforcement and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms and pluralist democracy;
- the promotion of an awareness of European identity;
- the search for common responses to the great challenges facing European society.

The CDCC's education programme covers school, higher and adult education, as well as educational research. At present, its main priorities are projects on: the European dimension of secondary education; university co-operation; adult education and social change; modern languages; and the pooling of the results of educational research.

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<sup>1</sup>Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovak Republik, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom.

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THE CDCC'S TEACHER BURSARIES SCHEME

65th European Teacher's Seminar

on

**Studying religions in social sciences at school**

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24 - 29 October 1994



Report

by

MARTIN PALMER

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## INTRODUCTION

This seminar marked an important development in the Council of Europe's work, one which has been under discussion for many years but which could only now begin to be realised. The Council, reflecting the particular history of both its development and of post-war Europe, or to be more precise of the post war Europes, has traditionally steered clear of religion. The history of Europe has been bedevilled for many centuries by religious rivalry, and the founders of the Council felt that religion had no specific place in their vision of the new Europe.

Ten years ago, the World Council of Churches began to discuss with the Council of Europe the place and significance of the religious understanding of education, particularly in the context of a pluralist world and multi-faith educational issues. The discussions were held as part of the World Council of Churches' Interlink project which was exploring the diverse philosophies of education that arise from belief systems such as Islam, Christianity or secular Humanism. It was the hope of those involved in these discussions, that the Council would take a leading role in developing dialogue between faiths on education and not just on religious education but on the very values which were believed to underpin education per se.

But the time was not yet ripe. It took the tremendous changes in Eastern Europe with the fall of Communism and the resurgence of the churches, the continued rise of religious communities such as the Muslims in Europe and the debate about the role of the spiritual in the material for the time to come when the Council could openly explore this very contentious area.

However, the Council began to explore associated areas through specific seminars and conferences from 1987 onwards.

Starting with the studies on the Jewish Contribution to European Culture (1987) and the Contribution of Islamic Civilisation to European Culture (1991), the Council also explored Sects and new religious movements (1992), the fight against racism, xenophobia and intolerance (1993) and religious tolerance in a democratic society (1993). In all of these, the importance of the study of religions for a balanced understanding of contemporary societies, was stressed. For example Recommendation 1178 (1992) 7.i states:

"the basic education curriculum should include objective factual information concerning established religions and their major variants concerning the principles of comparative religion and concerning ethics and personal and social rights;"

Recommendation 1202 (1993) 16.iii states:

"to ensure that studies of religions and ethics are part of the general school curriculum, and to work towards a differentiated and careful depiction of religions in school books (including history books) and in classroom teaching with a view to achieving a better and deeper understanding of the various religions"

In 1994, the Council decided to hold its first avowedly religious seminar. It approached one of the people who had been involved in the World Council of Churches project Interlink, Mr. Martin Palmer of the International Consultancy on Religion, Education and Culture (ICOREC). Using ICOREC's network of contacts and the Council's own resources and network, the seminar was assembled in a few

months and the debate was commenced on the role and place of religion in formal education and the perspective of the religious upon the issues of education.

The aim and objectives of the seminar were set out in the briefing paper prepared by the Council.

"Religion is part of cultural identity and cannot be overlooked, especially in the context of our pluricultural societies. In consequence it is for the school to promote in its teaching a cultural, social and historic approach to religions which is at one and the same time tolerant, multilateral and free from all clericalism and ideological indoctrination.

The aim of the seminar is to examine:

- how to approach the teaching of religions as social and cultural facts, and value bases, the analysis and understanding of which is necessary for an understanding of the past and the present.
- how to provide teachers with the means and the elements for reflection which allow them to integrate the teaching of religions in various subject areas linked in particular with the humanities and the social sciences and to turn it into a 'horizontal' theme."

Unfortunately, much of this language indicates the particular cultural bias with which the Council approaches the issue of religion and its place in education. It also indicates areas of supposed superiority of secular thought - all of which are of course value statements and as such open to the same criticism as value statements springing from religious convictions. This tension was one which was to shape and affect the Seminar throughout, though not in a particularly negative way. The debate about values, assumptions and beliefs began as it was to go on, taking seriously that there is no such thing as an objective view; that all values are culturally biased and that therefore the secular humanist perspective is as belief oriented as the Muslim, Hindu or Christian perspective.

This was spelt out in the preparatory paper by Martin Palmer.

If we are to examine the place of religion in the social sciences in Europe, we need to be aware just how one-sided most of our Education systems are. For complex reasons which I will touch upon later, Europe has an understanding of reality which can only handle the phenomenological. It has chosen on the whole to see value and significance primarily in terms of the quantifiable and to explore that by reductionism. It has produced a system which has to a great extent produced more and more people who know more and more about less and less!

What has been lost or at times quite deliberately set aside in much of European Education, has been the affective rather than the effective; the unquantifiable rather than the quantifiable; the holistic vision rather than the particular. In short, what all cultures throughout time have described in terms such as the spiritual, the religious or the Divine perspective on life.

Sadly, Europe's experience with the religions has not always been a happy one. Although every country in Europe owes its educational system at least in part to the

fact that Christianity, Judaism and Islam take education very seriously, many countries have felt impelled to exclude religion from any role in education. The reasons for this are diverse ranging from fear of the power of religious institutions to rejection of certain fundamental beliefs and values of religion. The struggle between rising nationalism in the 19th century and Nationalist Communism in the 20th century and in particular the non-nationalist, universal world vision of the Catholic Church, led to many clashes. This also combined with the powerful conservatism of many expressions of religion which prevented them absorbing and understanding developments such as the theory of evolution, and thus left them behind in the expansion of knowledge.

The beginning of the 20th century saw many in the West believing that humanity was "growing up" and life was getting better and better. In terms of the usual standards of living, we are better off. Better health, better educational opportunities, better houses and so forth. But two world wars, the destructiveness of both Communism and Capitalism on many communities and the rapid degradation of our natural environment raise serious question marks against any glib assumption that humanity has grown up and thus puts away childish things like religion. If the environmental crisis has taught us anything, it is that we may have grown more arrogant and even more technologically sophisticated, but we have also lost sight of how to live in any real balance with the rest of creation.

In the West religion is not allowed into many public arenas for two contradictory reasons. Firstly, because it is feared for its ideological power which it has often abused in the past. Secondly, because religion in the West is now seen primarily as a private issue - somewhat akin to whether you prefer Indian or Chinese take-away food. An optional extra.

In the past religion was rightly attacked for the ideological grip it sought to maintain on societies. The rise of liberal education values was an attempt to break free of such dogmatic straitjackets and thank God for that. However, what post-modernism is reminding us is that no view is objective. No view is free from values, assumptions and prejudices. Every system of education, every subject taught functions within its own "mythological" world where certain beliefs are taken for granted and based upon these beliefs, a system of values and assumptions can be constructed by which and through which some sense can be made of the universe, this world, ourselves and indeed life itself.

And there is nothing wrong in this! It is impossible for human beings to function otherwise. What is wrong is when the "mythological" world view considers itself to be real reality and thus dismisses or ignores other world views, or patronisingly looks at them as either quaint ideas or colourful traditions. European models of secular values are as guilty of this as are all the major religious and ideological (Marxist, Fascist, Nationalist) traditions.

If as a result of our Seminar, we still view the religious dimension as a colourful add on extra, we will have failed to grasp the key issue facing education. Our value system is not working. Worse, it is creating havoc.

This Seminar should not be about how to be fairer to the Muslims when we teach about the Crusades in History. Or how to teach appreciation of a medieval Christian world view if we are studying Dante or Chaucer. Nor is it concerned with teaching



about different religions just because "we now have a lot of them in our schools." That is irrelevant because for example, there may be an insight we need to have from Australian Aboriginal tradition to re-evaluate our relationship with nature - and there aren't many of those in Europe! What it should be about is what visions of meaning there are in both historical resources and contemporary resources which enable us to face, begin to comprehend and then respond to the crises which are confronting Europe and indeed most of the world. These crises are environmental; they are economic; they are psychological. They relate to transport; to urbanisation; to warfare. They relate to inter-personal relationships; to sexuality; to both rights and duties; they relate to my understanding of my own value and place in the world.

If these are our concerns then what we are looking for as educators are visions, perspectives, insights, ways forward, ways out that will help us comprehend and re-imagine ourselves and our societies. In such an exploration, we need all the conceptual, mythological and analytical help we can get. On this basis, we can look at the great world views - the diverse religions, the diverse ideologies (including secular humanism) and see if any of them have anything worth listening to.

In doing so, we do not have to accept all world views as equally valid. We are in effect establishing a set of criteria - the issues outlined above of environment, psychology etc. - by which we judge the worthwhileness of any world view. With such criteria, those aspects of all belief systems - secular as much as religious - which are life denying or distorting, must be dealt with critically.

Europe has a great fear of diversity. Culturally we want conformity, be it to one religion - Christianity; one system of government - Parliamentary democracy; one economic system - free market capitalism. We find diversity threatening because we want everything to be One. Thus diversity is experienced as a threat to unity or to this Oneness.

But what if diversity is actually vital to life? What if diversity is actually how things develop? In the environmental world, biological diversity is vital because when the natural world experiences fundamental shifts in climate or threats to its continuance, it needs diversity as a resource bank to call upon. So I would argue do we in the world of ideas and action.

## THE PAPERS.

Four papers were presented to facilitate discussion and bring key issues to bear upon the topic of the seminar.

### Human Rights and Values

The first paper was presented by Martin Palmer. The topic chosen was that of Human Rights. For many in the secular world, there is a hope that the notion of Human Rights might become a rally point, a battle flag around which collective values might be gathered in spheres such as education or public life. However, the issue is far more complex than this for the simple reason that Human Rights is itself a culturally relative notion, arising from certain historical developments in the Christian and post-Christian Western world.

The paper started by affirming the great importance of the ideal of Human Rights.

The concepts of basic human rights, of respect, dignity and freedom have transformed many parts of the world, or at the least, have tried to do so. In particular they have been used to challenge the dead hand of authority and coercion in the name of both religious and ideological power. They have given people a sense of worth, a vision of something better to live for, to aim at. The concept of human rights has enabled many to stand upright and to consider that their views, their perspective, their wishes, are as valid as any one else's. It is no accident that the United Nations, after the horrors of fascism, nationalism and genocide in the wars of the 1930's and 40's, produced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In the face of such abuse of humanity, the need to state categorically that certain rights must be respected was paramount in the minds of the shapers of the UN.

The paper went on to explore the changing notion of what was Human and what was a right.

"..Jefferson and the other Founding Fathers [of the USA] did not intend their declaration to be taken literally by huge sections of American society - by slaves, by women, by the landless, to mention but a few! The notion of 'rights' as understood by these pioneers has to be understood within the context of their culture, their time and their underlying values."

The very notion of what is a 'right' is bound by culture:

All concepts of rights assume certain values. In 1776, it was the supreme value of being a white, landowning male American. In 1948 at the UN it was the rights of all members of the human species on earth to use the planet and other creatures as they wished, in order to further human comfort. In 1994, rights are being applied to trees, entire oceans, the Antarctic and even bacteria.

The notion of rights is culturally determined. There is no such thing as a universal concept of rights. There cannot be, for the whole idea of rights is a recent human philosophical invention, less than three hundred years old. It arose in specific historical, geographical and cultural conditions, both in reaction against, and rooted in, Christianity and Judaism. It is a creature of certain cultures, yet it now claims universality. Can it do so?

What is more important than rights, I would argue, is values. Values recognise that they arise from certain assumptions. They are value-laden. They know that they carry certain assumptions, certain beliefs. As such they can recognise their importance and their partiality. In education, I believe that while rights have a place, it is values which need to be explored.

The paper then looked at the tension between the duties and needs that certain faiths outline, such as Buddhism and Christianity and the rights contained in notions such as the right to Happiness. The tension between either being on the way to Utopia or heading to Armageddon as a basic dialectic in Western culture was explored as a disturbingly childish vacillation between unnecessary extremes.

The roots of the desire for a society where all are equal and all live contentedly go far back into early Greek myth and legend. What is different about the belief in the Pursuit of Happiness is that a hoped-for state of existence has been given the status of achievable right.

The point I am making is that in considering what it is to be human, the major faiths take seriously both the light and the dark side of existence.

What has this to do with human rights? Everything, for we have no fundamental 'right' to be happy. But nor do we have a fundamental necessity to be miserable! Yet we are in danger of viewing life as 'either/or', rather than as a complex, messy mixture.

Finally the paper raised the issue of why the West is so frightened of diversity:

The West has traditionally found it very difficult to deal with pluralism. We always want others to be like us: to be of our faith, or of our economic system, our democratic system, our political system, our ethical system - our notion of what is right. The West's obsession with conformity to a universal norm has bedevilled the rest of the world - and in each instance, those trying to impose conformity and universality have done so for the best of reasons. Yet in the end, the West's desire to have everyone believe the same has been destructive to those who have a different vision. Because the pursuit of the One has made us deeply suspicious of pluralism, of difference. If you believe you have the best vision and understanding of what it is to be human, or for human society, then any divergence from this, any difference, is experienced as threat.

If however, you recognise that your ideas are based upon certain assumptions; that others have other starting points; that there is no One Way, no one solution, no one system, then diversity is a resource and a stimulus. Too often in education we act as if other insights, other beliefs, other ways of doing things are fine for a few but irrelevant for the majority. This is what has caused such trouble over the centuries for us, and in particular for those whose value systems are fundamentally at odds with ours and whom we have sought to 'improve'.

This notion of diversity was taken a stage further:

If education is going to take religion seriously, it has to recognise that it will be challenged as well as challenge. It must recognise that things we hold to be true and valuable will not necessarily be seen in the same light by others. Perhaps most importantly we need to stop talking about multi-cultural or multi-faith education, in

which the word 'education' is in the singular not the plural, as if there could only be one model of education. We need perhaps to talk instead of multi-cultural or multi-faith notions of education - to talk, in other words, of pluralism of education - of educations, not education.

### **The Rise and Significance of Fundamentalism**

The second paper was presented by Dr. Desire Brokerhof on The Rise and Significance of Fundamentalism. Dr. Brokerhof is director of the Stichting Godsdienst en Opvoeding, The Netherlands.

The topic of fundamentalism arises so often in the context of religious beliefs that it was felt a whole paper should be devoted to it. The term is often used very loosely and more in the sense of an insult than as a compliment. It is used to dismiss the views of those who are so labelled. Yet the rise of fundamentalism is a major new religious phenomenon and one which the paper sought to take seriously and study in terms of its implications for the teaching of religion.

Dr. Brokerhof started by looking at the rise of fundamentalism.

In my opinion there are three aspects that can be used to describe fundamentalism in detail at the individual level. In the first place a fundamentalist bases his thinking and acting on fixed religious principles and values.

In the second place one of the principles of a fundamentalist is to be convinced about the uniqueness of his own principles and values; this is the reason why every other belief-system in principle has no right to exist.

In the third place a fundamentalist is strongly trying to convince other people of the validity of his principles and values, for the others are fundamentally wrong.

At the social level fundamentalism can be determined by the following parallel characteristics.

Within the fundamentalist group exists a strong consciousness of being a group with common aims and common rules of conduct. As a matter of fact there is a hierarchical structure and a natural obedience to higher placed persons.

Dr. Brokerhof asked us to look at not just religious fundamentalism but at other forms of such fundamentalism as National Socialism, nationalism and forms of racism.

He then asked what single factor could account for the current rise of religious fundamentalism:

This makes it all the more important to know why fundamentalism - like secular nationalism - is so clearly rising in the recent period. In my opinion there is one main reason: fear. Behind this fear there is the knowledge that the human race is able to destroy the whole world many, many times.

Behind this fear there is the feeling of loneliness - as a result of modern individualism.

Behind this fear is a certain feeling of postponement to others - "the" others who therefore become enemies.

Behind this fear is a lack of community experience.

In our modern world there are many reasons to fear.

Can we understand that people in this situation are looking for a group with clear principles and common values? and do we understand what it means to become a member of this group and to do everything that continues that membership? Even when it leads to animosity to others?

If you ask for a second reason I just know one more: the fact that a fundamentalist is strongly trying to convince other people of the validity of his principles and values - this fact does have effect, indeed. For it is the counterpart of all the mechanisms coming out of the above mentioned fear.

Dr. Brokerhof then turned to the role of formal education, and in particular he took as his starting point the recommendation of the Council of Europe (nr 1202, February 1993) that the study of religions and ethics be a part of the general school curriculum and he asked, how do we teach about fundamentalism? He began by tackling the question of the tension in education between the role of transmitting information and the role of being future-centred and creative.

The cognitive part of education is the transmission of knowledge and experience. This educational object has to do with quite a range of subject matters that have found their place in the curriculum. To what extent religions and ethics are part of the curriculum differs from country to country. But in all cases knowledge about religions and ethics have to be taught in a sphere of respect and openness. For one of the most decisive objects of education is that children of different backgrounds - religious as well as cultural - are being prepared for an independent participation in society.

In answering his own question about how to teach about fundamentalism, he pointed to a basic tension and to a danger of what he termed 'liberal fundamentalism', a concept which clearly disturbed some at the seminar, but which others found immensely helpful. It remained a heated discussion topic throughout the seminar:

And when we agree, that fundamentalism is a way of believing that exists in many religions, then there is only one possible answer to my former question 'what kind of attention we have to give to fundamentalism at school'. The answer is: we have to pay attention to it as a phenomenon, as something that exists. We have to deal with fundamentalism, for we cannot deny it - just as we cannot deny nationalism. And we have to study it within the context of the above mentioned tasks: with mutual respect. I know: there will be a tension between respect for fundamentalists and their own principle of uniqueness. Between their intention to convince and our openness. This tension exists and has to remain, for in the other case we make the same mistakes. It cannot be true that we raise the liberal point of view as a higher standard than fundamentalism. For then we create a kind of liberal fundamentalism ourselves, a secular fundamentalism that is dangerous as well.

To clarify what he meant, he introduced three ways of teaching concerning religion:

Teaching in religion has a evangelising goal which cannot be justified.

Teaching about religion looks like a mere cognitive and comparative approach without emotion and involvement.

Teaching religion has its focus on exploring the religious approach of life - in different ways but seen from inside, as far as possible. This way of teaching lets opportunities in all kinds of subjects - including social sciences - to give room to

religions integrated in people's lives and in social development.

Within this approach of teaching religion we have to give place to different religions and life stances in a positive way. But there are bounds to positive attention!. At the moment the means and methods of persons and groups become extreme we have to make clear our disapproval and we have to warn the young people at school against it.

Dr. Brokerhof illustrated the last of these three by citing examples from the work undertaken in Dutch schools by his organisation. He ended his presentation by quoting from one book produced by his group, and a story told within it.

In one of the books of a method for religious education I am responsible for, we tell the story of a woman living alone with her children in her house. Because she is alone she feels different from the other people and she mistrusts them. Therefore she builds a wall around her house. Of course the other people dislike that and become angry. So the conflict grows and the house at the end of the story is like a pill-box in the war with barbed wire and mines in the garden. We gave this story a place in this book because children have to learn what fear and diversity between people can lead to.

Unfortunately we have to conclude that many, many adults have to learn this lesson, too!

And he again warned us that liberals can be as fundamentalist as Bible based or Qur'an based fundamentalism!

### **History and Religion**

The third paper was on History and Religion - and the subject of religious education. It was given by Dr. Tim Jensen of DACOREC, Denmark.

Dr. Jensen began by illustrating the complexity of both the term religion and history. In particular he drew attention to the cultural assumptions which we have in the West arising from the specific roots of these terms. As he said, "If we include the non-European religions, cultures and 'histories' then the terms 'burst' open wide and a general theory of 'history' and 'religion' and the way the two interact seems even more difficult to arrive at."

Drawing upon the Recommendations of The Parliamentary Assembly of The Council of Europe (nos. 1162, 1178, 1202), he sought to amplify these in order to reinforce the importance of their implementation.

He opened his exploration of the history of religions with the following observation, from which much of what followed flowed:

As far back that archaeology and history can take us into in the prehistory and history of man the human being seems to have experienced and expressed what we nowadays call religious experiences and religion.

I dare not subscribe to the opinion that religion is a universal and part and parcel of man's consciousness and being in the world, because I actually think that there is empirical evidence that some persons have survived without it. Besides I am not in

a position to divine about the future. I do however have to simply make the conclusion that so far, history and religion seem to go hand in hand. You cannot think about history and mankind without thinking about religion.

Skipping over the earliest pre-historic and historic periods, he looked at the extraordinary period around 600 BCE when religious leaders of the caliber of the Buddha, Zarathustra, Confucius, the Old Testament prophets and Vedic writers of the Upanishads; period of such centrality to the development of religious thought and practice that it is called The Axial. He then moved on to look at the transition stage from a period of separate major faith/culture blocks to the modern world.

A characteristic trait of the period from 600 B.C.E. to 1500 A.C.E. is the way the named four civilisations and their dominant religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity) balance each other globally.

Going to the next chosen period, namely the period from 1500 - 1945 things are changing. This is the period termed 'modern'. The above mentioned balance is lost, the European civilisation achieves a strong and dominant position, crossing the borders given e.g. by the Muslim world, and the Europeans reach, colonize and rule the "new" worlds which consequently have had to struggle with the combination of traditional and European technology and values.

He went further in his analysis of the dominant trends within this modern period.

Logical positivism, the biological and psychological view of human nature and the natural sciences and their worldview culminates in this period in Europe, but it would be a serious mistake to think that the set back it has suffered lately has seriously undermined the evolutionistic belief in the future and the badly defined "progress". The belief is still dominant on many of the political and most influential levels and it still goes hand in hand with the concept of European/Western supremacy, a concept which after a period of decline right after World War II now seems to blossom in the wake of e.g. the Rushdie-affair and as a consequence of a growing tendency to an ideological confrontation with especially the Muslim world (or rather the militant stereotype of Islam).

In concluding his whiz through the history of religion, Jensen mused that:

The various responses from the various religions and groups within them to these developments in modern history, range from international inter-faith cooperation in order to solve the global crises and political conflicts to localism, nationalism and militant fundamentalism, responses which in turn will affect and change the future of the world and the future of the religions themselves. The world and the religions are rapidly changing.

Moving on, Jensen looked at the debate about the "End of History". Far from ending, as some conservative Western scholars and politicians have claimed with the 'triumph' of the secular consumerist culture, Jensen sees us standing at the start of another 'turning of the wheel of time.' He then made the interesting observation that:

I personally find it hard to face the fact that we are probably standing at the gates not to the end, but to another beginning, another turning of the wheel of time, and I do believe that the vision of the ever changing flux of things, great and small, is amongst the prime factors for all religious and non-religious efforts to create order and system.

I also believe that the speed with which things are changing globally and locally are amongst the most essential reasons for the spiritual crises and also the so-called revival of religions, nationalism, right-wing conservatism, religious and non-religious fundamentalism etc. And, despite the many signs of a coming global breakdown (the ecological disaster, the explosive overpopulation, the consequences of more poverty, social upheavals, political and ideological confrontations between those who have and those who have not etc.) nobody except maybe some god can say where we are heading. There is for instance nothing that guarantees that the present global distribution of power or the present distribution of the world religions is the only one possible. Maybe the European/Western supremacy beginning around 1500 C.E. with Christianity as the religion of the majority is coming to an end in a relative short time. With over half of the world's Christians belonging to one of the over 20,000 non-European varieties of the Third World, Christianity certainly is changing rapidly. With the economic success of e.g. the Southeast Asian countries who openly contest the supremacy of the European economical, political, ethical and religious systems and with the breakdown of the communist, per definition atheistic and anti-religious ideologies and states, more changes are bound to come.

The future is most uncertain and sometimes it is indeed hard to imagine that it is in our power to influence or even create the future. Our praised freedom nowadays often seems to be a pretty illusion.

Jensen went on to say that one major change in thinking amongst both historians and scholars of the contemporary socio-political scene have had to make is with regards to the role and significance of religion. As he put it:

Religions in many ways are "back on the stage" and even the historians writing about Europe, trying for instance to define what Europeans today define as European, come back to religion. They are now ready to admit that once again we must define not only the European heritage but also the present European concept of European identity in terms of religious belonging (to the traditional Christian denominations, the Lutheran, the Catholic and the Orthodox churches) and in terms of contrast with other religions, especially of course Islam, which has for centuries served Europe as a means of self identification by contrast.

Jensen saw two related phenomena as being the harbingers of this change. First, he saw a factual revival and manifestation of religions, old and new returning to the public scene and also having considerably more influence upon the private scene. He pointed to a number of signs of this. For example, the growth of explicitly anti-secular groups in many faiths who were intent on curbing the power of the secular state and introducing theocracies. He also points to the rise of the public face of religions, tackling social and political issues, from an avowedly religious perspective and in relationship to specific faith agendas. He quotes Vaclav Havel on this:

"Politicians can repeat over and over again in international fora that the general respect for the Human Rights must be the basis of the new world order. It will however have no effect as long as this message, this commandment, is not based upon respect for the miracle of human existence, the miracle of the universe, the miracle of nature.



Only that person who gives in to the cosmic order and the order of the creation, only that person who values the right to be a part of this order and the right to participate in it, only this person can truly value himself and his neighbours, and only in this way is the human being able to honour and respect the rights of his neighbour as well as his own."

Vaclav Havel who says this in a lecture given when receiving a medal of freedom in Independence Hall in Philadelphia, July 1994, goes on to say that this fundamental respect is integral to all religions and that it nowadays seems as if man can only fathom the right to freedom if he does not forget the Creator who granted it.

But Havel's words do create serious problems, not only on a logical level (the Human Rights are not only the fruit of Christianity but also of Humanism and Humanism by definition has dispensed with God), but also on a political level.

The second phenomena relates to  
"an inherent and misleading fault within the theories about the decline of religion, within the theories of history and secularisation."

A fault which Jensen sees as having led to a fundamentally false picture of both religion and history. He elaborated this:

All the dominant theories of history and secularisation and the history of religions have a common denominator - and a common bias:

- a) They are intimately connected first to the Judaeo-Christian concept of history; secondly and partly as a consequence of the first they are connected to the positivistic, evolutionistic and historicistic concepts of history and to the conviction of the final supremacy of the Western secular society and thinking.
- b) They are intimately connected to the Christian religion in many ways: to its theory of creation, of God the Father and God the Son; to the importance it places on the individual and the personal faith, something which was furthered and developed not the least by Martin Luther and something which has gone hand in hand with the theories of the Enlightenment and later modern times.

These beliefs and theories to a large degree have set the limits for the typical European religions as well as non-religious concept of religion and the divinely willed or rationally sound separation of religion and politics, state and church, the sacred and the profane, the public and the private etc.

In other words: those theories of religion, of history, of the history of religion, of the secularization, and of the vanishing and final exit of religion from world history were highly ethno-, Euro- and Christocentric. They were also depending upon a lack of knowledge of religions, a lack of knowledge of the history of the religions and to a certain degree on a very unbalanced and irrational belief in the rational, in the secular, in Humanism, and in all the other -isms which did not include transcendent, transhistorical or religious dimensions.

Having given a very stimulating and provocative outline of his approach to religion and history, one which created considerable debate and discussion throughout the rest of the seminar, Jensen then looked at the consequences of what he was saying for the role of history and religion in education, and in particular, religious education.

Can anybody doubt that nobody in today's world can consider himself well educated

if he or she does not have an education which implies knowledge of and some kind of understanding of religion and religions and their past and present interaction with the cultures and societies? Can anybody doubt that we have to strengthen the teaching of religions, no matter if we place that teaching in the school subject of 'history' or 'religion' as we call it in Denmark. Can anybody doubt that in the modern world we have to teach religions and not only one religion, i.e. that the teaching of religions must be a non-confessional humanistic and social scientific obligatory subject in the schools of all European countries? Can anybody doubt that it is the task of the public system of the secular state to guarantee that no future citizen in the pluralistic, global and local, democratic society leaves school without have had "religion"?

Of course nobody can seriously contest nor doubt this - no matter what obstacles the realisation of it will run into. This is exactly what we have to do if we want to be able to hold on to the praised freedom and if we want to be able to participate in the creation of a future European and global world.

He then drew out from this the reasons for the importance of religious education per se.

First of all, basic knowledge of religion and religions, the religious worldviews, value-systems, morals and manners and their cultural, political, societal, economic implications and impact is a must because without that nobody can "orientate" himself in what has happened and what is happening in the world, no matter if the world is defined as the whole world, the European world or the local, national world. The future citizen, the coming bearer of enlightened democracy, the state employee, the businessman etc. must have a minimum knowledge of religion and religions. Simply because the religions have always been in this world, always played some role in the lives of the various cultures, the life of the societies, the life of the individual.

Secondly, the teaching of and learning of religions, not only the religion of the majority of the society, but the religions of the pluralist and multifaith society, the religions of the world, past and present, will if the teacher is well educated and if the teaching of the other religions do not serve only as a means to teach ones "own" religion lead to an opening of new horizons, new perspectives, on history and religion, on the possibilities and experiences of mankind. Studying and teaching religion and learning about religion is a "mind-opener". The constant implicit and explicit comparison between actual and the past, the foreign and the "familiar" will lead to a relativization of what seem to be the given, the truth. It will eventually lead not only to a knowledge of facts and a knowledge of the reasons why the "other" (human beings or cultures) think and act the way they do; it will lead also to a greater "self understanding".

Jensen justifies the role of religious education in the following terms.

Via religious education, contemporary issues, be they of a spiritual, ethical, political or religious nature, will be placed in a larger historical and spiritual framework and this will make the pupils capable of being more consciously aware of their own cultural heritage and perspectives and the influence this exerts on theirs and other people's choices and ways of living. One might very well argue that religious

education leads to a revaluing of and reinterpretation of one's own religious and cultural tradition but in a way that exactly underlines the principle of religious freedom, the democratic principle of the right of the individual to consciously choose his religion.

Finally, Jensen put the relationship between education, history and religion into an overall perspective, centred upon his call for the development of specific religious education.

Now if you ask me whether it should be taught as a special subject and with a syllabus of its own, my answer is yes. The dimension of the history of religions, the worldviews, the various concepts of history etc. of course must be part and parcel of the syllabus of many a subject, not the least the subject of history. I know that the old-fashioned canon of history, i.e. history as solely political history, is on its way out and in Denmark for instance the above mentioned cultural dimensions are already part of the syllabus of the history-subject.

Still, the integration of the history of the religions and cultures into the different subjects of the curriculum is far from sufficient. Teaching of religions demands special qualifications and some may even say special didactics. First of all it is evident that the quantity and quality of the subject matter makes it necessary that the teacher has specialized in religions past and present. The subject matter is just as huge and just as intricate in nature as the other subject matters. Secondly the subject matter is much too important to be simply subsumed in other subjects and taught by teachers with no special education and training in the matter.

## **Religion and Philosophy of Life in Education**

### **The Role of the Arts**

The third paper was on Religion and philosophy of life in education and was given by Dr. Wil H. Arts, from the Department of Religion, Culture and Art, in the Academy for Theology and Philosophy of Life, of the Hogeschool, Holland.

Dr. Arts opened her paper with a very clear statement of what she felt was central to her paper:

I would plead to reserve room in the curriculum for this approach, because the emotive aspect is threatened with being marginalised. My plea has a twofold motivation: Firstly, I presuppose that this aesthetic education represents the intrinsic value of the introduction in the world of literature, poetry and arts. And secondly, that this kind of aesthetic education enables pupils to understand religions and supports them in their own quest for meaning.

Arts opened her paper by linking the religious and the aesthetic to the existing experience and culture of the young.

When we are treating the question of the nature of religious and aesthetic education of the youth, then we presuppose in our interpretation of these concepts that not only conceptions about religion and art are at stake. Moreover our aims are to introduce young people to other ways than just common sense, empirical and quantifying languages. A language they partly already know from/by video clips, MTV, compact

disc-covers, animation films and comics. Apart from stimulating the sensibility and the openness towards the imagination, it is important to build up frames of reference. That enables them to link the undefined, diffuse experiencing of the aesthetic and the religious dimension over their personal experiences with larger systems of belief and systems of meaning. It is only then that reflection and further development will be possible; it is only then that the connection with acting can be made; and then we may speak of spirituality.

To illustrate the necessity of such a wider language and image basis for individuals to use to help them reflect upon their own experiences, she spoke of a colleague of hers, who teaches ethics, visited during his sabbatical trip in the U.S.A. the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, where two special lecturers had been appointed for the subjects Literature and Medicine and Art and Medicine. During these lessons, which were compulsory, for example poetry was read by prospective doctors, in order to obtain a certain sensibility for the different levels in the stories of their future patients.

She then turned to the example of her own institute and its unique programme on art education and philosophy of life. The starting point for this work was:

With the development of this unique department in the Netherlands, the starting point was a cultural and social analysis, in which, in relation to the secularisation and rationalisation of society an increasing 'language poverty' was observed in the area of orientation in life and in reality. This is similar to what Martin Palmer describes as loss of spirituality and a reduction of reality to that of empirical factuality and the quantifiable.

We can ascertain that the individual interest in religion, spirituality and art has grown and that, in view of the rise of a multicultural society, the need comes up for more knowledge about different religions. At the same time there is a tendency in the opposite direction: the rationalisation and secularisation of the culture bring about a form of 'language poverty'. This is where people are not as a matter of course introduced anymore to the symbolic and metaphorical language, in which questions about the ultimate concerns of life and death and of religious experiences as such are discussed. Where it is up to each individual to assemble a system of symbols, convictions, values and practical orientations, not everyone meets a rich assortment. It is not only that much remains unarticulated in a culture, dominated by image communication and music (which does not mean that it does not exist); poetic and religious language is taught in few places and is only allowed to be used in limited places. It has to abandon the field for more useful language, such as that of the economy, and its ground is thereby re-defined. Religion and philosophy of life have become private matters and moreover the inhabitants of this reserve lack adequate frames of reference for religious experience.

She then went on to draw out four key principles which underline her work in Holland but which are of much wider relevance.

1. Art, as well as religion, science and philosophy, is a form of knowledge in its own right, by which reality can be constructed, classified or interpreted. In other words: art is a way of world-making.
2. Poetic language and artistic imagination can contribute to the construction of a religious frame of reference.

3. Art turns out to offer an important contribution to the development of the religious identity of many people. People may draw their religious or existential orientations from art and literature.
4. To many people aesthetic and religious experiences are intertwined.

Arts then expanded upon her understanding of the importance of these principles. Art offers us an encounter with a work of art in which we meet both that which is familiar and that which is strange. Dr. Arts stressed that it was from this tension that the knowledge basis of art comes; from a form of knowledge which constructs and interprets our world, often through the 'otherness' of the art object.

Dr. Arts then moved on to look at the ways in which this encounter with the familiar and the strange can contribute to the construction of a religious frame of mind. She quoted from R.M. Bucke's "Cosmic Consciousness" in which he describes being caught up in a spiritual experience of one-ness with the Universe, what Bucke calls Brahmic Splendor or Brahmic Bliss. Arts distilled the essence of this experience and its significance for her topic.

The characterisations ascribed to the religious experience by the psychology of religion are present here: there is a feeling of being involved in a meaningful way within the whole of existence. A restructuring of the field of perception is taking place in such a way that events are being seen through another perspective than that of our daily experience.

Arts then gave an example of art as a form of knowledge and the contribution of poetic language and artistic imagination to the construction of a religious sense. She quoted from E. Canetti's autobiographical work "Fackel im Ohr", using it to illustrate the way in which:

People may draw their religious or existential orientations from art and literature. Literature, drama, mythology and paintings supply the elements for Canetti's philosophy of life. The imaginative language of words and the language of the images supply a catch-net by which reality can be interpreted.

The section she quotes deals with the impact made upon Canetti by hearing an actor he admires, read the Gilgamesh epic, at a time when Canetti was already fascinated by the issues of the masses, death and the dignity of the individual. As Arts says,

There is much to say about this fragment; I will only point to the combination of elements, which made the Gilgamesh-epic to his lifepartner: a great admiration for an actor, a love for ancient texts a piece of life experience that is transcended and becomes a task: to live with the death. The myth is here not only but a myth, not an object of knowledge but it is a category of knowledge. The myth supplies a symbolic language.

It is not only true, but surely also "well said". I think the truth and the beauty are strongly connected with each other for Canetti.

Experience and reflection only become a philosophy of life or religion if the frame of reference is at hand. Only then they may become directive for norm and values.

It is this theme of the need for language and imagery which furnishes us with the vocabulary, the means for expression of and understanding, 'knowledge' of those experiences which take us beyond the mundane, which Arts concludes with.

The relevance of the attention for stories, myths, and systemized contents of belief is becoming clear: they can't be missed as elements for a frame of reference for the religious and existential development. Peak experiences and mystic experiences in nature can only be interpreted if such a frame of reference is available. For the individual development the appreciation of the aesthetical dimension, becoming familiar with poetical and metaphorical language and the development of the imagination are important elements that contribute to spirituality. Religious language has to be learned. In religious education it is important not only to learn about religions(s), but also to make a connection with the life of the pupil. For that connection images can be links: diffuse events and feelings are related to a potential image, reflection and articulation promote the further development of the religious identity. So it is a question of attention both to the language of words and the language of images.

I have already given several reasons why arts, literature and poetry are relevant for religious sensitivity: they supply images and symbols, its language is that of the metaphors. But what fascinates me in art, and with which I like to confront the students, is the forementioned own nature of art and of aesthetical experience; the possibility of disconnecting from daily reality and the renewal perceiving of things, plants, pure forms or materiality as: "otherness". Even the most realistic paintings, of which we down to earth Dutchmen seem to have the monopoly in the 17th century, make that which is well-known and familiar, strange.

## **WORKING GROUPS**

Following the lectures, the seminar broke into four groups for discussion and in order to focus upon the themes highlighted in the papers. The four topics were:

- a. Religion, Human Rights and Values.
- b. Literature and Religion.
- c. History and Religion.
- d. Religion and Arts.

### **Religion, Human Rights and Values**

The Religion, Human Rights and Values group contained a wide range of opinions and experiences within it. This is reflected in the opening of their report:

The group was in agreement that pupils had a right to learn about religion but there was such debate about how this should be achieved. For example, some felt that RE should go beyond the descriptive, studying beliefs, festivals and practices, and require pupils to make personal responses to the subject matter. Others felt that the latter should take place in a secular ethics type lesson where contemporary moral issues could be discussed without a necessary reference to religion. Many felt that the pupil's faith response should be the responsibility of the home and the pupil's particular faith community. All agreed that the teaching of one faith does little to promote understanding of religion per se and hinders pupils' understanding of other cultures and religions. Most of the group recognised also the danger of studying too many religions, perhaps in a systematic way; it might cause confusion for the pupil and make it difficult to develop his/her own stance on life. A balanced approach is needed.

Many arguments were discussed involving freedom to practise the wearing of particular religious-cultural dress, the speed we are allowed to travel on a motorway, capital punishment, the teaching of girls in our schools, the rights of dyslexic children. It was apparent that for every right there was a restriction and a responsibility. Issues such as care for the planet had to be put into the context of a world where most of the human population are starving to death and are striving for economic independence.

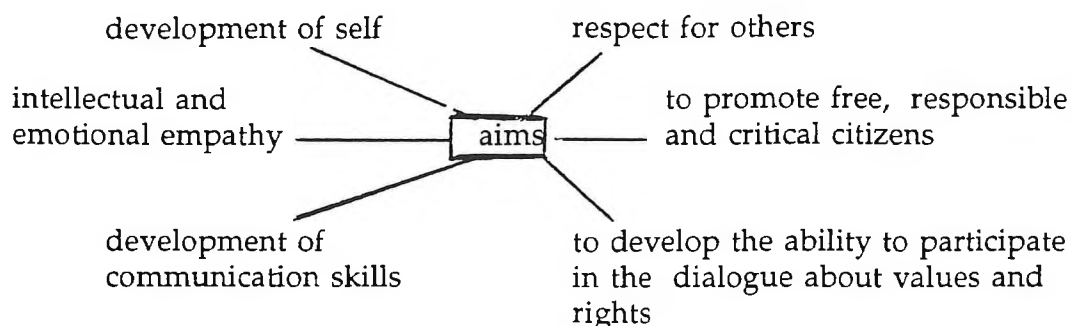
As the group worked, they focused upon a specific project in order to clarify their thinking and to give practical expression to the issues and the debates they were having.

At this point the group proposed an education project which questions the values attached to curriculum design and development in our schools. That RE could be used as a way of starting a topic on rights and values by starting with the experience and values that the children bring to the classroom and exploring these and using world religions and other sources in expanding their knowledge and understanding of these issues but with the following proviso.

The group felt that as education itself is sometimes described as a journey the issues about human rights and values should be treated as an exploration starting in the primary school and using a cross curricular approach within a spiral curriculum. It was not felt to be the responsibility of one subject area alone that rights and values should be discussed. It is not satisfactory that these issues are only discussed and perhaps practised in one area of the curriculum and possibly totally ignored elsewhere in the school.

It should be recommended that before the school embarks on its journey especially the journey being proposed which deals with issues of values and rights, the teachers should meet and discuss their aims, visions, values, methods and standards as a whole and acknowledge the work of all in working towards a common vision. All teachers must feel that their work is valued and also that they themselves value the individual pupils in their care. That consideration should be given to pupils with special needs; pupils from minority groups (no matter who they are); pupils with different abilities; different attitudes to learning; and the gender issue as it relates to girls' academic achievement in single sex schools. This is to ensure equal opportunity for all. In connection with this the particular learning styles employed involve all pupils so that none are left out to fail or be rejected. Teachers should question the possible need to move from "products" teaching to process learning where appropriate. That the school should acknowledge the hidden curriculum and respond to it where necessary. That parents are entitled to be involved in the learning experience of their children and support staff in a school are aware and practise the aim objectives and values the school wishes to promote. Finally the pupils establish with the teacher the ground rules for the class and themselves.

The project which was proposed is as follows:

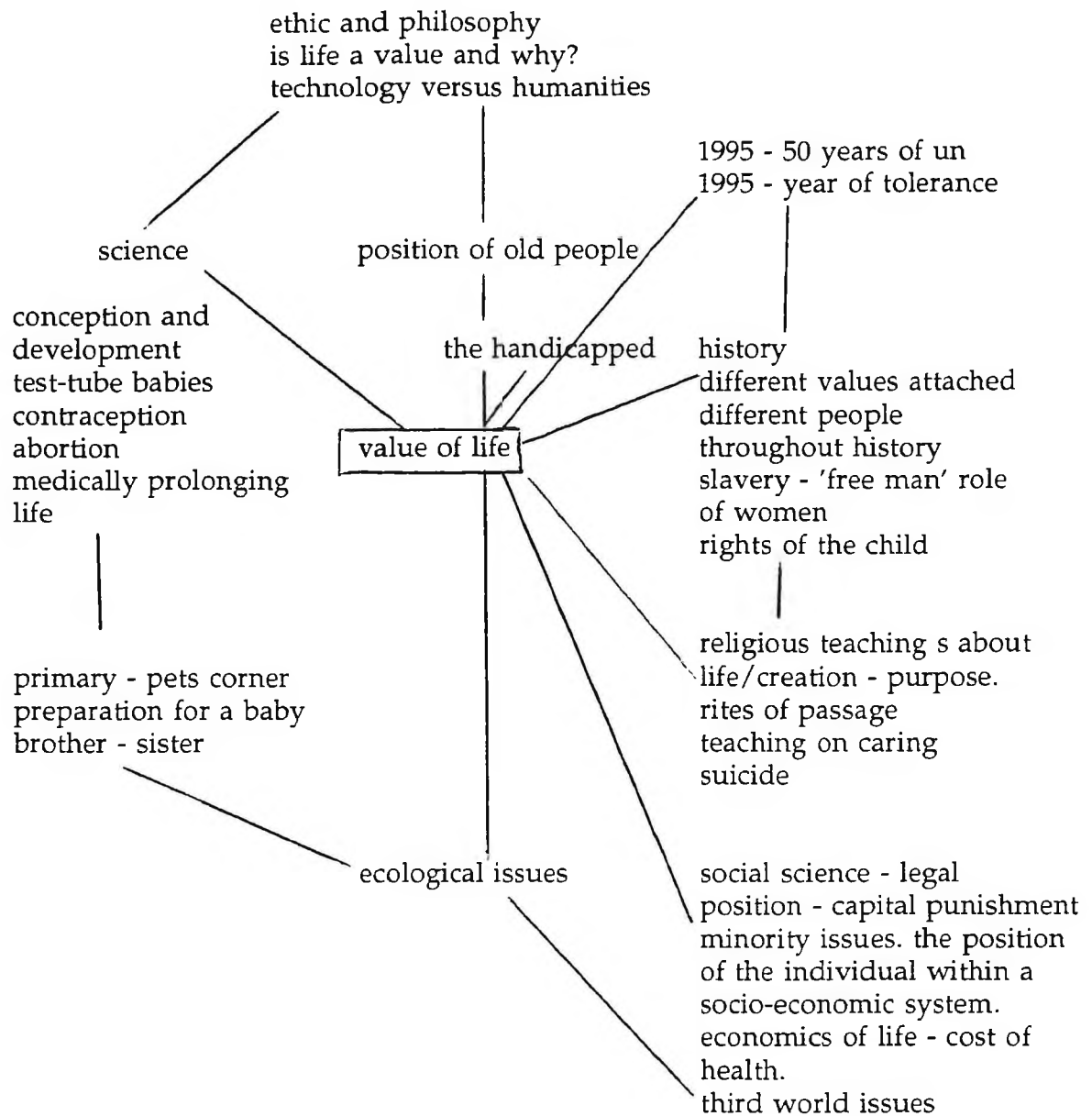


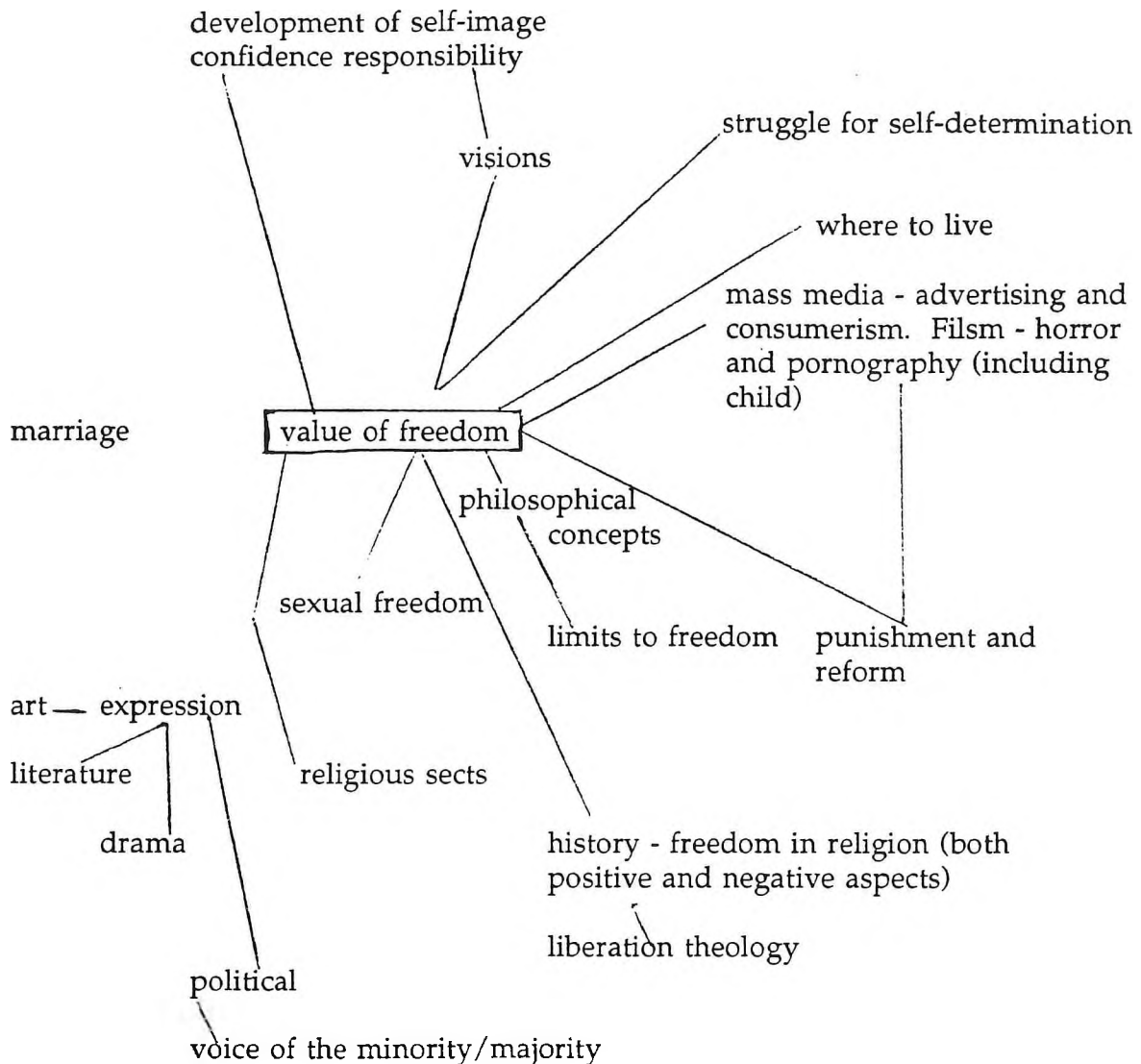
The rationale behind these aims is the fact that we live in a shrinking world where contact with people from different cultures is a necessity of life and the future will be dependent on the interdependent nature of this relationship apart from the survival of the earth as an ecological system.

The cross-curricular approach as suggested by the group was based on two values after much discussion. These were the Value of Life and the Value of Freedom. The group felt that all areas of the school would have something to offer the pupils irrespective of age or ability. That work in these areas is being already developed in all the countries and this should be further encouraged and promoted.

The group suggested the following topics for each value. The suggestions are in no way exhaustive and reflect the backgrounds of the group membership more than any deeply held philosophical strategy; there was little time to detail any one particular area and produce schemes of work and lesson plans. It was also felt that to do so would take away a valuable part of the curriculum development of a school adopting such an approach.







We felt no area could present a value free curriculum nor should it attempt to. But the values expressed are those of the school community in its broadest sense. Schools should pay more attention to the affective domain or as it is expressed in the English national curriculum "the spiritual, moral and physical development of its pupils".

There was not much time to discuss a particular curriculum development. Nevertheless we did consider a cross-curricular approach based on a "Peace, Study, Theme" used in a teacher education college. The scheme involved students observing pictures of war whilst listening to the famous speech of Martin Luther King "I have a dream...." They had to learn about African and Asian dance in how it is used to convey a story and emotion and they had to study literature concerned with the description of war. They also had the opportunity of studying through research a particular war and presenting a short talk on what they had found out. For evaluation people who had had experience of war were invited in to listen to the presentation and make comments on its accuracy. It was felt that schools could take away some of these ideas to develop. For example schools in England make use of people from the community in telling pupils what it is like to live in the past. In English, children are encouraged to write material for specific audiences.

## Literature and Religion

The second group, looked at Literature and Religion. The group stressed strongly that literature offered one of the most important ways of opening up new experiences and providing images and language to facilitate a person's own growth in understanding and awareness. They echoed strongly the points made by Dr. Arts. The group noted that:

Literature is of particular use in teaching about religions, values, and personal development because it offers the teacher and the student the opportunity to engage in both the rational and the emotional experience of humanity. Our attention has been drawn again and again during this conference to the dangers of dealing with only the rational or only the emotional aspects of being a human.

After giving a list of books which they felt could be used in raising religious issues of the broadest kind, the group took one specific book and developed a model of how to use it and the issues it raises for religious education.

An example of how the use of literature might work: Self knowledge and Buddhism.

A recently published book by Sigrid HENCK *Der Windglocken Tempel* (ISBN 3-522-71660-4) is used to show how these two areas of understanding can be explored. The book deals with the development of a young man, Nick, who drops out of expected behaviour in Western society because he is fleeing from family tensions caused by alcoholism and who has to face the death from drug abuse of a young woman who has taken him seriously as a person. The three sections of the book, which are presented within a framework of Chinese Buddhist poetry, show, firstly, the wanderings of Nick through the Mediterranean and Asia until he comes into contact with an old Buddhist man, Chang, who is about to die. In the second section, Nick learns from Chang as they live together for several days. Chang introduces Nick to the world of Buddhism and tells him the story of his three previous incarnations. In the third section Nick takes on the language of Buddhism in gaining awareness of himself and the world he inhabits, through visions of his future as a dolphin, a tree and an old man. In each of these incarnations Nick realises the damaging impact of humanity as it poisons the world.

The book could be used in the classroom with students aged 14-17 in the following sequence of lessons:

- (i) Group work on the personalities of the main characters of Nick, Miriam and Chang.
- (ii) A study of Nick as a refugee from family problems who experiences different ways of life. A parallel can be drawn with political and economic refugees.
- (iii) The differing societies Nick experiences; a way into Chinese and Tibetan society taking in the religious and political framework. This could be done through teacher input or pupil research tasks.

- (iv) Nick's developing self-awareness charted through studying particular passages from the book.
- (v) Consideration of those who helped Nick in his spiritual journey through role-play or drama.
- (vi) The role of religious ideas and practice in helping Nick to grow; a comparison with the possibility of finding personal space within Western culture.
- (vii) Students' evaluation of the study through individual writing, such as creative writing, book review, or advertisement.

#### Teaching about Buddhism

This book could be used in conjunction with a unit of work about Buddhism. This would include the following emphases:-

- (i) The story of the temptation of the Buddha linked with group work and class discussion of what young people consider to constitute modern day temptations.
- (ii) The story of Siddhartha Gautama.
- (iii) Eight ways of living a good life, developed from a brain storm session with students, compared with the Eight Fold Path.
- (iv) The Five Precepts considered through groupwork relating them to newspaper headlines.
- (v) A video showing Buddhism in Western society, followed by an information sheet, discussion and written work.
- (vi) The preparation by the students of an assignment "The Middle Way of the Buddha" in which students are asked to present what they think and feel about their knowledge of Buddhism.

Finally, the group proposed a longer term project which could be developed to enable religious issues to be raised through literature.

A scheme of work for students aged between 14-17 should be drawn up entitled Becoming a Whole Person. This could be delivered through native language lessons, through ethics or religions lessons, through religious education, or through personal and social education. This project would offer a framework for teacher planning drawing on the following areas:-

- (i) Literature. Several books should be explored showing differing cultural and religious settings worldwide.
- (ii) Religious responses offered to the believer in becoming a whole person. This might include exploration of Christian concepts of atonement; repentance; forgiveness and new life; Islamic teaching of submission to the will of Allah bringing peace and understanding of world-wide community; Buddhist understanding of the Four Noble Truths and the Eight Fold Path leading to awareness of interconnectedness with all other beings and the transitory nature of this life.

- (iii) Psychology: an examination of the work of Freud and Jung as they contribute to knowledge of the working of the mind.
- (iv) Health education; mens sana in corpore sano and how this can be effected in a world where humanity is busy destroying this unique eco-system.

## History and Religion

The third group examined History and Religion. It was a large group and for some parts of its work, it split into three regionally based groups. The very fact of these different regional groups having very different histories from each other emphasised the points made by Dr. Jensen in his paper. The bulk of their report was taken up with recommendations which arose from these three groups and the key points of these were:

### Recommendations by Group 1 - Cyprus & Malta

#### Pretext:

Governments should be encouraged to support a multi-faith religious education wherever this is still lacking.

#### Reasons:

- a good knowledge of various religions helps an individual to avoid resorting to violent and extreme means. S/he will be able to accept and tolerate other people's ideas.
- Religion should be seen in a more global perspective and so should act as a unifying force in spite of evident differences.
- looking to the future - populations will continue to be more complex because of migratory effects.

#### Starting Point

- Our states profess one official Religion
- we must depart from a purely confessional type of religion. The teaching of religion should not be a catechism experience. Obviously the basic principles of our religion should still be emphasised.
- However, we must also supply an outline of the beliefs of all the other major religions

#### Different approaches in teaching religions

1. The Thematic Approach: different themes treated throughout all religions eg love; charity; honesty; tolerance; hospitality; mercy; forgiveness.

This can be done through stories and myths which have a moral.

Pictures, paintings, hymns and psalms from different religions can be ideally used in this form of teaching.

2. The Comparative Approach: Comparisons between two or more of the major religions.

This can be implemented through visits to monuments, churches, museums etc.

3. The "Patch" Historical and Religious Approach: Studying in detail the history and religions prevailing at a given date eg 1800. Considering in detail how history influenced religion and religions influenced history.

4. The Individual Approach: Dealing with the different religions by studying the lives of particular individuals eg A day in the life of an Indian boy or family. A day in the life of a Chinese child or family.

### Personal Training

1. Training courses for prospective teachers must not be run by the official religious authorities.
2. Seminars with participation of multi-faith representatives should be organised for teachers and curriculum developers. These seminars would help to increase the consensus among teachers of different religious creeds. Such seminars should not include participants who have a Christian creed only.
3. Conclusions of such seminars should be distributed among all countries if some of these countries happen to be missing from such seminars.

### **Recommendations of Group 2. Russia, Czech Republic and Slovak Republic**

1. Training of RE Teachers

Russia: In Russia this problem has already been settled. They do not need help from foreign teachers but they do need help in the way of resources, textbooks, syllabi etc.

They would strongly advocate school partnerships with ensuing interchange of staff and schools

In Slovakia and Czech Republic: It would be necessary to set up a Religious Studies Course at Secular Facilities (it is studied at the Faculties of Theology only at the moment)

As the establishing of Religious Studies at the Faculties and in Secondary Schools may be a legislative and a long term matter we propose that a group of teacher trainers come to our countries to train other staff and to conduct in-service teacher training courses. They should share with us their "know-how" but not necessarily bringing textbooks as these could be produced at a local level. Moreover, as with Russia we strongly advocate school partnerships with ensuing interchange of staff and students.

2. Aims of the Curriculum (see Vaclav Havel p8 4th & 5th Para "his own ....." (a quotation from V. Havel's lecture given when receiving a medal of freedom in Independence Hall in Philadelphia, July 1994)

- a) A Survey of religions from a historical point of view with emphasis on national culture
- b) motivating values
- c) Looking for similarities among different religions in order to be able to say how these values influence people's lives
- d) Pointing out the dangers of intolerance.

### 3. Implementation

In Russia - there is no need for any steps to be taken

Slovakia- to legislate to make it a compulsory subject. An alternative is to teach it one year out of the compulsory allocation of history lessons. If it is non-compulsory there is a fear that children will not attend it especially in rural areas.

Czech Republic- would rather have it as an optional subject at Grammar Schools to start with and especially those who want to study Humanities at University. I accept that some Czech colleagues teach religion as a part of their social sciences, history and Czech language lessons. They support the French model of division of Church and State.

## **Recommendations from Group 3 - France and Spain**

### 1. Training of Teachers

We would want religion in schools to be seen from a secular point of view - as information on other cultures and as knowledge.

An agnostic teacher or an agnostic point of view in the classroom is needed. In the teachers' training there should be the following:-

anthropology  
sociology  
history  
languages - particular from Eastern faiths  
semantics

### 2. Syllabus

10-12. In Primary Schools the only work would be to teach habits, gestures, facts of all the religions without explaining their significance (unless the children ask questions). The purpose would be to see the others and their behaviour as normal persons and facts and accept differences without fear or prejudice.

In Secondary Schools - Real Knowledge

From 11-15 - History of all religions

From 15 - Bachelor - Philosophy of all religions

### 3. Implementation

The public powers eg the Council of Europe will have to standardise the teaching with an official curriculum - in the sense of teacher training and syllabuses.

#### **Religion and Arts**

Finally, the fourth group considered Religion and Arts. From quite diverse backgrounds, the group soon came to a common agreement that:

There was a common concern that many students seem to be unfamiliar with the stories and images which have shaped European culture and identity, and the stories and images which might shape it in the future. Students often also lack the hermeneutical skills to make sense of the images, literal and pictorial, which form part of their changing world. Whilst students' own culture and creativity is to be valued, their hermeneutical skills need to be developed, and their knowledge and experiences of images widened, if they are to become "educated persons" with an active role in the Europe of the future. Understanding the modern world includes understanding the arts in religion - not merely in Christianity but in other world faiths.

The practical difficulties of arts in the classroom were a recurring theme in the discussion. Another issue was a certain uncertainty about the relationship between the home faith of a child and the introduction of other faiths. Some felt that younger children needed to be secure in their own faith before being introduced to other faiths. This was not the view of others in the group who felt children should know about one or two other faiths quite early on in their formal education.

there were differences of opinion about the appropriate age to introduce children to a faith other than their own. There was a fear of syncretism and confusion, and that children would gain breadth at the expense of depth. One view was that careful teaching methods can enable children to find their religious identity without their own family tradition, while benefiting from encounters with other faiths.

The group did agree however on certain key methods and objectives:

- (i) comparing an image with a text as a means of introducing a myth, text or religious theme.
- (ii) comparing different images of the same text as an introduction to iconography; including the historical and political context of the painting.
- (iii) using an image to contribute to a discussion about a chosen theme. Here the emphasis in looking at the picture would be on the content, the effect on the pupil and the message, as identified by the teacher.
- (iv) using an image as a stepping stone to personal meaning. Here the image is left behind once the discussion with the pupils starts.
- (v) helping children dialogue with an image as part of their own quest for meaning by taking them through a staged exploration of the picture - including letting them talk about the effect the image has on them, before unpacking its structure and iconography.



This found particular expression in a project proposal which the group submitted.

## **Religion and Art - Group Proposal**

### Preamble

- (i) Europe needs citizens who have an understanding of their own and others' traditions including those of the "new Europeans; and who have the skills to move in a culture in change. Such traditions include religious art.
- (ii) Children and young people need access to explicitly religious art; as an important part of their affective and spiritual development.
- (iii) Teachers need easy access to reproductions or slides of religious art which can be used in the classroom. They need information about the images, and ideas for teaching with them.

### The Proposal

That the Council of Europe set up a group to develop a multi-faith resource pack on the Visual Arts and Religion for use in European schools. The pack would consist of:

- 1. A folder of approximately 60 slides - of artwork from five world faiths, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. The slides would be of art not of artefacts though the art might be taken from an artefact (eg a picture of the "Tree of Life" from a Persian Islamic Prayer Mat).
- 2. A handbook containing the following:
  - (i) an introduction to ways of using the slides in the classroom.
  - (ii) an introduction to the relationship between faith and the Visual Arts in each religion.
  - (iii) Details about iconography and structure of the image on each slide.

It might also include a list of museums and galleries in the countries of publication.

### The Slides

This group recommends the following criteria for the choice of slides and gives some examples. However, clearly the choice of slides would be best determined by a working party composed of members of each faith and/or people in Art Education.

- (i) The pictures should be drawn from both the historical tradition, and the living faith and would include art from the immigrant communities eg the section of Jewish art might include
  - a scene from a Medieval Aggadah
  - pictures of graveyard carving and synagogue ornamentation
  - a work by the modern Jewish artist Joe LASKO.

- (ii) They would indicate the diversity in the faith, eg the section on Christian art might include Orthodox Icons, Modern African Art, Celtic Art.
- (iii) Wherever possible and appropriate they would be detailed, complex images eg Buddhist mandala
- (iv) They would allow entrance into different aspects of the faith.
- (v) The art would be a high standard.

#### Who would use the pack?

The pack could be used by teachers across the age range - from young children to mature adults, though it's likely it would have most use from the second stage of school upwards. It would be used by Art Teachers who were incorporating understanding religion into their curriculum, as well as by teachers of Religious Education.

### **SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES**

In terms of the issues which arose in the plenary sessions or the discussions following the papers, key amongst these were issues of cultural relativism and religious and ideological diversity. Some found the notion of secular values being themselves belief systems, quite threatening and those coming from France and Spain in particular were unhappy with what they saw as an attack on the importance of secular, rational basis for the study of religion.

On the whole, the importance of religions and of ideologies was clearly acknowledged as was the need to help students understand the diversity of religious experience, data and phenomena, not just because it was 'cultural' or 'historical' but because it opened up the human spirit.

The issue of the place of religious education as a timetabled subject arose most forcibly. It was felt by many that if religious issues were to be adequately handled in various disciplines in school, there needed to be a trained specialist who could direct or aid such teaching. While all felt that the Humanities or Social Sciences should and could cover aspects of religion, there was a majority feeling that this should supplement formal, non-denominational, multi-religious education.

At the end of the seminar, a formal set of proposals were tabled and discussed. The following are the recommendations which were adopted by the Seminar and which we now hope the Council of Europe will work to implement.

### **FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED BY THE SEMINAR**

1. As a result of the seminar we wish to recommend that each country should have formal professional time-tabled non-confessional RE as well as seek to develop horizontal or cross-curriculum teaching on religion and religious issues. By 'Religious Education' we mean teaching about the diversity of faiths and diversity within faiths; about core teachings and local variations; about key beliefs and cultural manifestations of religion. It should include sensitivity to beliefs but also a critical edge. It should also ensure space for proper handling of issues related to minority groups - both minority faiths and minorities within faiths.

- \* **Recommendation 1.** Each country in the Council of Europe should have separate, timetabled professional non-confessional RE with at least one full time trained and qualified RE teacher in each school who directs the curriculum for RE and acts as a resource person for cross-curriculum work;
- \* **Recommendation 2.** The Council of Europe, through Projects, Seminars and other appropriate means should encourage a move from confessional RE to non-confessional RE within state education.

2. The methodology for the teaching of religion should be based upon two complementary elements in education.

- (i) a variety of analytical approaches - anthropology; history; philosophy; ethics; etc.
- (ii) a variety of experiential approaches which enable the spirit not just the phenomena of religion to be encountered. These approaches would include - literature, drama, art, creative writing and so forth. These would manifest themselves in such curriculum areas as RE, language, literature, art, drama, music, crafts.

- \* **Recommendation 3.** The methodology for the teaching of religion should combine both the analytical and the experiential. This should be expressed primarily in RE (see Recommendation 1 above) as well as in horizontal or cross curriculum schemes of work.

3. We feel the above meets the first aim of the Seminar

"how to approach the teaching of religions as social and cultural facts and value bases, the analysis and understanding of which is necessary for an understanding of the past and the present."

However, in light of our comments in 3 above we would amend the last few words to reflect the dynamics of change the teleological perspectives of all faiths and the changing nature of religions. We would say:

".... which is necessary for an understanding of the past, present and future."

4. To implement this we suggest that experience and modules developed in Religious Studies Departments and/or History of Religion in Universities be shared with those responsible for teacher training and thus for the development of formal RE. We also suggest that professional courses for the training of RE teachers be established in all the countries of the Council of Europe.

We also suggest the development of pilot projects designed to produce relevant modules and appropriate resources to further the expansion of RE in a non-confessional way.

Through these we can fulfil the second aim of the Seminar;

"how to provide teachers with the means and elements of reflection which allow them to integrate the teaching of religions in various subject areas linked in particular with the humanities and social sciences and to turn it into a "horizontal theme";

\* **Recommendation 4.** The Council of Europe should assist the linking of Religious Studies and/History of Religions Departments and other appropriate departments at Universities with those responsible for teacher training in order to develop a common, European wide rationale and methodology which will direct teacher training for non-confessional RE, for horizontal projects and for inservice/curriculum development.

\* **Recommendation 5.** In line with Recommendation 1, that the Council assist the member countries in the establishment of professional training for RE on a non-confessional basis.

5. To ensure the progress towards European wide non-confessional RE there need to be a small group to oversee and assist the Council in the development and implementation of the pilot projects listed in the Recommendations below and to initiate new projects which can further the implementation of the recommendations.

\* **Recommendation 6.** A small development group on RE be established by the Council of Europe in co-operation with the Director of this Seminar consisting of professional independent personnel who develop and implement non-confessional pilot projects and which can initiate projects which further the Recommendations.

\* **Recommendation 7.** The Development Group on RE should work in consultation with other appropriate bodies from both religious and secular backgrounds but in a non-confessional way.

\* **Recommendation 8.** The following Pilot Projects to be funded and developed by the Council of Europe under the aegis of the Development Group on RE over the next three years. These projects should commence in Autumn 1995 with continuous evaluation and agreed end products for use and dissemination by the Council of Europe and its member countries.

6. The following recommended pilot projects have been devised and proposed by the Working Groups established at the Seminar. There were four groups:

1. Religion, Human Rights and Values
2. Religion and the Arts
3. Religion and Literature
4. Religion and History

The following recommendations are brief summaries of the proposals.

\* **Recommendation 9:**

- a. Based around the twin issues of Value of Life and Value of Freedom, a cross curriculum programme and resources to be developed which examines the values attached to curriculum design and development. This should start at primary school.
- b. The development of a multi-faith resource pack on the Visual Arts and Religion, providing appropriate images and commentary suitable for European wide use.

c. Becoming a Whole Person. A project to develop the exploration of this theme between the ages of 14-17 drawing on examples from literature from a variety of cultural and religious settings; on responses religions offer to the believer, on psychological insights and on issues to do with health education.

d. The history work group formed three geographically defined groups

(i) The Mediterranean; (ii) Eastern Europe/Russia; (iii) Spain/France

(i) Training courses for prospective teachers must not be run by the official religious authorities. Seminars with participation of multi-faith representatives should be organised for teachers and curriculum development. The results of such seminars to be distributed to all countries even if no representative was present. Multi-faith RE must however be gradually established in a parallel way with the confessional teaching of the official religion.

(ii) To legislate for non-confessional RE to be a compulsory subject in the Slovak Republic while starting non-confessional RE as an optional subject in the Czech Republic.

(iii) The Council of Europe to assist in developing a common, non-confessional 'secular' approach to RE leading to an official curriculum for teacher training and syllabuses.

e. Further to the above, we recommend:-

Seminars along the same lines as this one take place in the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic and Spain to develop the non-confessional RE outlined above with appropriate input from existing RE professionals practising in the spirit of these Recommendations, from Western Europe. These to take place, if possible, during Autumn 1995.

Those of us who have had the privilege of working on this seminar with the Council, wish to express our thanks and gratitude to our colleagues at the Council. We look forward to discussing with them the implementation of these recommendations and to the next stages in this, most exciting and challenging programme.

Martin Palmer. ICOREC. 11th January 1995.

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