



Summary of lecture by Zorica Kuburić:

Role of religion in contemporary world and its relation towards tolerance and conflict situations

Ljubljana - Kreatorij DIC, 3.8.2007 - 16.00 / Public discussion Divided God

I am very glad to have this opportunity to be part of this project which deal with religion, religion education and the name of God. The first question which I have in my mind is: how they (first students in this project) understand "Divided God". What is behind these words. I still do not know what others think about this, but I try to talk about my impressions and the meaning which I give this statement.

If we are educated in Christian theology we can talk about nature of the God and "Divided God" in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Also, we can talk about different names of God in different religions. But, in view of the fact that I am professor of Sociology of religion, I will not talk about God, just about the believers. First I plan to talk about the meaning of "Divided people in the name of God" and how religious education helps to divide children in the school. Second, I plan to talk about "Divided image of God in the different understanding of God's personality. Both are in mankind perspective and it takes place in the process of socialization and education.

Religious Education, more than any other school subject, has been a conflict-prone field on many levels, especially in the education system. Its reception ranged from rejection to acceptance, from fear to the hope that it has the power to install or uproot a socio-political system.

This project "Divided God" starts in Mostar. We can see a divided town in those who belong to Islam community and those who belong to Catholic Church, and those who don't belong to. They live in the same country, in the same town, they go to the same school, but, the name of God is different and it looks like parallel worlds. They are divided in time. They are on different sides of the street and between is a gap of faith (not a gap of generation). It will be different if it is a private school and everybody pays if they like to have religious education. But, it is a state school and nobody can escape from belonging.

It starts from 1991. in Croatia. Religious education was first introduced in Croatia if we talk about previous Yugoslavia. Catholic Church was ready to fill the gap between atheist society and society in transition. The non-confessional approach has been completely marginalized. Religious Instruction as a confessional, optional subject in all grades of primary and secondary school has been the dominant mode of teaching religion in the last 17 years. The lack of an alternative subject means that pupils who are not religiously educated within their families and who do not attend confessional religious instruction in schools are deprived of the opportunity to learn about world's religions (Marinovic-Bobinac and Marinovic-Jerolimov, 2006:68).

Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of two entities. The Federation is further divided into ten cantons, of which five with a Muslim majority, three with a catholic majority, and two cantons without an ethnic majority (in all cantons there are Serb minorities). Schools are ethnically divided: there are more than 90% pupils of one nation/confession; minorities have either extracurricular activities or no organized alternative at all. Confessional religious education starts from 1994. by its nature takes place in segregated classes. In the Federation, however, a more pressing issue is the total ethnic and religious segregation in so-called "two schools under one roof." It is difficult to make room for a neutral, informative subject about religions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Popov, Ofstad, 2006: 103).

Confessional religious education was introduced in the Serbian public school system as a multid denominational and optional subject by a governmental regulation published on July 27, 2001. Even though it was not compatible with the programs and contents of other school subjects, Religious Education was lunched in Serbian schools. Pupils could choose between two subjects, Religious Education or Civic Education. Students are obligate to take one of the two. Traditional churches and religious communities obtained the same rights in conducting religious educatin in public schools. It is interesting that this right was granted only to those religions that are nationally or ethnically based: The Serbian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community, the Roman Catholic Church, The Slovak Evangelical Church, the Reformed Christian Church, The Evangelical Crhistian Chruch and the Jewish Community. The confessional, multi-denominational model has survived a constitutional challenge, whereas proposals for a subject based on a multi-cultural, comparative Religious Studies approach have not been accepted.

Religious education has not been introduced in Montenegro, where public opinion is divided on the issue. One survey of public opinion in the 1990s showed that 64% were in favour of religious education in schools. There are not religious education in Kosovo, which is currently under UN administration.

In Slovenia, confessional religious education remains strictly barred from the public secular space of the school building, instead, there is a non-confessional elective subject covering different religious as well as ethics (1997).

"Religion and Pluralizm in Education" (Kuburic, Moe, 2006) is the name of book we prepare in coparative approaches. This subjects have been the subject of many debates and raise many questions: Is there a place in public schools for religious instruction based on normative e theology, or only for a neutrally informative subject on religions based on scular scholarship? Should children of different religions be taught jointly or separately, and should the subject be compulsory?

It is however a particularly sensitive issue how the state organises the teaching of religion, and as such, the subject could easily become a focus of social conflict. If we remember, throughout the twentieth century, reliogus education reflected political canges: from being the main value system to being an enemy who had to be expelled together with teachers who taught it (during the communist period). Fifty years later, it was reinstalled in the education systems of the post-comunist states, influencing again the moral behaviour of young people. Empirical studies show that religius education is accepted as the free choice of students. Any coercive implementation of such a subject on public schools, or state prohibition of its availability within religious communities, would not be in agreement with religious rights and freedoms of individuals and religious communities. (Kuburic, Vukomanovic, 2006:133).