

Article

Not peer-reviewed version

Christian Education in a Secular Democracy. Balancing Secular Citizenship and Sacred Belief

Ciprian Simut^{*} and Ion Albulescu

Posted Date: 6 February 2025

doi: 10.20944/preprints202502.0418.v1

Keywords: cristian education; citizenship; civic responsibility; dialogical teaching; curriculum



Preprints.org is a free multidisciplinary platform providing preprint service that is dedicated to making early versions of research outputs permanently available and citable. Preprints posted at Preprints.org appear in Web of Science, Crossref, Google Scholar, Scilit, Europe PMC.

Copyright: This open access article is published under a Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license, which permit the free download, distribution, and reuse, provided that the author and preprint are cited in any reuse.

Article

Christian Education in a Secular Democracy. Balancing Secular Citizenship and Sacred Belief

Ciprian Simut ^{1,*} and Ion Albulescu ²

¹ University of Oradea, Romania

² Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

* Correspondence: cipriansimut@uoradea.ro

Abstract: Christian Education in a Secular Democracy. Balancing Secular Citizenship and Sacred Belief. The essay examines the challenges and opportunities that Christian education faces in balancing religious teachings with the demands of secular democratic values. It explores how Christian schools nurture students in Christian virtues, while equipping them to participate actively and responsibly in a pluralistic, but democratic, society. It also points to the role of the curriculum design, dialogical teaching, and civic engagement in integrating Christian virtues with civic responsibilities. By analyzing these pedagogical strategies, the essay argues that Christian education can train and prepare individuals, who are committed to their faith, but also are well-prepared for life in a secular democracy.

Keywords: cristian education; citizenship; civic responsibility; dialogical teaching; curriculum

Introduction

The essay explores the possible tensions and connections between Christian education and secular democratic values, with the focus on how Christian schools could approach the task of effectively educating students to become citizens who are conscious about their religious virtues and their civic responsibilities. Nurturing values is one of the challenges for Christian education, because they prepare students to engage responsibly a pluralistic society, where secularism has strong foothold. The challenge, therefore, lies in fostering love, justice, morality, and integrity, as Christian virtues, within the secular democratic context, where pluralism, critical thinking, diversity, and personal autonomy are core principles. The essay aims to provide insight into how Christian education can navigate the realities of a secular democratic system, while maintaining and protecting the fundamentals of Christian values.

As a theoretical essay, the study approaches concepts such as the curriculum and pedagogical principles, in order to explore how Christian educational institutions address societal and legal expectations, without compromising their religious integrity. The essay also draws upon historical and contemporary issues that beget the discussion about how Christian values can coexist and complement secular democratic principles in education. Throughout the essay, it is argued that Christian education is capable to develop responsible citizens who are faithful to their Christian identity and who act and engage societal issues in a responsible manner.

The essay argues that Christian education can balance the teachings of Christian virtues with preparing students for an active and responsible participation in secular democratic societies. It can also be argued that balancing does not mean accepting or identifying with some secular concepts, that go against Christian teachings, but instead it refers to acknowledging that secular principles do not always go against Christian teachings[1]. Christianity does not reject secularism on a whim but informs society of its views on political and social matters to create the environment that would allow the shaping of a more just and harmonious society. A partially overlapping set of values and principles consist of the biblical principles of love, justice, and integrity, and the secular principles of

democratic and/or secular principles of justice, human dignity[2], and common good[3]. Ethical citizens, with an informed view of the issues of contemporary society, can be educated in Christian schools, provided they integrate faith-based instruction with critical thinking, acknowledgment of diversity, and civic responsibility. Students who are educated in Christian schools, through dialogical pedagogy, as a key component of curriculum design, are able to engage with secular democratic values, while being grounded in Christian faith[4]. Spiritual and civic life do not exclude one another, even if they are built on different world views.

There is a wide range of possibilities that allows the exploration of the challenges and opportunities that arise from the balancing act between Christian education and the principles of a democratic society, that are secular in nature. The analysis provides practical strategies for addressing potential conflicts that might arise from curricular content and legal requirements, together with proposing opportunities for integration. The essay proposes perspectives into how educators can maintain religious integrity, while preparing students to engage in a society characterized by cultural pluralism in a democratic setting. Within this purpose, the essay argues that Christian education can train students who are both faithful to their beliefs and active, accountable, responsible and mature citizens in democratic settings.

The Tensions Within

Cultures, religions and philosophies coexist in a pluralistic society, while education engages them in a structured manner and presents the contents to students, one of the purposes being that of shaping future citizens, who are informed, active and responsible[5]. Education is considered the primary means to achieve the educational ideal of shaping the citizens. The family environment, as well as the community in which children grow, contribute, sometimes decisively, to how the educational ideal is achieved. Pluralistic societies also have a significant secular element, which influences moral education and the relationship between individuals[6]. At an educational level, Christian educational institutions have a difficult task to achieve. On the one hand, they need to nurture Christian virtues and faith-based values, while on the other, they need to equip students to participate effectively and responsibly in a secular democratic system. Christian schools do not offer the option of retreating from society to preserve a Christian core of values, but instead argues for students to engage society and if possible, to have a positive effect on it[7].

Christian education grapples with the spiritual and moral formation of students, using biblical teachings. It also works on the development of Christian virtues, that shape the life of faith in the service of God and fellow man, together with care for nature[8]. An issue of particular importance is that the school curriculum is shaped by theological perspectives, which place the authority of Scripture at its core, but which view moral and ethical issues through a religious lens, which could differ from one Christian tradition to the other. Despite the differences, different Christian traditions find enough common ground in matters of morals[9]. Therefore, Christian education aims for academic excellence and living a life based on Christian principles. The fundamental Christian principles are love, humility, and integrity, to which justice can be added, with the meaning of judging all things in the light of God's principles and acting based on them. These principles are absolute and unchanging[10]. Divine authority is non-negotiable, and the afore-mentioned principles are grounded in it.

Secular democratic values would promote and prioritize pluralism, personal autonomy, equality, as well as the capacity for individual reasoning and the right to have individual choices, without religious pressure[11]. Critical thinking, promotion of diversity of thought and belief, as well as the ability to engage in civil discourse despite differences, could be considered characteristics of democratic citizenship. The separation of church or religion and state is a prerogative of secular democratic systems, but it is also a characteristic of modern democratic thought, which was not secular in the sense that it denied the existence of God. The purpose was the creation of an environment where no single belief system would dominate the public sphere, while individuals

would have the freedom to create personal and individual views on all matters, religious and secular[12].

Christian education works within a secular society, therefore Christian schools face challenges in their approach to their own curriculum and the type of society outside its walls. The curriculum is the first significant challenge to address by Christian education[13]. In a conservative Christian environment, the expectation would be, in most cases, that disciplines, such as science, human sexuality, and ethics, fit a rather conservative theology, whereas these issues are not approached in this manner in schools that have a liberal theological identity. The issue is significant, since secular curricula address issues such as evolutionary theory, gender identity and sexual orientation, together with critical race theory and the plethora of LGBTQ issues[14]. These approaches would not integrate the Christian view, whereas public funded Christian schools might have to accommodate them. The challenge to Christian schools is not keep these subjects away from their students, but to approach them properly, as societal debates are useful in tackling the issues[15].

Cultural pluralism adds to the complexity of the issue, because in pluralistic societies students come from different backgrounds into the Christian schools. Christians have a wide range of views on matters of theology and politics, which could interfere with the way a certain Christian school chooses to address such issues[16]. Staying true to a certain denominational foundation in matters of doctrine and theology, might be a challenge among the staff. However, the ability to engage with students in a respectful manner on all opposing views builds the fabric of a democratic society[17].

A significant tension is the extent to which state laws can enforce education to integrate subjects that are free from religious coercion, especially in publicly funded schools. These schools can be confessional, thus certain subjects might go against the doctrinal views of the school[18]. National educational standards could be forced into schools, but the issue is whether these confessional schools are allowed to stay true to their religious identity. Being a private school does not guarantee that national educational standards may be avoided. Christian schools, if compelled to integrate a secular curriculum, would have to work around and address the issues in their interactions with students[19].

The tension encompasses the issue of moral and civic education. Although moral discipline is not taught as a separate subject, it is embedded in all Christian teachings and doctrines, as it is one of the foundational issues in Christianity[20]. Moral education permeates all disciplines, since the Christian worldview considers the existence of a personal God, who is also a moral God. Teaching students about how to live morally is also extended to how to view education from a moral perspective, regardless of whether they are scientific or humanistic in nature. Creation reflects the attributes of God, therefore, humans, as part of the created order, choose to live or not in accordance with God's revealed knowledge, whether in nature or in the Bible[21].

Civic education is taught separately, as a distinctive set of disciplines. In the Romanian curriculum, elements of civic education are integrated at kindergarten level, continued in the 3rd and 4th classes in primary school, followed by a set of four distinct disciplines during gymnasium, namely: critical thinking and children's rights (5th grade), transcultural education (6th grade), education for democratic citizenship (7th grade) and financial education (8th grade). During gymnasium and primary school, they are compulsory disciplines, integrated in the curriculum[22]. The Romanian educational system renamed civic education as social education, at the gymnasium level. In high school, civic education is optional. Among many themes, civic education focuses on issues such as tolerance, freedom of expression, and equality before the law[23].

The views of traditional Christians or Christians who adhere to a nationalist take on Christianity, might find it difficult to reconcile these issues with other types of Christian perspectives. However difficult and diverse Christian views might be, Christian education can offer the optimum environment for informed debates on various issues, that might be different from one denomination to the other[24]. Highly trained educators can use their knowledge and skills in debating and communication to foster the possible outcomes that are deeply rooted in the Biblical teachings. Some of the most important issues for Christian education are marriage, family life, and human dignity, as

they apply to most situations that students face in their daily lives. Educators could develop the environment where Christian teachings and democratic principles are engaged in significant and consistent manner, so that students might have the best view on the broader society[25].

The discipline of critical thinking is integrated as a separate subject in certain curricula (such as the Romanian one), but from a secular perspective it focuses on issues of questioning authority, seeking evidence, and forming independent judgments. Despite the idea that Christianity is about the opposites of these principles, it does place a significant emphasis on righteousness, which makes it possible, even recommendable, to question the authority, but not to simply overthrow it, instead, to defend the Biblical truth[26]. It is the same for seeking evidence and forming independent judgments, even though believers submit to a set of teachings/dogmas and rules that they learn through catechisms and within families, where possible. In some churches, the priesthood is seen as the intermediary between God and the believer and the world, which led some to believe that questioning their authority is equal to going against God. Christianity is in a constant dialogue with all fields of knowledge[27], which informs it and leads its leaders and teachers to elaborate more meaningful ways in which the believers can think and relate to God. Christian education places emphasis on faith, obedience, and acceptance of doctrinal truths, but not in a way that annihilates the believer or cancels one's independent thoughts[28]. For Christian education, critical thinking can work together with faith and reverence for religious teachings. The spiritual formation of students is of paramount importance for the churches and the wide Christian peoples, because students who are better informed and engage with the issues of contemporary society, the better it is for the following generations, who will develop skills that matter in shaping society[29].

The Influence of Democratic Ideals

Throughout its history, Christianity managed to offer principles that were developed into democratic ideals, such as human dignity, justice, and equality. Christianity asserts that human beings were created in the image of God, therefore they have intrinsic worth and there is also ontological equality between human beings, which does not affect the differences between them, because they give a person's individuality. In a rather concise manner, the concept of justice and common good were developed by theologians such as St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas[30], who argued that human societies should develop human flourishing in accordance with divine law. Modern democratic thought, as was developed by John Locke, argued that natural rights and government legitimacy, were heavily inspired by Christian views on the sanctity of life. The Christian teachings on justice were developed into the democratic ideals of fairness and social responsibility. Christian activists, such as William Wilberforce[31], who promoted the abolition of slavery, and Martin Luther King Jr., who organized rallies to support civil rights, Christianity became the source for many a social justice reforms[32]. Christianity lays great emphasis on the concept of community and care for others, regardless of how difficult and costly the care must be. Within a democratic system, the care for one's neighbor is translated into social welfare, and activism into civic engagement. The purpose of such a democratic perspective is the fostering of a society that protects individual rights and collective well-being.

Christian education, based on values, may clash with pluralistic societies and their secular principles, especially in the realms of secular laws or societal norms. The basic belief of Christian education is that it relies on absolute moral truths, derived from Scripture, which could be different from democratic ideals, such as individual autonomy, moral relativism, and freedom of choice. These recurrent ideals are manifest in areas such as sexuality, gender identity, reproductive rights, and science[33]. A contemporary debate, that takes place in Romanian churches, in both historical and evangelical branches, about the possibility of having LGBTQ+ principles taught in public schools, as part of the school curriculum, in the societal context, where marriage is defined as the union between one man and one woman[34], is like a bonfire kept alive by the media[35]. The scenario describes Christian schools as having to face legal and societal pressure to include non-discriminatory policies in the curriculum that would affirm diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Such issues

would be in direct conflict with Christian doctrines[36]. Regardless of the future outcome, Christian schools need to consider their response and adaptive strategies, where they need to comply with secular mandates, especially in public schools, while maintaining religious integrity.

The Christian stance on life and human dignity, manifested in pro-life issues such as abortion and euthanasia, can conflict with secular laws that protect an individual's right to choose what to do with their own bodies[37], which is another stance that comes into conflict with Christian teachings and ethics. Teaching ethics and human rights becomes a challenge for Christian schools, especially when students come into contact with alternative or contrasting views, promoted by the broader society[38]. Cultural secularization can marginalize religious perspectives in the educational discourse, creating a rift between religious distinctiveness and the secular educational landscape. Christian schools engage the secular values by trying to remain relevant while upholding their faith-based mission. The pressure posed by cultural secularization is discernable in the efforts to integrate and adapt to legal, cultural, and societal expectations, that are part of secular democracy[39]¹. Christian schools would have to ensure that students are prepared not to avoid, but to meaningfully engage the religious and secular elements that are part of a democratic system.

Integrating Virtues

Perhaps a beneficial way to align Christian education with the demands of secular citizenship is through the common virtues. If Christianity's principles are, among others, love, justice, humility, and service to others, there must be similar civic values in a democratic system. The equivalent of Christian love, as expressed and taught by Jesus Christ, is solidarity and community engagement, which encourages students to care and engage the vulnerable in their communities, and contribute, therefore, to the common good. Christian education fosters a deep sense of social responsibility through teaching the practical aspects of faith[40]², that allows them to engage in the welfare of others, through direct action and civic participation.

As for justice, Christianity promotes equality and fairness, principles that correspond to the democratic ideals of social justice and human rights. Christian schools guide students in addressing issues such as economic inequality and environmental stewardship. The way students are taught to engage such issues is focused on honoring both their faith and fellow citizens. Equality under the law is a principle that complements the Christian teachings of care for the weak and the oppressed, which allows Christian education to train students on how to advocate for policies that support the dignity and worth of everyone[41]. Forgiveness and mercy fit the civic goals such as conflict resolution and restorative justice, that enable students to engage in peaceful, but productive way to engage and possibly solve societal challenges.

Character development stands as a core principle of Christian education, which aligns with the democratic citizenship principle of moral discernment. In this context, students become familiarized and able to learn about honesty, integrity, and responsibility. The result, in the long term, is an engaged citizen. A distinctive Christian teaching is focused on the principle of servant leadership, that emphasizes a mindset where students consider leadership as an opportunity to work for the common good. Self-promotion is not a negative endeavor, unless it is achieved at the expense of others[42]. Christian education equips students to become ethical leaders, who prioritize justice and community welfare, in a society that can fit both secular and Christian teachings and principles.

Pedagogical Approaches

¹ John LOUGHLIN, "Human Dignity: The Foundation of Human Rights and Religious Freedom," 2016, <https://doi.org/10.15581/001.19.313-343>.

² Sungwon KIM, "Development and Validation of a Scale for Christian Character Assessment for Young Children1," *Religions* 10, no. 5 (May 2019), p. 318, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10050318>.

As this is a theoretical approach to the issue of Christian education and citizenship education in a democratic setting, characterized by pluralism and globalization, with a background of secularization, the pedagogical approaches will also have a theoretical element to them. Therefore, they may present perspectives that are not applicable to real life situations but might anticipate certain chains of events[43]. Christian education can accommodate religious instruction with civic education, by designing a curriculum that combines faith-based teachings with various societal issues. In this context, a Christian curriculum integrates Biblical teachings on justice, mercy, and compassion, that are applied to issues such as poverty and human rights. A practical approach to Christian faith benefits students, who might not have had any or just limited engagement with the issues of the community in which they live. This approach might also encourage students' active engagement in the public life of the community, fostering a deeper sense of meaning for the concept of citizenship. Service learning is focused on integrating practical approaches to charity and stewardship to real life projects. Food banks and homeless shelters offer the opportunity to engage and alleviate suffering, as well as spiritual growth[44].

Comparative religious studies offer an enlightening perspective on religious diversity, which should have the effect of deepening and reaffirming one's belief in the context of the contributions of Christianity to the concept of democracy. Studying different religious views on justice and governance, through civic education, shapes the students' perspective on how to meaningfully engage with other belief systems. Students would also benefit from observing which religious system best promotes and integrates democratic ideals and perspectives, not only in contemporary society, but throughout their history. Christian teachings would have to integrate perspectives on history and literature[45], while observing how various historical figures managed to engage their cultural contexts and change them, as for example the abolition of slavery and civic rights movements.

Christian education has a substantial focus on dialogic teaching, which promotes open discussion between Christian and secular viewpoints. Students gain a deeper understanding of the issues at hand, from multiple perspectives, through structured discussions[46]³. The purpose revolves around the way Christian values align with or differ from secular ideals, on various topics, ranging from human rights[47] to climate change. Open-ended questions are a means through which teachers encourage students to think deeply about the intersection between faith and public life. The process offers students information and the tools to meaningfully engage secular ideals and to defend their beliefs, in a respectful manner[48]. Through this strategy, students practice their skills in civic discourse, which is an integral element of a democratic system.

The topic of civic engagement through community service is challenging, but it can bridge Christian education and secular citizenship. The Christian principles of service allow students to apply their faith-based perspective in local projects, amongst which joining missions in derelict areas, helping the poor or taking care of children in daycares or organized pre-school institutions, would benefit the local community. The concept of servant leadership is connected to democratic values in public service. Students can also think about how Christian teachings on justice and mercy can inform solutions to social issue, that have a bigger impact on the communities, such as homelessness or inequality[49]⁴. In all these situations, students would make a practical connection between their faith and civic engagement.

Dealing with Criticism

³ Antony LUBY, "A Culture of Dialogue. Vision, Pedagogy and Dialogic Skills for the RE Classroom," *British Journal of Religious Education* 43, no. 2 (April 3, 2021), pp. 150–160, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2019.1628006>.

⁴ Regan Harwe SCHAFFER, "Service-Learning in Christian Higher Education: Bringing Our Mission to Life," *Christian Higher Education* 3, no. 2 (April 1, 2004), pp. 127–145, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15363750490429417>.

One of the main criticisms of Christian education is that it promotes indoctrination, which can negatively affect critical thinking, creating an environment which promotes exclusion of the others, who are not of the same mindset. Critics highlight theological dogma and moral absolutes as the main elements that prevent students from engaging with diverse perspectives, submitting to extreme conformity, with limited or no intellectual autonomy. Critics argue that this type of Christian or faith-based education is incompatible with open-mindedness and critical inquiry in the educational process. Democratic societies rely on individuals being able to reason autonomously and in a critical manner, to identify the threats to the democratic system[50]. The specific cases and institutions that promote indoctrination should be identified and engaged, while the others should be allowed to promote intellectual engagement with secular society, to promote and uphold democracy.

Christianity is a truth-seeking religion, claiming to have access, limited as it may be, to the ultimate truth, represented by God. The truth-seeking characteristic makes Christianity compatible with critical thinking, many a time, exercised through Socratic questioning dialogical teaching. Christian education encourages students to develop critical thinking skills and engage with meaningful questions, followed by evaluating various viewpoints, and making principled decisions[51]. Some Christian circles are offering readymade answers for various societal issues, but Christian education should promote critical thinking, to reconcile faith and civic responsibility.

A proper Christian education engages with secular scholarship and competing worldviews, through religious studies or ethics classes. Students are presented with various belief systems, such as secular humanism or atheism. In any case, students are taught and trained to address these systems in a respectful manner, and with intellectual curiosity. By being exposed to other systems of belief, the Christian students' assess their own beliefs in a critical manner, becoming better equipped to understand and interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds[52]. In this view, faith and critical thought are complementary, contributing to a wider and deeper understanding of the human condition.

Christianity may also be described as a religion that excludes any elements that do not fit its teachings or practice. To stay faithful to its understanding of the Bible, Christianity must reject teachings that do not fit its own identity. However, that does not mean Christianity cannot have an informed dialogue with other points of view, other dogmas and religious views[53]. Issues such as gender roles, sexual orientation, and family structures, can be addressed in a thoughtful manner, with compassion and care, but also with a clearly stated identity, which cannot accept certain differences or views. Acceptance does not mean that Christianity should identify and readily accept any antithetical ideas, but it can show willingness to engage in a respectful and informed manner, even if highly critical. The acceptance that is expected from Christianity, is not shown by the systems that accuse it of being exclusionary[54]. Yet, Christian education can prove that there can be religious convictions and diversity, in dialogue and practice, that promote a genuine and mature democratic system.

Conclusions

Democracies are not, by definition secular, but the secular element is considerably more pronounced than the religious one, which is incorporated into the system, not at its helm. The influence of religion plays an important role in a functioning democracy. The way it interacts with the democratic system is the result of Christian education, which takes place mostly within families, churches and the Christian schools. The latter is challenged to balance religious teachings with the demands of the secular citizenship. The characteristics of Christian education are moral and spiritual growth, and promotes love, justice, and compassion. Despite its communitarian characteristic, Christianity depends on individual autonomy, engaged with diverse worldviews, which shape, as a result, one's perspective on the world. The essay aimed to present ways in which Christian education can reconcile Christian perspectives with secular perspectives in a democratic setting, through curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and civic engagement.

From a historical perspective, of which the essay scratched only the surface, Christian education has contributed to the development of democratic ideals, while supporting religious virtues and civic responsibilities. The alignment of Christian values and democratic principles opens the possibility of schools, especially Christian ones, to train and foster ethical citizenship. In such an educational environment, students are prepared to live out their faith, while engaging in the public sphere in an active and responsible manner. Pedagogical strategies, such as dialogical teaching, which promotes critical thinking and open discussions, aim at aiding students to reconcile their religious convictions with their roles as active citizens. Despite justified criticism about indoctrination and legal compliances imposed by the state upon education, Christian schools can prove that their efforts are channeled towards deepening the students' intellectual curiosity, respect for diversity, and compliance with secular mandates, without having to compromise with their religious beliefs.

References

1. BARASA, Tiurma, "Forming Critical Thinking Concepts in Students," December 1, 2022.
2. BETAKORE, Yoel, Ekawati WULASARI, and Fredik BOILIU, "Student Spirituality Formation through Christian Religious Education," 2022, <https://eudl.eu/doi/10.4108/eai.11-10-2021.2319606>.
3. CARR, David, "Knowledge and Truth in Religious Education", in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 28, no. 2 (December 1, 1994): 221–38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.1994.tb00329.x>.
4. "Civic Virtue and Values Teaching in a 'Post-Secular' World - Carol Vincent, 2018," Accessed October 21, 2024, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1477878518774128>.
5. CLOONEY, Francis, "Comparative Theological Learning as an Ordinary Part of Theological Education", in *Teaching Theology & Religion* 16, no. 4 (2013): 322–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12132>.
6. CONOVER, Pamela Johnson, Donald D SEARING, and Ivor CREWE, "The Elusive Ideal of Equal Citizenship: Political Theory and Political Psychology in the United States and Great Britain", in *Journal of Politics* 66, no. 4 (2004): 1036–68, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2004.00289.x>.
7. CRESS, Andrew, "Toward a Mutually Informing Approach to the Integration of Faith and Learning in Christian Higher Education", in *Journal of Faith in the Academic Profession*, July 27, 2022, <https://www.cbuopenpublishing.org/index.php/jfap/article/view/10>.
8. DILGER, Hansjorg, and Dorothea SCHULTZ, "Politics of Religious Schooling: Christian and Muslim Engagements with Education in Africa: Introduction", in *Journal of Religion in Africa* 43, no. 4 (January 1, 2013): 365–78, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700666-12341262>.
9. EKSTRAND, Nathan, "Complexity, Diversity and the Role of the Public Sphere on the Internet", in *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 46, no. 8 (October 1, 2020): 961–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453719890001>.
10. FACIONE, Peter A, "The Disposition Toward Critical Thinking: Its Character, Measurement, and Relationship to Critical Thinking Skill", in *Informal Logic* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 2000), <https://doi.org/10.22329/il.v20i1.2254>.
11. FRANKEN, Leni, "Coping with Diversity in Religious Education: An Overview", in *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 38, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 105–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2016.1270504>.
12. — — —, "Religious Freedom in Education: The United States Versus Belgium", in *Religion & Education* 43, no. 2 (May 3, 2016): 191–207, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2016.1147914>.
13. GINTING, Roynoaldy, and LELA MUSLIMAH BRUTU, "The Role of Civic Education in Building Character in the Younger Generation", in *International Journal of Students Education* 2, no. 1 (June 21, 2023): 99–102, <https://doi.org/10.62966/ijose.v2i1.273>.
14. GULAP, Haldun, "Debating Secularism: A Liberal Cosmopolitan Perspective", in *Frontiers in Sociology* 8 (March 2, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1113208>.
15. HELM, Joel J, and Nelia Beth SCOVILL, "A Spectrum Pedagogy for Christian Ethics: Respecting Difference without Resorting to Relativism", in *Teaching Theology & Religion* 13, no. 4 (2010): 350–70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9647.2010.00647.x>.
16. HILL, Brian V, "Must Christians Indoctrinate?", in *Journal of Christian Education* os-8, no. 3 (December 1, 1965): 136–44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002196576500800304>.

17. JIVRAJ, Suhraya, "Interrogating Religion: Christian/Secular Values, Citizenship and Racial Upliftment in Governmental Education Policy", in *International Journal of Law in Context* 9, no. 3 (September 2013): 318–42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1744552313000165>.
18. JOLDERSMA, Clarence, "Doing Justice Today: A Welcoming Embrace for LGBT Students in Christian Schools", in *International Journal of Christianity & Education* 20, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 32–48, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056997115617950>.
19. KALYVAS, Stathis, and Kees van KERSBERGEN, "Christian Democracy", in *Annual Review of Political Science* 13, no. Volume 13, 2010 (June 15, 2010): 183–209, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.021406.172506>.
20. KEANE, John, "Secularism?", in *The Political Quarterly* 71, no. s1 (2000): 5–19, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.71.s1.3>.
21. KIM, Sungwon, "Development and Validation of a Scale for Christian Character Assessment for Young Children", in *Religions* 10, no. 5 (May 2019): 318, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10050318>.
22. LATIF, Dilek, "Dilemmas of Religious Education, Freedom of Religion and Education in Cyprus", in *Religions* 13, no. 2 (February 2022): 96, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020096>.
23. "LEGE 198 04/07/2023 - Portal Legislativ." Accessed October 21, 2024. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/271896>.
24. LOUGHLIN, John, "Human Dignity: The Foundation of Human Rights and Religious Freedom," 2016, <https://doi.org/10.15581/001.19.313-343>.
25. LOWE, Stephen D, and Mary E LOWE, "Spiritual Formation in Theological Distance Education: An Ecosystems Model", in *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (May 1, 2010): 85–102, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131000700106>.
26. LUBY, Antony, "A Culture of Dialogue. Vision, Pedagogy and Dialogic Skills for the RE Classroom", in *British Journal of Religious Education* 43, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 150–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2019.1628006>.
27. MACDONALD, Paul A Jr., "Studying Christian Theology in the Secular University", in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 4 (December 1, 2010): 991–1024. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfq053>.
28. MADDUX, Graham, *Religion and the Rise of Democracy*, London, Routledge, 2002, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203193129>.
29. MERINO, Stephen M., "Religious Diversity in a 'Christian Nation': The Effects of Theological Exclusivity and Interreligious Contact on the Acceptance of Religious Diversity", in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 2 (2010): 231–46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2010.01506.x>.
30. MULLEN, Steve, "Integrating a Service and Learning Paradigm in a Christian Education Environment", in *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (May 1, 2010): 162–71, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131000700111>.
31. MULYA, Teguh Wijaya, "Critical Philosophies and Christian Education in the Digital Era", in 20–28, Atlantis Press, 2023. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-160-9_4.
32. NELSON, James, and Yue YANG, "The Role of Teachers' Religious Beliefs in Their Classroom Practice – a Personal or Public Concern?", in *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 44, no. 3 (July 3, 2023): 316–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2022.2125672>.
33. PERRY, Samuel L., "Historical Fundamentalism? Christian Nationalism and Ignorance about Religion in American Political History", in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 61, no. 1 (2022): 21.
34. PIKE, Mark A., "Citizenship Education and Faith Schools: What Should Children in Christian Schools Understand and Appreciate about a Liberal and Secular Society?", in *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 9, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 35–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/205699710500900105>.
35. PRICE, Myeshia N, Wilson Y LEE, J N HOBBS, Jonah DeCHANTS, and Carrie K DAVIS, "Middle and High School LGBTQ Students Report What Makes School LGBTQ-Affirming Across Race/Ethnicity and Gender Identity, a Topic Modeling Method", in *Journal of School Health* 94, no. 7 (2024): 601–9, <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.13460>.
36. "Programa Școlară Pentru Disciplina Educație Socială, Clasele a V-a - a VIII-a", in Ministerul Educației Naționale, 2017, <http://programe.ise.ro/Portals/1/Curriculum/2017-progr/28-Educatie%20sociala.pdf>.

37. "Reconciling Religion and LGBT Rights: Christian Universities, Theological Orientations, and LGBT Inclusion - Jonathan S. Coley, 2017." Accessed October 21, 2024. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2329496516651639?icid=int.sj-full-text.similar-articles.6>.
38. REUTER, Alan, "Ideology, Criticism and Trust in Religious Education?", in *Religious Education*, January 1, 1981, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0034408810760109>.
39. RINGENBERG, William C., "Honesty", in *The Christian College and the Meaning of Academic Freedom: Truth-Seeking in Community*, edited by William C. RINGENBERG, New York, Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137398338_3.
40. ROCKOW, Lewis, *Contemporary Political Thought in England*, Routledge, 2019.
41. ROMAN, Mihai, "Reacție dură a Bisericii Ortodoxe față de Legea care introduce educația sexuală în școli: Atentat asupra inocenței copiilor", in *G4Media.ro*, April 27, 2020, <https://www.g4media.ro/reactie-dura-a-bisericii-ortodoxe-fata-de-legea-care-introduce-educatia-sexuala-in-scoli-atentat-asupra-inocentei-copiilor.html>.
42. ROTARU, Ioan-Gheorghe. "Plea for Human Dignity", in *Scientia Moralitas. Human Dignity - A Contemporary Perspectives* 1 (2016): 29-43, <https://www.scientiamoralitas.com/index.php/sm/article/view/2>.
43. ROTARU, Ioan-Gheorghe. "A look at how the concept of human rights has evolved over time", in *Journal For Freedom of Conscience (Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință)* 11, no.2 (2023): 825-874, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10557901>.
44. ROTARU, Ioan-Gheorghe. "Aspecte ale secularizării și ale omului secularizat", *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Theologia Orthodoxa* L-LI, no.1 (2006), pp. 251-266, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, http://studia.ubbcluj.ro/arhiva/abstract.php?editie=THEOLOGIA%20ORTHODOXA&nr=1&an=2006&id_art=548.
45. RUSIN, Roxana, "Corigenții de la educație sexuală", in *Contributors* (blog), June 22, 2021, <https://www.contributors.ro/corigentii-de-la-educatie-sexuala/>.
46. SCHAFFER, Regan Harwe, "Service-Learning in Christian Higher Education: Bringing Our Mission to Life", in *Christian Higher Education* 3, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 127-45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15363750490429417>.
47. SMITH, Ted A., *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.
48. SMOLIN, David M., "Religion, Education, and the Theoretically Liberal State: Contrasting Evangelical and Secularist Perspectives", in *Journal of Catholic Legal Studies* 44 (2005): 99.
49. STEIBEL, Sophia R., "Christian Education and Spiritual Formation: One and the Same?", in *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (November 1, 2010): 340-55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131000700207>.
50. STOKKE, Christian, and Guro Hansen HELSKOG, "Promoting Dialogical Democracy: Dialogos Philosophical Dialogues as an Approach to Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue in Education", in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 24, no. 2 (2014): 182-201, <https://doi.org/10.2143/SID.24.2.3073525>.
51. STOLZENBERG, Nomi Maya, "'He Drew a Circle That Shut Me out': Assimilation, Indoctrination, and the Paradox of a Liberal Education", in *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 3 (1993): 581-667, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1341657>.
52. SZYDLOWSKI, Piotr, "Dominant Styles of Thinking about Religion", in *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 10, no. 1 (2018): 94-101, <https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000153>.
53. TEMPERMAN, Jeroen, "State Neutrality in Public School Education", in SSRN Scholarly Paper, Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, April 17, 2012, <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2041264>.
54. TEMPLETON, Elizabeth, "Religious Education in a Secular Pluralist Culture", in *Religion, State & Society*, March 1, 1999, <https://doi.org/10.1080/096374999106737>.
55. TURCESCU, Lucian, and Lavinia STAN, "Religion, Politics and Sexuality in Romania", in *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 2 (March 1, 2005): 291-310, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130500051924>.
56. VALK, John, "Plural Public Schooling: Religion, Worldviews and Moral Education", in *British Journal of Religious Education* 29, no. 3 (September 1, 2007): 273-85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200701479661>.

57. VOLLAARD, Hans J. P., "Re-Emerging Christianity in West European Politics: The Case of the Netherlands", in *Politics and Religion* 6, no. 1 (March 2013): 74–100, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048312000776>.
58. WEAVER, Darlene Fozard, "Christian Formation and Moral Pluralism: Challenges and Opportunities", in *Studies in Christian Ethics* 33, no. 1 (February 1, 2020): 27–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946819884551>.
59. WEITHMAN, Paul J., "Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin and the Function of Political Authority", in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30, no. 3 (1992): 353–76.
60. WHELAN, Matthew Phillipp, "'Until Dignity Becomes Ordinary': The Grammar of Dignity in Catholic Social Teaching", in *Religions* 14, no. 6 (June 2023): 716, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060716>.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.