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Religious Education at Schools in Europe

Part 2: Western Europe

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Religious Education at Schools in Belgium

Introduction

Belgium is a rather small country in Europe. But it turns out to be great in complexity, when visitors try to understand its societal, cultural and religious organizational framework. The diversity of official languages (Dutch, French and German), the presence of different religions and world views, the permanent flow of newcomers and people just passing-by on this small surface and the variety of political institutional levels to manage this diversity, often create an image of Belgium as a complex knot of relationships which can hardly be unraveled. This was also our first impression as authors of this chapter, originating from the three linguistic communities and all being involved in research on religious education in and around Belgium. However, in our gatherings we exchanged information and communicated about the finesses of the respective educational systems and didactical options at work. We became more and more interested in the larger and smaller differences and gradually aware of the mutual benefits and boundaries of the different provisions of religious education in the different parts of the country. The writing process in itself was an intercultural journey and the mutual use of languages – French, German and Dutch, mostly ending up in a sort of common Belgian English – was our guide on the road. We are aware of the fact that our conversation could have been more inter-religious, including fellows of other worldviews, but then the group would have been too complex. What follows is the result of our inter-cultural and inter-linguistic discourse.

1. Socio-religious background

Belgium is a federal state composed of three linguistic communities (*Gemeenschappen, Communautés, Gemeinschaften*) – which have assigned duties, of which education is one – and three geographical regions: Flanders, Wallonia and

Brussels-Capital Region (Worldbank Belgium). Belgium is a country with 10,879,159 inhabitants, according to the 2010 census. 6,251,983 citizens live in the (northern) Flemish Region, 3,498,384 live in the (southern) Walloon Region, including the 75,222 inhabitants of the German-speaking community in (the eastern part of) Belgium. 1,089,538 citizens reside in the (bilingual) Brussels-Capital Region (Portal Belgium).

Historically Belgium is a Catholic country. Over the last decades however the number of members of the Catholic church is declining dramatically. According to the European Value Study (EVS) of 1981 75 % of all Belgians declared to be part of the Catholic community, while 24 % was part of no community at all. 1 % of the population was part of another religious community. In 2008 though, only 50 % declared to be part of the Catholic church, while the number of non-believers and atheists increased up to 43 %. Another 7 % belonged to another religion (Voyé 2012, 3–27). Church practice within the Catholic church decreased from 42 % in 1967 to 11 % in 1998 (Hooghe, Quintelier and Reeskens 2006, 115). In 2009 merely 5 % of the population attends church services regularly (Dobbelaere, Billiet and Voyé, 13 f). The number of baptized Catholics decreased from 93.6 % in 1967 to 54.6 % in 2007 (Hooghe and Bottermann 2009, 18). While the number of Catholics is decreasing, the number of non-believers and members of other religions, especially Islam, increases (See www.uclouvain.be/cps/ucl/doc/laap/documents/BAROMETRE.pdf).

As a consequence of the active labour migration in the sixties and early seventies, Belgium might be called an “immigration society” (Loobuyck and Jacobs 2009, 19–27). Before the migration stop in 1974 there has been a major inflow from Southern Europe, Morocco and Turkey (Attar 1992, 139–170). More than 300.000 people, descendants of the original Italian immigrants, now form the largest foreign population in Belgium, especially situated in Wallonia. Since 2003 the so called “citizenship trajectories” were established and new citizens were received. This group is very heterogeneous. The spectrum goes from political refugees to people working at the European Institutions in Brussels. They are the new immigrant inhabitants of Belgium. In 2010 a total amount of 1,057,666 people or around 10 % of the Belgian population had a different nationality (Hanseeuw 2012, 3). If one adds to this the Belgian inhabitants who were born outside the country (7.74 % of the Belgian population) and their respective children, one can argue that almost 25 % of the Belgian population has one or two parents “nés étrangers” (Rocour 2012). It goes without saying that this demographic evolution – Belgium as an immigration society – will have thorough consequences for schools and their educational goals (Bastienier, Dassetto 1990; Feld, Manço 2000).

Since education is a duty of the Communities, the number of people taking part at the different provisions of “world view courses” in school needs to be

differentiated.¹ In total 82 % of all pupils in all secondary schools (both private and public schools) in Flanders take classes in Catholic religion, 0.3 % in Protestant religion, 0.2 % in Jewish religion, 5 % in Islam and 13 % in Non-Confessional Moral Education (*Niet Confessionele Zedenleer*) (Onderwijs Vlaanderen 2010, 430 – 431). For the Brussels and Walloon region a recent study has shown that in private (i. e. mostly Catholic) schools Catholic religious education is dominant (92.7 % to 99.6 %). In the public school system in Brussels however most students attend Islamic religious education (in primary 43 %, in secondary 41.4 %), followed by moral education (27.9 % in primary and 37.2 % in secondary education) and Catholic religious education (23.3 % in primary and 15.2 % in secondary schools). In Wallonia 52.8 % of the primary school pupils in public education attend Catholic religious education, against 37.3 % moral education and 8 % Islamic religious education (Sägesser 2012, 2140 f). In secondary schools, the course of morality with its 64.2 % of attendance is dominant, against 26.4 % for Catholic and 7.8 % for Islamic religious education. The general spread of secondary school pupils in the German-speaking community over world view courses in 2005 was as follows: 83.3 % took part in Roman-Catholic religious courses, 5.15 % in Protestant, 1.9 % in Islamic, 0.21 % in orthodox courses and 9.29 % in non-confessional moral education (Godolt 2012).

2. Legal frameworks of RE and the relationship of church and state

Officially the relationship between church and state is defined by the freedom of religion proclaimed in article 19 of the Belgian Constitution. As a consequence a clear church and state separation is at stake, which means that no religion is favoured (Van Stiphout 2010, 126). The state though is not completely neutral since she actively supports a plurality of world views (Eurybase 2009 – 2010, 17 f). Therefore it may be stated that on the vertical level world views are treated equally, but on the horizontal level the state attempts to stimulate dialogue and tolerance (Van Stiphout 2010, 133 – 134). Specifically for education article 24 of the Belgian Constitution safeguards the freedom of education, to which freedom of religious education belongs as an important element. The constitution guarantees the right of every child in primary and secondary school to a mini-

1 We use the English term “world view courses” as a general common denominator for the school subject, since this is the best possible translation of the Dutch term “levensbeschouwelijke vakken” (life stances) and the French term “cours philosophiques” (philosophical courses).

num of two hours of religious lessons every week. The actual execution of this section of the law depends on the educational institution – public or private – the citizen is opting for.

In Belgium, a distinction is made between education organized and financed by the Community and education offered by a private- or public-law legal person, but fully subsidized by the state (Simon 1993, 206–239). In this last category there are schools established by public-law legal persons (cities, municipalities, provinces or inter-municipal companies), called “subsidized official education”, and schools established by private-law legal persons. These can have a Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or non-confessional background and offer “subsidized private education” (Eurybase 2009–2010, 46). Due to the historical presence of Catholicism in Flanders most of these schools have a Catholic background. 75.33 % of the Flemish speaking secondary school students attends private schools, of which the large majority are Catholic (Onderwijs Vlaanderen 2010, 110–111). 62.98 % of all Flemish speaking primary school students attend private Catholic schools (*ibid.*, 32). Generally considered one French speaking pupil out of two is attending a private Catholic school, against 36.3 % for subsidized official education and 14.7 % for Community schools.

The organization of religious education depends on the type of educational system. The public schools (operated by the Communities and cities, etc.) are compelled by constitution to offer religious courses in all of Belgium’s six officially recognized religions plus the officially recognized freemasonry. For the moment Flanders adopts these seven for being taught in the public school in courses of Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Judaism, Anglicanism, the Orthodox creed and Non-Confessional Morality. In Wallonia and Brussels six of them are taught at school: the Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jewish and Orthodox religion, together with Non-Confessional Morality. Students in public schools can freely select one of those seven in Flanders and one of those six in the French speaking part of the country (Van Stiphout 2007, 36). In the private sector on the other hand the private-law legal persons can offer students the world view education they consider as educationally preferable. They are not obliged to offer all of the seven / six officially recognized perspectives. For that reason a Catholic school will mainly opt for Catholic religious education.

In opposition to other courses, in religious education the state has limited authority when it comes to the content of the course and the appointment of teachers. An important role is therefore allocated to the organising authorities of the different religions and non-religious belief systems themselves. Catholic religious education teachers for example need the intervention of their diocese twice before they even can be appointed by a school (*ibid.*, 22). In the first place they need a mandate, which can only be given by the bishop of the diocese. In Flanders one has to be baptized and has to sign a statement of commitment

(*engagementsverklaring*). This mandate opens the possibility to work as a religious education teacher, but does not give any access to a concrete appointment yet (ibid., 22–26). Therefore the vicar-general in the Catholic diocese, an independent commission or the leader of a religious order has to evaluate the prospective teacher (his / her confessional background, the need for additional formation, etc.) and can then submit him / her for a specific job at a specific school (ibid., 26–28). This procedure is the consequence of the church and state separation in which the government is not supposed to judge someone's qualifications for religious offices (ibid., 28). The application of teachers for other world views happens in a similar way.

The German-speaking community has its own ministry of Education, which is responsible for the organization of religious education in cooperation with church authorities, as is also the case in the other two communities. The inspector of religious education is responsible for religious studies on all levels, and on the bishop's authority he is also responsible for counseling, advanced vocational training, supervision and the official representation of religious education.

In the last part of this section we offer a brief insight in how religion in general and confessional schools more specifically are financed. The Belgian federal government is competent for the salaries of the religious ministers, while the Regions pay for the material provision (Dankaers 2011). Consequently all officially recognized religions and freemasonry are financed by the state. In the current model 80 % of all the financial resources in Flanders are used for the Catholic church, since only for this faith community the government does not count the actual members, but starts its calculations from all inhabitants in a parish, notwithstanding their actual belief. In order to adjust this distorted calculation a commission wrote the report *Magits*, which is a plea for granting equal financial rights to all world views (Werkgroep Magits 2010). The same discussion occurred in schools in the French speaking community. Here was the focus rather on the question whether or not the complete range of six worldviews should necessarily be provided in every public school (CSC-Enseignement 2004, 69–75).

3. Developments in the country's education policies

Four developments determine the future of religious education in Flanders. First there is the changing societal context. As a consequence of secularization and migration, the impact of Catholicism on societal and educational issues is declining. The focus of the education model in Flanders has shifted towards a diversity model, with equal participation of all target groups. Even within

Catholic schools many of the students do not consider themselves Catholic anymore, even if they are baptized Catholics. Practising Catholic students belong to the absolute minority even within their own schools. Therefore the Catholic education system shifted from a monologue to a dialogue model, in which the Catholic identity remains the point of departure, but where other life stances are welcomed (VSKO 26th of October 2011; Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2013). Another consequence of the decline of Catholicism is the changing financing methods of the officially recognized worldviews. More importantly a discussion about the content of religious education courses arises. In 2010, a group of politicians introduced a bill in parliament in which they proposed to spend in a compulsory way one of the two hours of religious education in the third grade of secondary school on comparative religion. The Council of State (*Raad van State, Conseil d'État*) though gave a mixed advice, defended both the autonomy of confessional courses in religion and the need to limit this autonomy when important democratic values are at stake. The advice hold that when democratic values can be realized without intervening in the autonomy of confessional course of religion, the autonomy should be respected. As a consequence the parliament rejected the bill in 2012. In the aftermath of this discussion, the different courses in religion themselves opted to work closer together on a voluntary basis (Ysebaert 2nd of May 2012). A last issue is the future of Catholic religious education, not as a consequence of state pressure, but as a result of inner reflection. In the Flemish Church a debate is going on between those who want religious education to be more Catholic again, and those who prefer a dialogue model (Godsdienstonderwijs.be).

In the French speaking community the Minister of Education, Marie-Dominique Simonet, proposed in early 2012 the idea to install at the beginning of the school year 2013–2014 a common trunk for the six courses in religious education and non-confessional moral education. This common trunk would include three dimensions: the philosophical question, the dialogue between world views and the focus on citizenship education. This well-reflected project should be elaborated by an inter-confessional task force. Central point of concern should be the description of particular competences related to each worldview and the definition of so called “transversal” competences and contents, common to all the worldviews. This project however has not yet resulted in a final decision. The particular part of every singular worldview has been finalized and the report was presented on the 17th of May 2013. In this report every worldview points to possible common competences and contents, but the final agreement is not achieved yet (Berhin 2013, 17–19; Ernens 17th of May 2013).

The German speaking community's autonomous academy (*Autonome Hochschule*) (www.ahs-dg.be) trains religious teachers for primary schools. The *Autonome Hochschule* of the German-speaking community was established in

2005 as a result of the merger of two smaller academies, one was subsidized by the community, the other was privately funded. It was Belgium's first merger of two schools from different educational backgrounds and consequently it attracted a great deal of attention. It is of interest to note the new academy's basic philosophy, which is described as "articulate plurality" and whose self-confessed aim it is to provide the associated academies with a solid basic structure for the years to come.

4. Role of denominational schools

Due to the historical Catholic background of Flanders most of the subsidized private schools have Catholic roots. However, the freedom of education allows also other religions and worldviews to organize their own schools. The most famous example in Flanders are the 30 schools of the Jewish educational system in the city of Antwerp (Leraar Worden). Most of them are allied to the large Jewish Orthodox community in this city. The Protestant community runs seven schools in Flanders, the so-called "Schools with the Bible" (*Scholen met de Bijbel*) (IPCO). In the Francophone Belgium seven Protestant primary schools can be found, mainly in the province of Hainaut (Vrij Onderwijsplatform). The other three officially recognized religions (Anglican, Orthodox and Islamic) do not possess own schools in Belgium (yet). Besides these schools with a religious background there are a lot of non-confessional schools in Belgium. Fourteen schools are lead by free-thinkers (Vrij Onderwijsplatform) and most schools that offer alternative education (*Freinet, Steiner, Experience Based Education, Life school*, etc.) are non-confessional as well (Eurybase 2009–2010, 78).

Even within the Catholic educational system distinctions are to be made, since, besides the diocesan schools, also five congregations and religious orders set up their own schools. The Jesuits run seven Flemish schools, the Salesians of Don Bosco 17, the Josephites three and the Brothers of Charity 50. Also the Brothers of the Christian Schools are present in the Flemish educational landscape. The superiors of these religious are not allowed to give mandates to prospective teachers, but they can submit them in order to get an appointment². As a consequence one cannot speak of denominations in the strict sense since a Catholic bishop has the highest authority in these schools. The same situation can be found in the southern part of the country, in which these congregations have gathered in 2012 in the ASSOEC (*Association des Ecoles Congréganistes Francophones*) (Van De Werve 2012, 22).

2 For the situation of the congregations, see Van Stiphout 2007, 28 and 37.

5. Conceptions and tasks of RE

In accordance with Canon Law, Roman Catholic religious education is an expression of being part of the Christian *communio* and of the universal mission of the Apostolic Church (Van Stiphout 2007, 18). For the implementation of this vision in the contemporary Flemish society the “Statement of Intention of Roman Catholic Religious Education” (*Leerplan Rooms Katholieke Godsdienst*) has one general objective: creating openness for and insight in what it means to be a Christian in the present-day plural society (Erkende Instantie 1999, 13–17). This general objective can be subdivided into three basic aims. First of all pupils need to be made aware of and challenged by the multitude of life perspectives and world views in a pluralistic society. Moreover they are to be motivated to take a critical stance towards the “economisation” of the western society. A second aim is to situate the Christian belief within a context of religious diversity. And finally pupils have to render account for their own world view profile in dialogue with the Christian faith tradition (Boeve 1999, 287–311; Onderwijs Vlaanderen 2003, 16). From September 2005 onward this intention and related curriculum became binding for all Catholic religious education classes in Flanders. Since then new text books are officially examined and can only be used after their official approval (Radermacher-De Ridder and Verkest 2007, 26).

The Roman Catholic line of approach which welcomes both Christian believers and non- or other-believers differs a lot from the point of departure of the statements of intention and curricula of the other officially recognized world views (Onderwijs Vlaanderen 2003, 5 f.). The statement of intention of the Islamic religious education course offers religious instruction to Muslim pupils through the knowledge and praxis of the sources of Islam. The Protestant statement of intention puts stress on learning Biblical themes, while the Orthodox tradition wants its pupils to appropriate a metaphysical mode of thought and to build up a religious personality. The emphasis of Anglican religious education lays on church history, bible studies, the church and religious service. The Jewish religious authorities stress the Jewish history, reading, praying, blessing, sense of public responsibility and the Hebrew language. Finally, non-confessional moral education aims at developing moral reflection and practice of pupils within a pluralistic society.

In the French speaking part of Belgium the secondary school curriculum of religious education adopted by the bishops in 2003 describes the aim of the course as follows: awakening a sense of quest for the meaning of life in existential issues – in confrontation with the many voices and especially the voice of Christianity. This confrontation is considered to be a personal articulation in the field of tension between existential issue, cultural material and Christian resources (Programme de religion catholique 2003; Derroitte 2009).

6. Practice / reality of RE in different schools

In their above mentioned 1999 vision the Flemish bishops (Erkende Instantie 1999, 13–17) recognize and valorize the new situation. The growing pluralization and de-traditionalization of society have a strong impact on churches and congregations and therefore on classroom. The spontaneous connection or “correlation” between faith in community and the daily life experiences of young people does not function anymore, so that the one-dimensional correlative religious education that was based on this is running out of order³. A new model is developed: the “hermeneutic-communicative” model (Lombaerts, Pollefeyt 2004; Lombaerts, Roebben 2000). Young people are trained in the perception and interpretation of moral and religious phenomena in society, they learn to define their own stance (hermeneutic) and they learn to deepen, clarify and articulate their position with and in the presence of others (communicative) – and this within the framework of the Christian tradition. In the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the KU Leuven this model is developed with strong multi-correlational ways (Pollefeyt 2004, 142–146) of appropriation by pupils and with an intense link to interreligious learning processes (Pollefeyt 2007). For the support of this model in teacher training and in in-service training the successful *Thomas* website (www.godsdienstonderwijs.be) was launched in 2001 with several theoretical, didactical and media-related impulses for religious education.

Two educational models are mostly developed in the Francophone part of Belgium. The oldest one, the *pédagogie d'appropriation*, has been implemented by an inspector of religious education, Eddy Ernens in the late 1970s (Ernens 1998). This structures religious education classes in five stages: awareness, documentation, confrontation, interiorisation and synthesis. Since the mid-2000s, a second method is also frequently used: the *pédagogie de la figuration*. It was designed by a Belgian Jesuit, Jean-Paul Laurent, and inspired by the philosophy of Ricoeur to conceptualize the course in three phases: figuration, configuration, and transfiguration (Laurent 2005, 325–339).

3 In Germany this process was for the first time explicitly articulated by Englert 1993, 97–110. For Flanders, see Roebben 2001, 146–149 and Boeve 2012, 229–257.

7. Observation on alternative subjects / learning areas like ethics, philosophy etc.

In Wallonia and in the French speaking schools in Brussels an alternative course of ethics and/or philosophy is not scheduled. Neither in Flanders such an alternative or parallel course to religious education exists. One can take lessons in one of the seven or six officially recognised worldviews, including Non-confessional Moral Education, the latter focusing more on philosophy and ethics *pur sang*. The curricula of some of the other world views, like the one for Catholic religious education, both in Flanders and in Wallonia/Brussels pay attention to philosophical and ethical themes as well, but always more or less from within a confessional point of view⁴.

Recently, in 2004, the Flemish Government introduced the *Vrije Ruimte*, classes freely introduced by the schools themselves for which no statement of intention nor final achievement levels exist (Experimenteren in de vrije ruimte 2007). This gives the pupils the possibility to acquire skills in a more relaxed atmosphere. For the moment the *Vrije Ruimte* only exists for the 2nd and 3rd grade of General Secondary Education. In some schools the *Vrije Ruimte* is used to introduce pupils into the basic principles of philosophy (VVKSO 2004). During the discussions about the future of religious education in the Flemish Parliament mentioned above some politicians suggested the introduction of a course on life stances, ethics and philosophy (*LEF: Levensbeschouwing, Ethiek en Filosofie*)⁵. This course would replace the courses on religious education, or would make them optional.

8. Dealing with religious diversity

In the French speaking part of Belgium the concern has been uttered to create an official space for moral and religious dialogue in society and schools, based on the assumption that young people need to learn to deal with diversity and that adults in society cannot leave them alone with that huge task. On the 3rd of June 2005 this council was created officially, the *Conseil consultatif supérieur des cours philosophiques*. Three main goals were fixed: to formulate advice and propositions in the realm of world view education, to promote exchange and dialogue between the different world views at school and finally to keep the philosophical awareness awake, including in confessional religious education. In 2006 this

4 See the analysis of Sägesser 2012, nr. 2140 – 2141.

5 *Vlaams Parlement trekt debat over godsdienstonderwijs op gang*, in *De Morgen*, 1st of February 2012.

council was consulted intensively on the issue of the relationship between religions and education for democratic citizenship.

Since the 1960s the organizing authorities (*Inrichtende machten*) for religious education in Flanders meet regularly to make practical arrangements for the organisation of world view education in public schools (Van Stiphout 2010, 125). These conferences are a practical outcome of the separation of church and state and are essential for the functioning of religious education on a state school level (*ibid.*, 133 f). The meeting of the organising authorities does not meddle in the content of religious courses and does never go into questions about ecumenism and religious diversity (*ibid.*, 134). Out of this meeting a new commission arose: the Commission of world view education (*Commissie Levensbeschouwelijke Vakken*), composed by the official inspectors-coordinators of the different world views. This organ does not only gather with regard to practical problems and does not only write advices about the organization of religious education (Onderwijs Vlaanderen 2003), but also attempts to promote the dialogue between the different life stances in the schools. Therefore projects on social problems are developed on a regularly basis. In a first step pupils of the same life stance can gather around these problems in order to form an opinion within their group. Afterwards these opinions can be brought together into a respectful interreligious dialogue. On the other hand the commission promotes an everyday dialogue between all world views present at schools. Nowadays this organ only has authority for public schools (*Gemeenschapsonderwijs*), in which pupils have to choose for a specific life stance education (see §2). The Ministry of Education has the intention to extend this dialogue model to all the schools in Flanders (Vlaams Parlement 2010 – 2011, 5). Recently, this same commission produced a document on interreligious competences concerning dialogue and collaboration of world views at school. It contains competences which all pupils should acquire in the religious education course (See www.kuleuven.be/thomas/page/historisch-engagement-over-interlevensbeschouwelijke-competenties).

In Flanders, most of the schools established by the Roman Catholic church already left the monologue model and use a dialogue model in their general policy and in the organization of their religious education courses. The statement of intention of Roman Catholic religious education, that seems to take the diverse society as a starting point, stresses that religious education has to be taught “in the way of the school”, with an eye on dialogue with other life stances (Erkende Instantie 1999, 13 and 29). The encounter with other life stances is an opportunity for Christians to get aware of their own tradition and identity, says the statement of intention (Erkende Instantie, 30). This opinion is a consequence of the hermeneutic-communicative model underlying Catholic religious education in Flanders today (see §6) (Godsdienstonderwijs.be).

9. Religion in schools outside of RE

On demand of the VSKO, the organisation coordinating all Catholic schools in Flanders, many schools offer their pupils and staff members a range of pastoral projects to deal with (VSKO 2010). The point of departure is a complete approach in which metaphorically “head, hands and heart” are united into one educational project. Attention is paid to Jesus Christ, his message and the Catholic tradition. Religious life is part of the Catholic identity of the school and of the general educational project. According to the VSKO, the aims of religious life and pastoral ministry at school are to provide children and young with the opportunities to be introduced to, nourished by and inspired with the Christian tradition in daily school life. At most schools some parts of the pastoral project are obligatory for all pupils, while others are organized on a voluntary basis⁶.

In Wallonia and Brussels there is hardly any research been conducted on the issue of pastoral ministry at school. An inter-diocese commission reflects on its goals and creates materials for concrete projects, but the main responsibility in this regard remains in the hands of the local organizing authorities (*Pouvoir Organisateur*) (Villers 2005). If one should analyze the activities in this respect, one could perceive a shift from celebration and spirituality in the direction of social and humanitarian work. Another evolution in the Francophone Belgium is the focus on the teacher, rather than on the pupils, because of his/her exemplary role as (Christian) educator in school. Pastoral ministry and initiatives to introduce this type of support remain rather limited in the German speaking community, though it is in place in Catholic educational establishments.

An interesting new development which should be mentioned here is the creation of new sacred spaces in schools, mainly replacing the traditional place of Eucharistic worship (such as a chapel or prayer room). Some school boards have been very creative in this respect and renovated and recontextualized these spaces into “open” sacred spaces, both for liturgical use and broader meditative events at school⁷.

6 One initiative to be mentioned here are the so called days of reflection, see B. Roebben 2001, 97–114.

7 Cf. the work of architect Tom Callebaut at www.tcct.be/PDF/TCCT_SacraleRuimtes.pdf.

10. Training of teachers of RE

The Belgian universities and university colleges invest intensively in education for prospective teachers of religious courses. In this part we will mainly focus on Catholic religious education and their view on religion teachers. In the Flemish job specification for teachers of Catholic religious education a distinction is made between those elements religious teachers have in common with others and those specifications characteristic for religious teachers in Catholic schools. In the latter three main requirements are mentioned: teachers have to know and use the statement of intent, have to be able to coach their pupils in search for religious growth and have to communicate about their Catholic belief (VSKO, FUNCTIEBESCHRIJVING). Consequently one can summarise the task of the teacher as being a witness of his own tradition, a moderator in religious communication and a professional specialist in the Christian tradition, in other world religions and world views (Godsdienstonderwijs.be; see also Roebben 2013, 191 – 194).

In order to prepare teachers for this demanding job, various teacher training and continuing education programmes are in place. In Flanders teacher training is offered on three different levels. First there is a university teacher training offering a master in theology and religious studies combined with the so called Specific Academic Teacher Training (*SLO*). Students with this educational background are allowed to teach Catholic religious education in all levels of secondary schools. Teacher training is also offered by several college universities in Flanders which provide diploma's on the level of a professional bachelor degree. Teachers with this degree can teach religious education in the lower levels of secondary school and in the primary school. A third way to become a teacher in religious education is the certificate handed over by the dioceses themselves. After a teaching package, the student will receive a degree comparable to a professional bachelor. Continuing education programmes for Catholic religious education are offered by IDKG, a coordinating organization, founded by the Flemish dioceses (IDKG, Nascholing). As was mentioned before, teachers also use the website *Thomas* (www.godsdienstonderwijs.be) of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the KU Leuven, in collaboration with the Flemish Office of Catholic Education (VSKO), the bishops' conference, the training institutions for teachers in Flanders and the inspectors for Catholic religious education.

In the Francophone part of Belgium, there are four ways of becoming a secondary school teacher of Catholic religious education. First of all there is the master degree in theology and/or biblical studies at the *Université Catholique de Louvain (Faculté de théologie)*. In combination with this master the students fulfil a praxis part in schools, which offers them the degree of *agrégation de*

l'enseignement secondaire supérieur (AESS). A second possibility is the university college, in which the students receive a bachelor degree for French and religion in the lower level of the secondary school. The third level is the diocesan level with the institutes of religious studies, together with the Institute Lumen Vitae (created by the Jesuits) (www.lumenvitae.be), who deliver the so called graduate in religious studies. And finally the fourth and most successful way consists in providing students of other disciplines with the *Certificat universitaire de didactique du cours de religion catholique* (CDER) after completing 30 ECTS of extra course work. Continuing formation and specific courses in religious and interreligious learning is offered by the CECAFOC (www.ceca-foc.be/religion). In-service teachers have access to different online support systems, among others www.coursdereligion.be, www.lumenonline.net and www.eyn-mayim.be.

The shortage of religious teachers in the German speaking community increases steadily. By now it is exceptional for schools in this community to employ fully trained secondary school teachers for religion. Very few young religious teachers graduate from the national Belgian religious teacher training colleges and the same applies to the community's own *Autonome Hochschule* (see §3), that is hardly able to provide any religious teachers for primary schools. Opportunities for advanced religious training, as well as pedagogical and didactic materials for religious education are mainly available in the neighboring French speaking community or can be obtained from the Catechetical Institute (*Katechetisches Institut*) of the Aachen diocese (<http://ki-aachen.kibac.de>).

11. Empirical research concerning RE

Extensive empirical data sets are available on religious education in Flanders. The KU Leuven published data on religious education in primary (Henckens, Pollefeyt, Hutsebaut, Maex and De Boeck 2011) and secondary (Pollefeyt, Hutsebaut, Lombaerts, De Vlieger, Dillen, Maex and Smit 2004) schools. The main result of the secondary school research was lying in the fact that teachers support the actual confessional understanding of religious education and are willing to combine witnessing of the Christian tradition with respect for and openness to the societal plurality in view of the support of the student. Students appreciate teachers in religious education as far as they have a post-critical cognitive belief style, this means, when they give witness to an open Christian identity. The main result of the primary school research was that even primary school children (age 10–12 years) show capacities for symbolic thinking and

acting, and that teachers with a post-critical belief style are best equipped to stimulate these symbolic competencies in children⁸.

Under the auspices of the GRER, a research group on Education and Religion at the *Université Catholique de Louvain* (Louvain-la-Neuve), an extensive survey was conducted in 2011–2013 among professors currently teaching Catholic religious education at the secondary level in the Francophone part of Belgium. This project had three goals clearly identified: (1) understand the need for training and support for teachers of religion; (2) analyse their positions about their job, the program they teach, the way they describe the main goals of the Catholic religion class, the link between their own religious beliefs and content they offer to students, etc.; (3) identify theological questions underlying the professional practice of teachers of religion, related to religious content, plausibility of religious speech in the public space, language of religious discourse in schools, inculturation, articulation in religious education between inter-religious and inter-confessional dialogue, etc. (Derroitte 2013).

12. Desiderata and challenges for religious education in a European context

Religiosity in Belgium is in many ways a patchwork tapestry – woven together out of traditional Catholic Church related elements, new religious experiences introduced by immigrant communities and an undefinable complex set of late modern world views of younger generations. Religious education in Belgium, in the public realm of the school, is dealing with this broader European and global diversity, but because of the small surface of the country and its deep history, the discourses on religious education seem to be even more intense. In an attempt to reach a provisional conclusion we bring together our four different voices and frame them in three common challenges.

1. We believe that the aim of religious education should be first of all humanisation and not socialization (for this distinction, see Pourtois, Desmet 2009, 13 f). It should be a place of reflection on the *humanizing character* of religions and belief systems in an open society and school environment. Churches and humanistic organizations (Leleux, Rocourt 2010) can provide young people with helpful resources to understand and exercise this task. In this respect Catholic religious education can no longer be considered from an integrative catechetical point of view. Nor the alternative of a mere objective juxtaposed presentation of different world views would be sufficient. Young

⁸ For empirical research on the identity of catholic schools, see Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2010, 193–210.

people have the right to be deeply involved in religious education, to raise important questions and to be existentially confronted with the wisdom of old traditions, without being indoctrinated by these traditions. Both the mere mono-confessional (*learning in religion*) and the multi-confessional (*learning about religion*) approaches to religious education do not seem to take the longings and quests of young people serious. We believe that a well organised hermeneutical communication⁹ on these life issues (*learning from religion*) can foster the human flourishing of future young people (Derroitte 2011, 217–239; Roebben 2013, 154–164; Roebben to be published 2014). This will be a major challenge for future school development and teacher training.

2. It is our contention that a clear, solid and deontological safe space for religious education can be built in a dialogical and open minded *confessional set-up* of religious education. We believe that young people have the right to orientate themselves in confrontation (positive or negative, but not in indifference) with the tradition of the Catholic school and / or Catholic religious education (See e.g. Joblin 2012, 333–347). This will imply a renewed reflection on the actually lived and authentic convictions within this tradition, both empirically and hermeneutically (Roebben 2011, 245–253). Once again: this will be a major challenge for future school development and teacher training.
3. Important questions will need to be solved in the future, more specifically about the organization of *religious diversity* in the contextual framework of religious education in Belgium. Probably different regional conclusions will need to be drawn¹⁰. Probably the coexistence of different organizational models will need to be explored, depending on the actual context of the school and its curriculum. Many theological and educational-didactical questions will need to be solved (Derroitte 2012, 57–85). And once again: this will be a major challenge for future school development and teacher training.

13. Further information

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⁹ See the Leuven hermeneutic-communicative model in §6.

¹⁰ For different views on Flanders, see Loobuyck and Franken 2011, 17–30; Coene 2011, 195–207; Juchtmans and Nicaise 2013, 132–163.

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