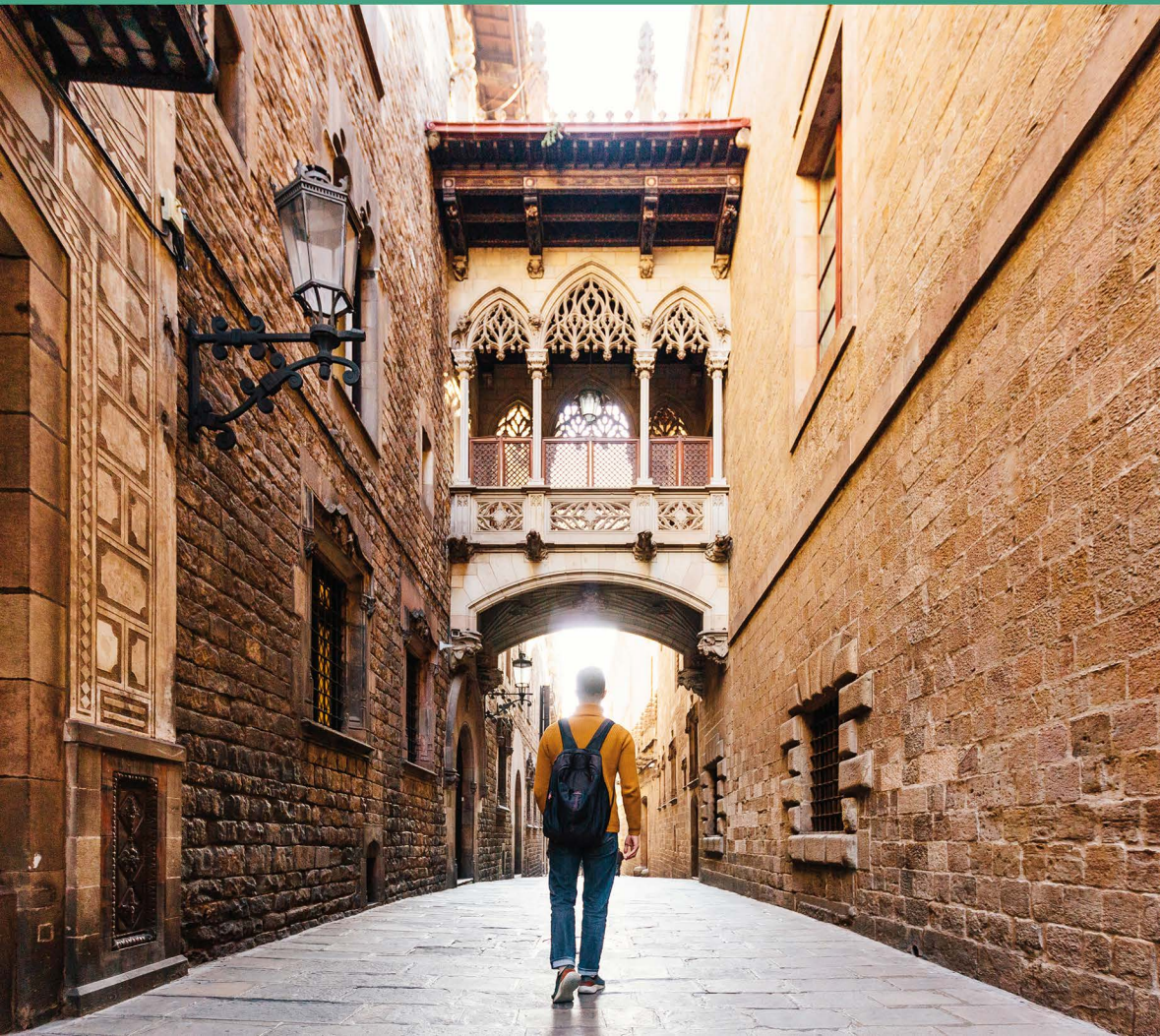


# RE-IMAGINING THE TEACHING OF EUROPEAN HISTORY

Promoting Civic Education and Historical Consciousness

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Edited by Cosme Jesús Gómez Carrasco



# RE-IMAGINING THE TEACHING OF EUROPEAN HISTORY

This book explores the challenges of teaching European history in the 21st century and provides research-informed approaches to history teaching that combine civic education, historical consciousness, and the teaching of controversial social issues.

With contributions from researchers across Europe, the book includes both theoretical and case study chapters. The first part of the book addresses issues such as globalization and teaching in an interconnected world, using multicultural and critical approaches, decolonizing education, and teaching uncomfortable narratives of the past. The second part of the book showcases thematic chapters dedicated to teaching intersecting topics in the European curriculum such as violence and armed conflict, social inequality, gender equality, the technological revolution, and religion.

Ultimately, this volume promotes criticality, civic engagement, and reflection on social issues, thereby prompting methodological change in the teaching of history as we know it. It will appeal to researchers and students of history education, democratic education, and citizenship education, as well as teacher educators and trainee teachers in history.

**Cosme Jesús Gómez Carrasco** is Senior Lecturer, Social Sciences Teaching, University of Murcia, Spain.



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Promoting Civic Education  
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## CHURCHES AND RELIGION IN EUROPE

### Interdisciplinary methods and approaches for a European history

*Filippo Galletti and Manuela Ghizzoni*

#### Introduction

At the end of the year 2018 the Eurobarometer 90.4, aimed at analyzing the attitudes of Europeans toward biodiversity, awareness, and perceptions of customs and perceptions of antisemitism (European Commission, 2018), photographed the presence of religions in the European Union in this way: the majority religion was Christianity, practiced by 72.8 percent of the population (in turn divided into Catholic Christianity, 44.5 percent; Orthodox, 10.2 percent; Protestant, 9.9 percent; and other Christianity, 5 percent). The percentage of citizens who declared themselves non-religious or agnostic reached 17 percent of the consensus, while atheists were 9.3 percent. The population of Muslim faith stood at 2.1 percent; Hindu at 1 percent; Buddhist at 0.6 percent; and Jewish at 0.2 percent. Compared to these data, the Pew Research Center (2017), a think tank that conducts surveys and demographic research in the social sciences, estimated instead that Muslim adherents reached 4.9 percent of the population (about 26 million): a number destined to increase in the next three decades also as a result of the migration phenomenon, despite the Union's own initiatives to limit it by funding, for example, "inclusive education strategies" in Turkey (530 million euros) and "measures to support migration and border management" (30 million euros), again in Turkey, where an estimated 4 million refugees, mainly Syrians, are hosted (European Commission, 2021a). The aforementioned surveys were conducted in the countries of the European Union, thus excluding several territories whose population is for the most part Muslim or is otherwise characterized by a significant portion of the population following the precepts of Islam (e.g., Turkey, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Russia, Serbia, and Montenegro). It follows that the European continent possesses a truly remarkable and, above all, changing multiculturalism and spiritual/religious richness, since migrations of peoples – and this can



be observed even now with the terrible crisis in Ukraine from where more than 6 million people have fled and were promptly taken in by neighboring countries, especially in Poland (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022) – are a constant in European history.

The different ratios of practiced or declared faiths, therefore, stem from the historical, social, economic, and demographic evolutions that have strongly contributed to shaping the material and immaterial identities and heritages of European countries and their common horizon. Understanding, studying, and analyzing these developments allow us to grasp in a diachronic and synchronic key trends, perspectives, and common elements, which lay the groundwork for enhancing an intercultural dialogue and strengthening appropriate paths for the formation of an active, responsible, and participated citizenship.

For this reason, in order to orient oneself among the challenges of the contemporary world and consciously design the key tools of global citizenship, the history of religions constitutes a relevant thematic area combining social, economic, institutional, and cultural history and can become an integrating background for genuine mutual collaboration among European and world citizens.

It is, however, a history that is not always peaceful. In the name of religion, as will be seen later, people have been killed and conflicts, even bloody ones, have been triggered, but this violent characteristic can be reshaped in the educational context of the 21st century. Studying religious conflicts, within the same community or the one toward “others,” can be useful, as well as reflecting about the many similarities between faiths, to re-imagine the teaching of European history, to promote civic education and historical consciousness projected toward building an attainable future, to avoid the rise of new clashes, and to resolve conflicts through dialogue and participation.

But let us take one thing at a time

The history of religions has a very ancient origin. Although its understanding has sometimes been hindered by an inaccurate methodological approach and it was only in the Modern Age that it achieved the status of an autonomous academic discipline, as Filoramo, Giorda and Spineto (2020) recall, it is believed that the first historians of religions, albeit budding, were the ancient Greek historiographers such as Herodotus and Hecataeus of Miletus (Harrison, 2010). To them we owe the elaboration of the relativistic conception of religion, that is, they were the first to hold and put in writing that all religiosity is to be considered relative to the population under consideration and that therefore there is no universal and absolute religion. A more organic study of the system of religions was later addressed by Aristotle and his school.

The ancient Romans, on the other hand, wondered about the etymological signification of the term “religion,” which, coming from the Latin *religio*, indicated a type of conduct in the face of certain realities (Fugier, 1963: 172–179; Lieberg, 1974). According to Cicero (*De natura deorum*, II, 28, 72), the word derived from the verb *relegere*, i.e., “to go over again” or “to reread,” meaning a new and careful

reflection on what concerns the worship of the gods. On the other hand, Lucretius (*De rerum natura*, I, 930) made *religio* originate from the root of *re-ligare*, to indicate “the ties that unite men to certain practices”—an explanation that was later also accepted by Lactantius (*Divinae institutiones* IV, 28), however with the meaning of “to bind oneself in regard to the gods.” Considering the interpretations, it thus seems possible to link the origin of the lemma to the pair of terms *religere/relegere* understood as “to collect again,” “to reread,” “to scrupulously and conscientiously observe the performance of an act,” and thus diligently perform the “religious act” (Filoramo, 2004).

As a result of these orientations, philosophical-religious analysis became more careful; religions began to be compared and anthropomorphic connotations removed from deity, resulting in traditional gods often being judged as lesser divine entities (Jordan, 1905; Schmidt, 1938; Bros, 1953; James, 2007).

Christianity willingly accepted the latter belief, which was capable of explaining and later offering the theological basis for combating pagan religions (Filoramo & Menozzi, 2002). The interpretations gradually perfected by Christian theologians of the late Antique Age and reaching into the Middle Ages were essentially traced back to two theories. The first, called “of plagiarism,” predicted that the ancient pagans had intuited the religion revealed to Moses but, at the same time, had imitated it erroneously; the second, called “of divine condescension,” considered that God had deliberately granted some pagan forms, since the ancients were not yet able to understand the authentic faith, but on the condition that paganism was then supplanted by Christianity.

Only in the 18th century, thanks mainly to missionary activity, was the horizon of observation broadened, allowing for more refined studies and insights. Giambattista Vico, for example, assumed the idea that the origin of mythology resided in human beings, who, in order to explain life, the universe, and natural phenomena, had recourse to imagination and tradition (Schaeffer, 2019). For thinkers of the Enlightenment, on the other hand, there was the belief that revealed religion (like Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and all religions) as originating from a common natural religion, that is, founded on human reason, later modified due to human weakness and the various interests of organized clergy. Still in the 18th century, again, David Hume (1757) held that monotheism was a later development than polytheism, which was considered a more backward form of religiosity.

In the first half of the 19th century, aided by the blossoming of numerous studies in philology, archaeology, and historiography in a modern key, the history of religions was able to count on valuable theoretical-scientific contributions and finally obtained the status of an autonomous discipline.

From this time, several currents ran through and continue to influence the history of religions, always connected to large-scale historiographical movements. The development of the “proto-Indo-European” theory was the basis for the reflections of Max Müller (1892) and Edward Burnett Tylor (1994), who identified a common primitive religion among Indo-Europeans along the lines of linguistic commonality among the various families of the population. The evolutionary strand

continued to have its own following, which saw the history of religions as a path toward progress and marked by the stages of animism, polytheism, and, finally, monotheism. It was followed, then, by an ethnological approach, based not on a single evolutionary line but on “qualitatively different cultural-historical cycles” (Frobenius, 1898; Gräbner, 1905), which mostly indicated characteristics inherent in mentalities (Lévy-Bruhl, 1922). The sociological approach dominated the research of many Francophone scholars, such as Hubert and Mauss (1899) and Durkheim (1912). At the same time, the psychological studies of Rank (1909), Freud (1927), and Jung (1970) gave an important impetus to the interpretation of individual religions (Kerényi, 1951).

In sum, all these influential schools of thought have made it possible to delineate a reasonable concept of religion, and historiographic analysis shows that religions are ultimately inseparably intertwined with all aspects of human cultures, from political and social institutions to economic structures, from arts and techniques to customs; even individual peoples’ views on nature, the environment, and history are closely related to religious conceptions.

For this reason, nowadays, on the one hand, the concept of religion is believed to be definable only within a historically determined cultural position and with reference to specified historical formations; on the other hand, methodological problems derived from the postmodern turn, combined with the ever-increasing sectoriality and specialization of scientific research, continue to pose some interesting problems of an interpretative nature (Alles, 2007; Antes et al., 2004; Whaling, 1985).

### Specific narrative strands in the history of religions

In a recent survey conducted by the European Commission (2021b), published in Special Eurobarometer Number 508, just over half of European citizens (53 percent) identify with their religion or religious belief; 21 percent maintain a neutral stance; and 24 percent say they do not identify with their faith. Although there are numerous differences between countries – more than seven out of ten respondents in Cyprus (79 percent), Italy and Slovakia (both 74 percent), Bulgaria and Poland (both 72 percent), and Romania (71 percent) identify with their religion, while respondents in Sweden (19 percent), Luxembourg (26 percent), Denmark (27 percent), Germany (35 percent), Finland and Belgium (both 36 percent), and Ireland (37 percent) are less likely to do so – religion represents a significant cultural and identity value, which can be a fertile common ground for dialogue with a view to active and responsible citizenship.

Indeed, historical culture, as mentioned above, is basic to the achievement and continuous regeneration of the concepts of freedom, democracy, equality, and human dignity on which the value pact of European citizenship is based. Critical knowledge of events and the practice of the basic methodologies of historical research constitute a fundamental cultural and cognitive background for orienting oneself in the present with awareness and responsibility, for being free and autonomous in current and future choices, for fostering the broadest coexistence

in respect for diversity, and for developing the critical capacities necessary to assume dialogue and confrontation as instruments of democratic exercise. In this context, knowledge of religious phenomena in a long-term historical perspective, in connection with the current religious and spiritual characteristics of Europe, can become a common ground for educating in intercultural dialogue and inclusiveness. The critical exercise of defining similarities and differences between cults and the different social and political contexts in which they are embedded – carried out over a very long time span and in a space of continental dimension – represents an opportunity to promote paths of education in active, responsible, and democratic citizenship.

Therefore, in the light of the most recent contributions of historiography and with the aim of designing the teaching of a collective European history, it is proposed to unravel religious phenomena through the critical narration of some specific themes: the spread of religions, the use of artistic manifestations to convey messages of faith, armed conflict (holy wars, jihad, and anti-Semitism), divisions (divergences and schisms) and, finally, the long road to the affirmation of the principle of full freedom of worship. We will refer, forcibly, to summary frameworks, which can be further deepened or declined according to specific educational objectives.

With regard to the first theme, the spread of religions, it should be remembered that religious sentiment is inherent in human beings; it has existed since individuals began to ask and then to try to answer the following questions, “who created us?” and “where do we go when we die?” In ancient times, polytheistic religions (from Greek: *polis* “much” and *theos* “god”) were formed: that is, ancient civilizations believed in the existence of as many gods as there were “magical” and unknown aspects of the world around them; this was the religious horizon of the ancient Greeks and Romans, for example (Dillon, 2019).

Then, it was the turn of the great monotheistic religions (from the Greek *monos* “unique,” meaning “believing in one God”), that is, from the oldest to the most recent, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Space does not permit a detailed treatment of the development of the monotheistic religions here, however, it is worth mentioning, consistent with the inspiring principles of this volume, some points of contact between the Abrahamic faiths.

Already this adjective denotes a common characteristic, namely a spiritual relationship with Abraham (Stroumsa, 2011). He was, in fact, the first man to believe in one creator, judge, omnipotent, unknowable, and eternal God. Religious experience is based on divine revelation: it is God who makes himself known and manifests himself to mankind through the prophets, those who receive revelation and have the task of spreading it among the nations. The three faiths, therefore, have a significant prophetic tradition: Abraham about 4000 years ago made a covenant with God, later renewed around 1250 B.C. with all the Jewish people (Levenson, 2012); 753 years after the founding of Rome, in Bethlehem, Jesus, the son of God, was born, who preached God’s love for mankind until his death and gathered a number of followers around him (Freeman, 2009; Ehrman, 2015). Finally, in the

first half of the 7th century, a merchant named Muhammad was chosen by Allah to pass on his revelations and convert the then polytheistic Arab people to monotheism (Donner, 2010). The three religions were formed in a geographically and culturally bounded space: the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East. The Arabian Peninsula, although not directly facing the Mediterranean Sea, was part of the late ancient oine and was a participant in the economic and cultural exchanges of the area; in fact, numerous communities of Christian Jews had settled in Arab cities and, probably, it was also thanks to these mutual influences that the new monotheism developed (Crone, 2015, 2016), which, among other things, counts Jesus as a prophet of Allah and Ishmael, son of Abraham, as the progenitor of the Arabs. The city of Jerusalem plays a most significant role for the three faiths. It is considered a holy city for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (before turning toward Mecca, Muhammad had pointed to Jerusalem as the point to which to turn at the time of prayer). The city's importance over the centuries is evidenced by the architectural treasures it holds: the Wailing Wall, sacred to Jews, what remains of the city's second temple after the destruction ordered by the Romans in 70 A.D., an event that triggered the Jewish Diaspora; the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, built in several stages on what is considered Golgotha: the mountain on which Jesus died and rose again, sacred to Christians; the Dome of the Rock, which holds the Foundation Stone, where, according to Islamic tradition, the prophet Muhammad ascended to Paradise, and the al-Aqsa Mosque, sacred to Muslims (Armstrong, 2002).

Regarding the issue of artistic manifestations, as the example of Jerusalem testifies glaringly, the religious heritage we have inherited represents a precious treasure to be enjoyed, preserved, and protected. But it is not only about the Holy City. UNESCO (2010) recognizes that about 20 percent of the sites on the World Heritage List have some "kind of religious or spiritual connection." But regardless of UNESCO recognition, religiously inspired architectural testimonies and artistic artifacts constitute a vast heritage, the result of the interconnectedness of cultures, feelings, and values that various peoples have ascribed to them over time. Just to give a few examples, by no means exhaustive, think of the Christian-Muslim legacies of the Mediterranean, such as the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba; the Alhambra complex in Granada, Spain; or the monuments of Arab-Norman Sicily; of the Jewish ghettos and legacies in many European cities; of Orthodox monasteries and Protestant cathedrals.

In the meaning of heritage, in fact, understood as "the heterogeneous and multiform set of legacies and resources, in which the environmental, historical-artistic, scientific and ideal characters, goods, values and knowledge collected and shared by human communities in their different territorial settings converge and sediment" (Dondarini, 2008), the ability to read current cultural heritage as the partial outcome of matrices, imprints and evolutions that have unfolded throughout history means placing at the center the lives of the generations who have lived there, those who live there and those who will live there, in a special synthesis of past, present, and future. Therefore, with the initiation of paths and activities related to the protection and enhancement of heritage, in its broadest sense, there is an

opportunity to educate the younger generations to sensitivity and respect for these principles along with responsibility and civic and political commitment; these paths also allow for the assumption of an active role, on the part of male and female students, which proves effective in stimulating content learning and the adoption of critical research methodologies and tools, while promoting, at the same time, solidarity and cooperation among citizens for the preservation of what belongs to all (world heritage) and the enhancement of what belongs to each community (local or regional heritages).

Regarding the third and fourth themes, as mentioned above, the faithful have often come into conflict both among themselves, that is, among followers of the same religion, and by prompting a clash toward the “other.”

Regarding the first case, the faithful generally accept the authority of certain sacred texts, traditions, and norms. However, interpretations of these teachings have ignited and still ignite intense debates. In the Jewish world, the first attempted schism was that of Korah, Datan, and Abiram who opposed Moses and were punished instantly by God. At the time of Jesus, the Samaritans, who had built a temple on Mount Garizim, were thought to be schismatics, and the Pharisees, loyal to official Judaism, avoided any relationship with them. The Essenes, who lived secluded in a desert area, represented a sect separate from official Judaism and rejected the corrupt clergy of Jerusalem (Clarke & Beyer, 2009). The Muslim community also split, a few years after Muhammad’s death, into two opposing groups: the Sunnis and the Shiites. Shi’ism is the overall definition (derived from the Arabic *shi’a* “party, faction,” implied by ‘Alī and his descendants) of the minority component of Islam, the root of which goes back to the civil war (*fitna*) that pitted ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib against Mu’awiya, future Umayyad caliph, between 657 and 661. Sunnism, on the other hand, refers to the majority current of Islam, which distinguishes orthodoxy as opposed to dissenters (especially Shiites) and for the sake of obedience over custom (Hazleton, 2010; McHugo, 2017). Among the most important schisms (from the Greek “separation”) within Christianity are the following doctrines: Arianism, which developed from the 3rd century and was condemned by the Council of Nicaea (325) and had a large following among the Germanic peoples between the 5th and 7th centuries; Nestorianism and Monophysitism, which emerged following the rejection of the provisions of the ecumenical councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451); the one that sanctioned the separation of the Eastern Churches, called Orthodox, and the Roman-Latin Church following the mutual excommunication between Patriarch Michael Cerularios and the pope’s representative, Cardinal Umberto of Silva Candida in 1054; the Protestant Reformation promoted by Martin Luther in Germany, which turned out to be a complex movement of renewal of faith and religiosity in the Roman Catholic Church (Cameron, 2012) and soon spread throughout Europe also thanks to the work of other reformers, such as the Swiss Zwingli and the French Calvin (Lewis & Lewis, 2009).

In a recent survey on discrimination in European Union member states (European Commission, 2019), nearly seven in ten respondents (69 percent) said they would not feel uncomfortable if the highest political office in their country was held

by an individual of a different religion (although, however, the degree of agreement varied from 88 percent in the United Kingdom, 85 percent in Ireland, and 83 percent in Spain to 42 percent in Lithuania, 46 percent in Cyprus, and 50 percent in Greece). Eighty percent of respondents also said they would feel comfortable in the workplace with a Jewish colleague (96 percent in the Netherlands, 95 percent in the United Kingdom, 93 percent in Sweden, 53 percent in Romania, 63 percent in Bulgaria, and 64 percent in Austria), a percentage that drops to 71 percent with a Muslim colleague (93 percent in the United Kingdom, 91 percent in the Netherlands, 87 percent in France and Sweden, 35 percent in the Czech Republic, 37 percent in Hungary, and 47 percent in Lithuania). The Christian faith is generally well accepted, as 88% of respondents would feel comfortable having a colleague of that religion (proportions range from 97% in Greece to 74% in Romania). Finally, more than eight in ten respondents (83 percent) say they would feel comfortable with an atheist colleague (proportions range from 95 percent in the Netherlands to 57 percent in Romania). These data, although they can be considered quite positive, reveal some grey areas with respect to the full assumption of the principle of “religious tolerance,” since quite a few respondents – especially in some countries – report a condition of discomfort in having a colleague of a faith different from their own. This situation can result in actual acts of discrimination, as evidenced by the same document (European Commission, 2019): 17 percent of respondents said that they had felt discriminated against, especially in public spaces, in the workplace and in job interviews, in the past year, and that in 38 percent of cases the discrimination was on a religious basis. As if that were not enough, the feeling of increasing violations to the concept of religious freedom seems to be confirmed by Fox’s (2017) study, which identifies an increasing trend of religious discrimination in Western democracies, between 1990 and 2014.

It is understood that, despite the best efforts, violence and religious discrimination have been and unfortunately still are part of the European social horizon, although to a lesser extent than in the past. This situation has a historical origin which needs to be understood and analyzed. The divergences in question can be traced in part to the phenomena of jihad, holy war, and anti-Semitism.

Jihad is generally understood as the “effort” referring to the impulse to achieve a certain goal and can constitute the religious impetus of the individual to improve himself. However, jihad is also an armed endeavor that has as its intent the expansion of Islam or its preservation and defense: in the latter meaning, jihad can be translated as “holy war.” The Qur’an and treaties of Islamic law prescribe that holy war is to be waged only against infidels, meaning pagans and polytheists, and that the war must be preceded by an invitation to convert to Islam: only upon a refusal can armed struggle proceed. In the case of holy war, the people of the Book are not obliged to convert but must pay tribute and accept the protection of Islam. In this sense, therefore, jihad has nothing to do with the violent actions carried out in Europe and in the Arab countries themselves by fundamentalist terrorists who claim to have launched holy war against the West and its allies (Cook, 2005; Barbero, 2015).

On the Christian side, among the best-known phenomena of the exercise of violence is that of crusade. Crusades are wars (but in the beginning they were “armed pilgrimages”) called between the 11th and 13th centuries by the Christian peoples of Europe against the Muslims to liberate the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and extend their political and social supremacy in the Holy Land. During the eight military expeditions, violence was not only directed toward Muslims but involved Christians themselves, as happened during the Fourth Crusade – with the siege of Zara and the sacking of Constantinople – and Jews, in Eastern Europe (Cardini & Musarra, 2019).

Phenomena of violence also occurred among Christians themselves in Europe. The most important example in this regard is the so-called religious wars that broke out in Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the countries of northeastern Europe following the spread of the Protestant Reformation (Nolan, 2006).

Anti-Semitism has represented, and still represents, one of the most enduring and execrable attitudes of racism in human history. It is based on intolerance, discrimination, and aversion to Jews. Anti-Semitism has a very ancient history, circulating as early as the time of the Roman Empire and acquiring further violence with Christians, who hurled against them the charge of deicide, that is, of having contributed to the execution of Jesus Christ. The French Revolution marked a break in the history of discrimination against Jews, which was explicitly condemned by the Constitution of 1791. During the 19th century, anti-Semitism re-emerged with new force, linking itself to racist theories built on pseudoscientific foundations and, particularly in the second half of the century, on nationalist political arguments (Germinario, 2011). Indeed, the Jew was accused of spiritually and culturally contaminating society. Anti-Semitism became a phenomenon of first magnitude in Eastern Europe (Russia and Poland), the Balkan Peninsula, and France in the late 19th century with the so-called Dreyfus Affair (in French “*Affaire Drefus*”), named after a French officer of Jewish origin, Alfred Dreyfus, who was unjustly accused of espionage and collusion with Germany. Anti-Semitism, which had already taken deep root since the First World War and become a mainstay in Hitler’s Germany (between 1933 and 1945), became explicit in a systematic persecution of the Jews to its extreme consequences, their annihilation (by means of the so-called “final solution”): this was the Shoah, a word from the Hebrew language that denotes the genocide of the Jews in the Nazi death camps (Perry & Schweitzer, 2002; Poliakov, 2003).

Despite the violence and conflicts, in parallel, the principle of religious and religious freedom, closely linked to interreligious dialogue and respect, developed, and established itself, and this is the fifth narrative juncture in the history of religions that we propose.

Religious freedom consists of the possibility to freely convert or not to profess any religion, to manifest it in practice, worship, observance, or teaching, while retaining the same rights as citizens who have different faiths. It thus also includes the right for religious communities to witness and spread their faith in society without being subjected to oppression or persecution as a result. Therefore, contributing to the slow affirmation of the principle of religious freedom has been the historical and philosophical evolution of the concept of tolerance, that is, the



condition – also legally guaranteed – of a coexistence between different faiths that, over time, has gradually become equal in rights and mutual respect.

In this sense, over the past 30 years religious authorities have moved toward actions of pluralism and dialogue. On April 13, 1986, Pope John Paul II and Rabbi Elio Toaff, considered the highest Jewish authority in Italy, met at the Great Synagogue in Rome: it was the first visit of the head of Catholic Christianity in two millennia and, at least symbolically, the watershed between a painful period of distance, misunderstanding, and persecution as well as the beginning of a path of dialogue and respect (Langer, 2015; Di Segni, 2021). With the same assumptions, on February 4, 2019, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar (the most prestigious figure in Sunni Islam) Ahmad Al-Tayyeb and Pope Francis signed the document on Human Brotherhood for World Peace and Common Coexistence (2019). Another important testimony of interreligious dialogue is the October 13, 2007, open letter titled “A Common Word Between Us and You,” signed and sent by 138 prominent Muslim personalities to Pope Benedict XVI, the patriarchs of the Orthodox Churches, and generally to all Christian religious leaders. The letter identified the “commandment of love toward God and neighbor” as the uniting point of the three religions in the book (*A Common Word Between Us and You. 5-Year Anniversary Edition*, 2012).

But the long road to tolerance has been long and bumpy, although in ancient times there was no real issue related to the principle of respecting and recognizing “other” religions: the Romans, for example, did not consider foreign gods a threat and were gladly included in the pantheon. In the Middle Ages St. Thomas Aquinas asserted that one could tolerate, that is, endure, differences in worship between Christians, Jews, and Muslims, borrowing St. Augustine’s belief that faith, the work of grace, cannot be imposed by men; however, as we know, episodes of religious intolerance occurred with some frequency. In the Renaissance, intellectuals had dreamed of the project of a philosophical religion capable of settling conflicts between the followers of different religions. But it was in the Modern Age that the principle of tolerance, understood as acceptance of the plurality of religions and, consequently, the need for their independent and autonomous coexistence was formulated and took hold (Grell, 1999; Zagorin, 2003). During the Enlightenment, the road to tolerance led, in 1789, to the French Constituent Assembly promulgating freedom of conscience among the rights of man. In the 19th century, having acquired the right of the individual to profess faith and exercise worship, tolerance took the shape rather of the freedom of the church or churches in their relations with state power. Nowadays, the principle of religious tolerance, understood as pluralism of ideas, confessions, and lifestyles (Wrogemann, 2019) is still a right to be defended and on which to establish paths of active citizenship.

## Historical concepts and goals

The historical frameworks outlined for each narrative theme – while being aware that the need for synthesis may undermine the restitution of the complexity of the phenomena – provide a guide for the teaching of European history through those of the religions that have furrowed the continent and are still practiced today.

The proposed narrative strands, through a transversal and chronologically contextualized approach, would allow addressing some traditional historiographical nodes, which accompany the political, cultural, and social development of Europe, as lenses to better read the principles that inspire our community today: the slow affirmation of religious freedom, temporal power and spiritual power, continuity and change in social phenomena, secularization, and armed conflict resolution are just a few keys to interpreting the historical meaning and value of democracy, secularism of the state, multiculturalism, and peace.

Conversely, with a view to education for active citizenship and in a historical-cultural dimension, it will be possible to design educational paths aimed at critically analyzing the contribution of religions to the development of knowledge and values; to recognize the interdependence between cults and religions and their local and global dimensions; to establish connections between different international religious traditions in an intercultural perspective; to be aware of the cultural value of religious heterogeneity, actively participating in the development and maintenance of the principles of freedom and tolerance as well as in the protection of architectural and artistic heritage; to evaluate facts and direct one's behavior on the basis of a value system consistent with the principles of the Constitutions and international human rights charters.

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