



Faculté de théologie (TECO)

Learning in differences:
The question of pluralism in religious education
in the secondary schools of the Seychelles

Mémoire réalisé par

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INTRODUCTION

The Schools are one of the privileged places for religious plurality and cultural diversity. With the increase in the different types of religions, school managers are facing mounting challenges. This is due to the fact that there is an urgent need to articulate the school mission- ensuring that the students acquired adequate knowledge with a good socialization where mutual respect is preserved.

Subsequently, the diversity in the school became unmanageable because of the parents exigencies. Today, parents are being quite selective where spirituality course is concerned. There are parents for whom spirituality remains pertinent for the children's development, but there are parents who refused to be affiliated with any form of spirituality. They valorized mainly some forms of humanization courses and a neutral society. The question is how to articulate those expectations in one school? What kind of religious plurality's organization the school managers have to put in place? Can religious education cope with those needs? Or, maybe, religious courses are obsolete, and new courses like citizenship need to be innovated. It is so complex to unify all those requests in one course. There are various reflections, which said mutual enrichment is primordial, for this is the foundation to ensure that the diversity is not jeopardized in school. But how well can this be done? That would be one of our reflections for this thesis- how to ensure the smooth running of pluralism and diversity in public schools?

Whilst openness towards diversity is vital for a better *vivre ensemble* (peaceful cohabitation of different religious views), we may question, why should the Catholic Church be omitted in such project? This Church remains the pillar of the society and it has proven unbeaten in the organization of the school system, thus why should it be replaced? There are European countries like Belgium, where the Catholic schools play an important role in education. So, another part of my research will deal with the conflict of interests between various actors. In education, there are clashes among Churches, Nation state, and non-governmental organizations, on how best the education should be structured, but more specifically, the role of the various churches in schools. Whilst some governments recognized various religions and give them right to be taught in public schools, other refused categorically that the schools should cater for them.

Dealing with this question can be quite problematic for the Seychelles. This is because some of the key partners in the field of education such as the Diocese of the Catholic Church, the school Directors and the teaching body who were basically priests and nuns still reminiscing on their coming back in the educational management. They refused to be out of the educational program. More than that, the Catholic mission has been and remains the cornerstone of the Seychellois society since their first settlement in 1770¹. Eradicating the Catholic Church in education can be quite challenging. As this Church has considerably influenced education in the Seychelles, their works are still being talked about among the great leaders of the country.

To ensure the pertinence of this thesis and the coherence of the reflection, the different partners of religious education will be put under study in a class scenario– the parish priest, the school directors, the parents and non-Catholic parents. In this class scenario, the conflict of interest, the complexity of religious plurality in one class, the question of the Catholic religious education will be displayed. The right of religion will also be questioned. The role of the school managers and the class teachers in motivating pluralism will be studied too.

My thesis will have four moments of reflections. Firstly, we will have an overview of the educational situation in the Seychelles. This point is primordial, as it is this section that will orient our reflection. So this phase of observation needs to be meticulous, every level of the educational situation in the Seychelles needs to be scrutinized. The history and politics of the Seychelles had affected religious plurality considerably, for instance the memorandum of understanding signed by the Catholic Church and the Nation State. This agreement had locked various religious plurality projects within the schools. Then, we will see the issue of religion in the Seychelles. This is a major factor that influences pluralism in the schools.

In this chapter, we will have a look not only at the figures of various religions, but also the various hidden mutations, for instance, the spiritual thirst of the Seychellois that had resulted in a hot Evangelical and Pentecostal wave in the country. This feature had shaken the Catholic Church and influences religious education in the schools.

It is necessary that we deepen our comprehension on the Education system and have a thorough outlook of the educational situation of the Seychelles. Then, we will look

¹ *Religion in Seychelles*, online on the site of Virtual Seychelles:
<http://www.virtualseychelles.sc/index.php/culture/people/religion-in-seychelles?showall=&start=1> (consulted 2nd May 2013). See also *Introduction à l'histoire de l'Église Catholique aux Seychelles*, online on the site of Catholic Church in Seychelles Diocèse of Port Victoria:
<http://dioceseofportvictoria.org/shorthistory/index.html> (consulted 2nd May 2013).

profoundly in the religious education. A true picture needs to be taken on this important element of my thesis. What is actually happening to religious education in the Seychelles? A glance will be done on the problems and obstacles. The voices of the teachers will be heard in this chapter. The program of religious education will be looked upon. We will obtain a closer look at the Seychelles' context of pluralism in the class scenario.

Once we have provided with some knowledge of the situation of the Seychelles where religious education is concerned, in the second part of my thesis, we will have an outlook on Christianity and pluralism. As my concern is the question of contextualizing the various information collected in areas other than the Seychelles, I will enter this second instant of reflection with a great picture of the Seychelles' difficulty to assume the plural context.

The concept of pluralism in the Seychelles remains quite obscure due to the dominant discourse of the Catholic Church and its monopoly in the school and the society, it is necessary that the various implications of pluralism are studied to shed some light on the situation of the Seychelles. A critical view is a necessity when analyzing those experiences, as they need to be properly contextualized.

After understanding the concept of pluralism through the encyclopedia we will take the views of few experts on pluralism and Christianity: Geir Skeie, Wolfram Weisse, Gabriel Moran, Norma Cook Everist ... The various debates will focus if we can minimize religious education courses for the sake of pluralism, and if religious education needs to open doors for better comprehension of its rituals to a larger audience. And we will see if it is pertinent that religious education re-examines the foundational principles of religion and its history to sort the essentials from the extraneous.

The third part of this thesis will focus on the Islamic world. We will understand the notion of pluralism in Islam with Professor Dr Mohammad Hashim Kamali; then we will use few experts to better understand the various experiences; Brigitte Marechal, Felice Dasetto and Mohammed Faour. The reflections will begin with the fact that Islam and Muslims represent a definitive establishment in Europe. Then we will have a look at compulsory Islamic religious education in public education. After that we will see the Islamic schools which are inculcating the Muslim posture, this will be proceeding with a view in Tunisia and Egypt.

After collecting enough data and information on the Christianity and Islamism religious plurality's experiences, we will continue with a discernment which is the fourth moment of reflection.

This fourth instant of reflection will be displaying new perspectives on the question of religious plurality in the Seychelles. The new perspectives will be displayed in two major disciplines; education and theology. In the educational field, we will base our views on the organization required when pluralism is adopted in schools. We will observe that the Church and State relation have an effect on the schools, and how considering and respecting the rights of parents could affect the organization of religious instruction at non-confessional public schools.

We will distinguish the school approaches on the teaching and treatment of religion in schools; afterwards, we will have a glance at how education can be a tool to combat ignorance, stereotyping and incomprehension of religions. In this fourth instant, we will also deepen our understanding on how pluralism is resourced when mutual enrichment is restored and cultures are not hostile. After that, we will detail how respecting students' identity, though one is seeking pluralism in schools is primordial. These researches can help in re-adjusting the objectives of religious education in the Seychelles. This thesis is not only a university research; it is indeed a proposed diocesan project for the diocese of Port Victoria after the recommendation of the President of the Seychelles and the Ministry of Education to modernize the Catholic religious education in the schools.

Those reflections can also be possible pathways for the Seychelles. There are crucial steps that the Seychelles need to adapt so that it can pave its way smoothly. Subsequently, there are some drastic changes that Seychelles need to take, and there are new modes of organization that the Nation State and the Catholic Church will need to adopt and/or inserted in the culture of the Seychelles.

This thesis will adopt this method 'Spotting the situation, judge it and act on it;

- Spotting the situation: Religious education situation in Seychelles
- Judge it: Pluralism and Christianity in the schools and Pluralism and Islam in the schools.
- Act on it: New perspectives of pluralism based on the organization of the school and the religious/theological reflection

1. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SITUATION IN SEYCHELLES

The education situation in the Seychelles has been under Catholic Church's management for many years. That management has 'Christianized' the educational program, the teaching body, the partners and the reflections on the issue. It is in 1976, when the British gave the independence to the Seychelles, that a new style of government was established, with the installation of the socialist regime in 1977². That rise to power of a socialist government changed the course of history. The political system basically 'unchristianized' the public institutions and an indemnity was given to the Church through a contract. This 99 year renewable. The agreement gave this church various advantages and most importantly turned the catechesis into a compulsory religious education class in all schools³. In a nutshell, this meant that schools would be run by the Nation state, but where religious education was and is concerned, Catholic diocese and the views of the Catholic Church would be upheld.

Therefore, the Catholic schools are named public schools, and are managed by the Nation State through the Ministry of Education⁴. The Catholic diocese of Port Victoria confirmed the contract and thus entered in this new regime of religious education. The diocese rejoiced for being the manager of religious education and it considers that responsibility as freedom to do what it wants about the content of religion teaching, the pedagogy and selection of the teachers. The religious education remains mainly the catechesis. Moreover, the contract makes no mention concerning the parents' agreement for the children to follow the religious education. Neither are there elaborations on the question of diversity of the school too. As mostly everyone was Catholic at that time, that question did not arise.

Today, this 'advantage' of the Catholic Church is being questioned by non-Catholic adherents - the parents, political leaders, lawmakers and the students because the school is a plural context and democratic grounds. The teaching body, the school management and the Catholic religion teachers and even the diocese are aware of this new paradigm within the school. But no substantial move is being done to understand, remedy or even palliate this thirst of pluralism at school.

² Cf. *Seychelles*, online on the site of Soldiers of fortune mercenary wars: <http://www.mercenary-wars.net/seychelles/> (consulted 20th November 2013).

³ Cf. GOVERNMENT OF THE SEYCHELLES, *Memorandum of Understanding on Religious education and Moral Instruction to Adherents of Roman Catholic Church*, Victoria, 1998, p. 4-5.

⁴ Cf. GOVERNMENT OF THE SEYCHELLES, *Memorandum of Understanding on Religious education and Moral Instruction to Adherents of Roman Catholic Church*.

1.1 History and Political preview

Seychelles is a comparatively young nation which can trace its first settlement back to 1768 when the islands were first occupied by French people⁵, leaders of a small party of Whites, Indians and Africans. In fact

“Seychelles were uninhabited when the British East India Company arrived on the archipelago in 1609. Thereafter, they became a favorite pirate haven. The French claimed the islands in 1756 and administered them as part of the colony of Mauritius. The British gained control of the islands through the Treaty of Paris (1814) and changed the islands’ name from the French Séchelles to the Anglicized Seychelles.

The islands became self-governing in 1975 and independent on June 29, 1976. They have remained a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Their first president, James Mancham, was overthrown in 1977 by the Prime Minister, France-Albert René. At first René created a Socialist state with a one-party system, but later he reintroduced a multiparty system as well as various reforms.”⁶

In 1993 took place the first multiparty presidential and legislative elections held under a new Constitution. René was elected. He also won the 1998 and 2003 elections before transferring the Presidency to James Alix Michel in June 2004. With the adoption of the multiparty system, the state called upon various Seychellois experts in exile to help in the formation of the new Seychelles. There were exilers returned from London, Canada and Australia. They were schoolteachers, lawyers, businessmen etc. Adoption of a new Constitution for the Country was a great moment of national reconciliation. It meant also openness to democracy and to the free World after being a one-party State for many years.⁷ Various clauses express that democratic vision as for instance Article 21 which stipulates on as follows:

“21. (1) Every person has a right to freedom of conscience and for the purpose of this article this right includes freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change religion or belief and freedom either alone or in community with others and both in

⁵ Cf. *Seychelles*, online on the site of Soldiers of fortune mercenary wars: <http://www.mercenary-wars.net/seychelles/> (consulted 20th November 2013).

⁶ *Seychelles*, online on the site of Infoplease: <http://www.infoplease.com/country/seychelles.html> (consulted 10th March 2014).

⁷ Cf. GOVERNMENT OF THE SEYCHELLES, *Constitution of the Seychelles Approved on 18 June 1993-Amended by Act No 14*, Victoria, Government of the Seychelles, 1996.

public and in private, to manifest and propagate the religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

- (2) The freedom to manifest and propagate a religion or belief may be subject to such limitations as may be prescribed by a law and necessary in a democratic society –
- (a) in the interests of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health; or
 - (b) for the purpose of protecting the rights or freedoms of other persons”⁸

And Article 22 stresses a point on freedom of expression: “(1) Every person has a right to freedom of expression and for the purpose of this article this right includes the freedom to hold opinions and to seek, receive and impart ideas and information without interference. (2) The right under clause (1) may be subject to such restrictions as may be prescribed by a law and necessary in a democratic society”.⁹

The new government, the new constitution, the wind of a democratic party enters the island of the Seychelles. This has provoked a new type of relationship between the Church and the state that would affect the educational system that until then was being managed by the Catholic Church.

1.1.1 *The relationship between the Church and the State*

As stated earlier, Catholic Church was in fact the Head of State of the Seychelles. This institution was the pillar of the society¹⁰. The Catholic Church under the governance of the Capuchins Congregation managed the hospitals, schools and the public administration of the Seychelles¹¹. After the Seychelles had its independence, and the installation of the multi-party system, the Catholic Church lost its influences as the Nation State¹². The installation of the new government shattered the Catholic mission. This was seen primarily as a defeat for the Catholic Church. So much so, that the Church resisted that movement. That was done via various propaganda activities in the Sunday masses.

⁸ GOVERNMENT OF THE SEYCHELLES, *Constitution of the Seychelles*, Article 21.

⁹ GOVERNMENT OF THE SEYCHELLES, *Constitution of the Seychelles*, Article 21.

¹⁰ Cf. DIOCÈSE PORT VICTORIA, *Directory of Seychelles*, Victoria, Saint Fidèle, 2004, p. 12.

¹¹ Cf. DIOCÈSE PORT VICTORIA, *Rapport de session du clergé; la catéchèse*, Victoria, Saint Fidele, 2002, p. 7.

¹² Cf. ADRIENNE Lonnie, *Rapport d'aumônier commission catéchétique diocésaine*, La Misère, Saint Fidele, 1999, p. 4.

There were highly critical homilies and the propagation of leaflets calling upon Christians to resist this ‘laicization’ within the country¹³. Finally the Catholic Church surrendered and collaborated with the Nation State for the sake of democracy. That conflict was concluded with an indemnity contract for the seizure of all the catholic institutions. The Church had the foremost guarantee that she would remain the pillar within the education system, but basically in religious education for 99 years renewable. That was perceived as a good enough compromise and encouraged the Catholic Church to conclude that contract. The Catholic diocese overlooked the fact that the religious environment could be modified with secularization. The Nation State gave the Church the assurance it needed. The government maintained a good relationship with the Catholic and Anglican churches. They were seen as important bodies for the Nation State. The government involved them in various ethical debates, moral reforms and much more¹⁴.

1.1.2 *The Agreement*¹⁵

The contract between the Catholic Church and Nation State that was concluded was an indemnity for all the institutions seized by the Nation state. Moreover, it was the guarantee for the Catholic Church to keep its foothold in the schools. Catholicism was very pleased to remain in schools as the sole religion. The contract stipulated that:-

- Religious education from the Catholic Church is taught in all public schools, in all classes on a weekly basis for 80 minutes
- All religion teachers are paid by the government and they need to be trained to acquire the competence needed as educators as required by the Ministry of Education.
- It is the Catholic Church who recommends the teachers for religious education.
- The government supports the enhancement of the teachers’ competence by the diocese.
- The Catholic Church can use all schools infrastructures without requiring any formal permission from the Ministry of Education.

So, as a result of the contract, the Catholic Church enjoyed a comfortable position and tried its utmost to catechize all the students¹⁶, though, the major loss to the Church was the fact that

¹³ Cf. ADRIENNE Lonnie, *Rapport d’aumônier commission catéchétique diocésaine*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Cf. DIOCÈSE PORT VICTORIA, *Rapport de session du clergé*, p. 2.

¹⁵ Cf. GOVERNMENT OF THE SEYCHELLES, *Memorandum of Understanding on Religious education*, p. 4-5.

¹⁶ Cf. DIOCÈSE PORT VICTORIA, *Rapport de session du clergé*, p. 1.

the catechesis was reduced to a weekly basis religious education¹⁷. Despite the advantages gained the Catholic Church had great difficulty to find the appropriate and competent teaching body. This is because, the number of lesson periods required surpassed the number of teachers acquired.

The diocese was faced with a major challenge. So, the diocese called upon faithful catechists and other laypersons to be employed as religion teachers. At that point in time the criteria to become a religion teacher became more lenient. Church servants, catechists, organist entered the Ministry of Education as religion teachers. The utmost criterion was the candidate's zeal for evangelization and his or her level of involvement to the parish or any other spiritual (catholic) group¹⁸.

As modernity installed and the country became increasingly open-minded and less restrictive, (with the Tourism industry becoming Seychelles' main revenue stream), various new religions started to implant in the country. Moreover, the Ministry of Education reforms in education opened doors to expatriate teachers from India, Kenya and Sri Lanka. The expansion of the fishing industry, with the opening of Indian Ocean Tuna Limited (IOT) saw an increase of Kenyan women as workers for the canning industry¹⁹.

Industrialization of the Seychelles and the wind of change in various Ministries opened the door to a large amount of immigrants, coming along with their own expressions of faith. So the Kenyans brought their Pentecostal faith, the Indians Hinduism, and the people of Madagascar brought their witchcrafts and sorcery, not forgetting all the other smaller sectarian groups that could now be found on the Seychelles islands. Then, there was an Islamic wave from Saudi Arabia as the government requested various grants from there (Sheiks)²⁰. The comfortable majority of the Catholic Church presence at school is shattered²¹.

¹⁷ Cf. GOVERNMENT OF THE SEYCHELLES, *Memorandum of Understanding on Religious education*, p. 4-5.

¹⁸ Cf. DIOCÈSE PORT VICTORIA, *Rapport de session du clergé*, p. 2.

¹⁹ Cf. IOTC, online on the site of Indian Ocean Tuna Commission: <http://www.iotc.org/> (consulted 29th April 2014).

²⁰ Cf. *Seychelles Presidents commends Sheikh Khalifa's interest in furthering bilateral relations*, online on the site of Iris media: <http://www.irisuae.com/en/shownews.php?id=70> (consulted 20th February 2014).

²¹ Cf. DIOCÈSE PORT VICTORIA, *Rapport de session du clergé*, p. 3.

1.2 Religion in the Seychelles

Today, the Islands of the Seychelles count more than 35 religious denominations²². Catholicism is the major religion with 85% of the population belonging to it. It is followed by the Anglican Church with 5%, the rest of the percentage being shared among the Pentecostal and evangelical movements, the Seventh Day Adventist, the Jehovah, Islam and Hindus²³. Since the last 15 years, there have been considerable Evangelical and Pentecostal movements invading the Seychelles. That can be easily observed in many corners of life, at work as well as at school. A good number of adolescents are following this Bible study. Many Catholic parish priests are receiving un-baptized request from those new born adherents of the Evangelical and Pentecostal movements. There is also a wave of conversion to Islam of young adults mainly men in their 20's and 30's of age. The Islamic wave is originated from Saudi Arabia branch. The young Muslims are quite fundamentalist and their spouses wore integral *burqua*. Seeing that movement, the Catholic Church has actively tried to stand up against those denominations.

The Church has been mobilizing efforts and really campaigning for a comeback to Catholic Christianity. Various Catholic movements and branches have been called to join the diocese in palliating this thirst for ulterior spirituality invading the Seychelles. The groups include '*Couples for Christ*' from Philippines, the '*group 40*' from Mauritius, the '*Neo-catechumenal*' groups from Spain, and the '*Chemin neuf*' from France. There were concerts where a charismatic priest from Mauritius came and motivated the Catholics for their Churches. On top of that, the Bishop of the Diocese Port Victoria of the Seychelles, Denis Wiehe called upon other priests and invited the Holy Spirit Congregation to renew the clergy as the Capuchins priests were becoming too old to answer the various exigencies of the

²² Cf. *Population and Housing Census 2010 Report*, 2.7 Religion, p. 29, online on the site of National Bureau of Statistics, Republic of Seychelles:
http://www.nsb.gov.sc/wpcontent/uploads/2012/12/Population_and_Housing_Census_2010_Report.pdf
(consulted 20th March 2014).

²³ Cf. *Population and Housing Census 2010 Report*, 2.7 Religion, p. 29.

faithful²⁴. Today the Catholic Church of the Seychelles counts 20 priests, a deacon and a brother²⁵.

1.3 Education system²⁶

Education in Seychelles is comprehensive, co-educational and free of charge to all Seychellois children for a period of 13 years (from *Crèche* to secondary). At the same time, a flexible option system of post-secondary schooling has been evolving. Seychelles has just established its first university in September 2009 for business, tourism and school of education only.²⁷ For the other fields the students pursued their studies abroad²⁸. Secondary education is delivered in regional secondary schools. Students follow a core curriculum from S1 to S3, (age 13-15) which is then followed by an option system in S4/S5 as students prepare for the National School Certificate and the Cambridge O-Level examination or IGCSA (Cambridge IGCSE is the world's most popular international qualification for 10 to 16 year old). It is recognized by leading universities and employers worldwide, and is an international passport to progression and success)²⁹.

Seychelles is characterized by a highly centralized education system with a common curriculum framework, common textbooks and learning teaching materials. The National School Curriculum includes the following subjects: English, French, Mathematics, The Arts, Sciences, Social Sciences and Information Technology but Religious Education is not in the school curriculum³⁰. The Ministry of Education manages the schools through individual head teachers; it controls facilities, resources, staffing, and budgetary allocation. One of the important objectives of the education system is to provide equal opportunities for all and to distribute resources equitably.

²⁴ Cf. *Journée mondiale de la vie consacrée 2014*, online on the site of Catholic Church in Seychelles Diocèse of Port Victoria: <http://dioceseofportvictoria.org/home/index.html> (consulted 20th April 2014).

²⁵ Cf. *Clergy*, online on the site of Catholic Church in Seychelles Diocèse of Port Victoria: <http://dioceseofportvictoria.org/clergy/index.html> (consulted 20th April 2014).

²⁶ Cf. *Seychelles – Education Fact Sheet*, online on the site of SACMEQ, The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality : <http://www.sacmeq.org/sacmeq-members/seychelles/education-fact-sheet> (consulted 21st December 2013).

²⁷ Cf. UNIVERSITY OF SEYCHELLES, online: <http://www.unisey.ac.sc/#> (consulted 21st December 2013).

²⁸ Cf. *Seychelles – Education Fact Sheet*, online on the site of SACMEQ.

²⁹ Cf. *Cambridge IGCSE*, online on the site of Cambridge International Examinations: <http://www.cie.org.uk/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-secondary-2/cambridge-igcse/> (consulted 21st December 2013).

³⁰ Cf. *The National Curriculum Framework – Supporting a new vision for learning*, online on the site of Seychelles Nation: <http://www.nation.sc/article.html?id=239424> (consulted 21st December 2013).

1.4 Religious education

Religious education (RE) of the Catholic Church is not in the National Curriculum. It is better known as the catechesis. This means that the Ministry of Education does not conduct any inspection on the pedagogy, the program and the content of the lesson³¹. This inspection is rather entrusted to a diocesan Service, the commission of the catechesis. Everything regarding innovation and the development of religious education is taken in charge by that commission which is chaired by Bishop Denis Wiehe. For the diocese, religious education at school is managed as parochial catechesis. Therefore, religious education at school is perceived by the diocese as a great opportunity where the maximum number of students can be catechized³². ‘The religion teachers met more Catholic students than a parish priest on a weekly basis’, said Bishop Wiehe on a meeting with the commission³³.

1.4.1 Teachers

The teaching of religious education in secondary schools is done mainly by faithful laypersons. Most of them have not received any training or teaching competence in neither the science of religions nor theological field. They are mostly parish animators who have answered the bishop’s call to give a helping hand with religious education in the Secondary schools. All secondary teachers have completed their secondary education and they have an advanced level in linguistics by the Cambridge University, as this is an additional criterion set by the Ministry of Education, to be allowed to teach at this level³⁴. Actually, the teaching body is facing great difficulty as a result of religious plurality in the schools.

1.4.2 Program

The Curriculum of Religious Education has been edited since 1980’s by the diocesan department of catechesis, headed by Father Lonnie Adrienne. It is mainly the doctrine of the Catholic Church, the catechesis and the Bible study. The Religious Education text books are out of date and this brings additional difficulty for the teacher to render the subject

³¹ Cf. THE REPUBLIC OF SEYCHELLES, *The Major Development of Education in the Seychelles (1977 to 1988)*, Victoria, Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 28.

³² Cf. ADRIENNE, *Rapport d’aumônier commission catéchétique*, p. 4.

³³ Cf. ADRIENNE, *Rapport d’aumônier commission catéchétique*, p. 4

³⁴ Cf. NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, *The Seychelles National Curriculum Framework Draft*, Victoria, Ministry of Education 1999, p. 23

interesting³⁵. The fact that the books are obsolete is seen on the secondary 3 level, where there is a one-year program on prophets for those adolescents. Religious education is also regarded as an idle subject. It is often used by the school and other subject teachers as a vacant and void moment, and they often asked the religion teacher to give them this period for the completion of their curriculum.

1.5 A Closer look at the Seychelles' context of pluralism in a class scenario

Various questions can be raised to comprehend the situation of pluralism in the Seychelles. In most classes, the religion class consists of at least 90% of Catholic students. This class consists also of 10% of Muslims and the born again Christians from the Pentecostal and Evangelical Church. Among, the Catholic students 90% goes to Church. Among the non-Catholic students, the large majority are Muslims. They have recently gone through conversion. There are also fervent Protestants Christians. Those new converted to Islam are in general former Christians who have received their sacraments: - baptism, holy-communion and confirmation³⁶.

Normally all the student participates in the Catholic Religious Education. The religion teacher prepares one lesson for the entire class. No specific pedagogy is being employed neither for differentiating learning nor taking into account students' prerequisite. For instance in a class, the non-Catholic students can make jokes, and sing profane songs. In those situations, the teacher continues the lesson and ignores those disturbances.

Here is an example of a typical religion class in one of the secondary schools in the Seychelles. The Teacher starts the lesson. 'Today, we will start by understanding the theme of salvation. We are invited to be baptized in the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. Not being baptized prevents us from getting into the kingdom of God.' She continues by insisting that those that have not been baptized are still under the power of the devil, and she prays that they will encounter a Christian to help them to be baptized and hence saved from hell.

A Muslim student interjects and says, 'Mohammed is the true Prophet. Jesus changes so many things and we need not follow Jesus, we need Islam as the religion of the world.' That statement will provoke the teacher, who will not hesitate to exclaim that 'Muslims are terrorists'...though? We often present this religion as a good one,' she explained. There are various suicide attacks, where innocents are murdered for instance, September 11.' The

³⁵ Cf. ADRIENNE, *Rapport d'aumônier commission catéchétique*, p. 7.

³⁶ Cf. ADRIENNE, *Rapport d'aumônier commission catéchétique*, p. 7.

Muslim boy left the class shouting, ‘I will tell my parents that you have said that Muslims are murderers’. -The Catholic students will applaud the teacher. And as the class will get so noisy, the Director of the school making his usual rounds will enter the classroom to see what is happening. After he heard what had happened, he would ignore the issue by stating, ‘Religious education is a compulsory course. Those who do not accept to follow it are not welcome in this school.’

The thesis interrogates if pluralism can pave its way in a mono-religion context as the Seychelles? Through the above scenario various questions are being raised concerning the content of the confessional religious education in plural religions schools. Should the content of religious education be simply descriptive, where only knowledge of a religion is acquired? Could it have the ambition of awakening the recognition of plurality while at the same time allowing pupils to build up an identity? Can it be both catechetical for the Catholic adherents and simply informative for the non-Catholic students?

The above scenario brings up the concerns of the secularization of the church. Can a Catholic Church monopole be impermeable from the paradigm of modernity? ‘Globalisation requires that education must rise to the challenges inherent in the growth of cultural and religious diversity in order to form citizens who are able to live together peacefully.’³⁷. But the question remains: is the Seychelles context apt for such challenge? Opening doors to pluralism may jeopardize the ‘smooth cohabitation of different religions in the Seychelles

1.5.1 *Religious education in a plural, secularized society requires a paradigm shift*

Leni Franken and Patrick Loobuyck in the introduction of their book, *Religious education in a Plural, Secularised Society: A Paradigm Shift*³⁸, explained that increasing forms of secularization and religious diversity characterized the European societies. Though they were using a European context, this echoed the situation of the Seychelles. The authors stated that, for a long time the main aim of religious education was clearly to educate children in their own religious tradition. Today, the aims of religious education are much broader: contributing to pupils’ general education and preparing them for participation as a citizen in

³⁷ Micheline MILOT, *The religious dimension in intercultural education*, in John KEAST (ed.), *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: a Reference Book for Schools*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe Publishing, 2007, p. 19. Quoted by Henri DERROITTE, *Cours de religion catholique et pluralité religieuse*, dans *Revue théologique de Louvain*, 41 (2010), p. 57.

³⁸ Leni FRANKEN et Patrick LOOBUYCK (ed.), *Religious Education in a Plural, Secularised Society: A Paradigm Shift*, Münster, Waxmann Verlag, 2011.

the future, within a multicultural society. They underlined that as a result, the following question arises in many countries, how can ‘teaching into religion’ be transformed into or complemented by ‘learning about’ and ‘learning from religions’³⁹?

How pertinent are these reflections to the situation in the Seychelles? We will clarify our research question by using the above scenario of the secondary school.

1.5.2 *Diocese of the Catholic Church affirms that Evangelization is not an optional activity*

The main actor of this scenario is the Catholic Church. According to this institution, the Church’s priority is to evangelize. They find their support, in the document, *Evangelii nuntiandi*. It gave a very clear emphasis on the importance of evangelization, not being an optional contribution for the Church. It states, “Those who have received the Good News and who have been gathered by it into the community of salvation can and must communicate and spread it. The Church knows this. She has a vivid awareness of the fact that the Savior’s words [...] Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize”.⁴⁰ “Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. [...] All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way they can be real evangelizers.”⁴¹

1.5.3 *The parish priest reinforces that evangelization is bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity*

The priest does not accept diversified religious education. For the Seychellois’ priest, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity and through its influence in transforming humanity from within and making it new, thus for him the school should make the most of this opportunity to evangelize. His argument is based on *Evangelii nuntiandi* n°18. It states, “For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new”⁴². Evangelization is conceived here as a real humanization of the mankind. It is something which makes the religious man worthy of his vocation as the partners of God in

³⁹ Cf. L. FRANKEN et P. LOOBUYCK (ed.), *Religious Education in a Plural, Secularised Society*.

⁴⁰ PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Apostolic exhortation, n° 13-14, online on the site of Vatican: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html (consulted 16th March.2014).

⁴¹ PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n° 21.

⁴² PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n° 18.

the work of creation. And that makes man and woman more responsible for the world. So the priest is putting forward that this humanization aims at reaching all corners, leaving no one behind. Everyone should be touched in this evangelization project with the objective of change and renewal of inner-self. So for him, the school remains the ideal place for this project.

Though the Church has the obligation to evangelize, the document *Dignitatis Humanae*, “declares that, the human person has a right to religious freedom”⁴³ and “that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person, as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself”⁴⁴ This article attenuated this monopoly of evangelisation.

1.5.4 *The Director of the school is cornered between constitution rights and the contract*

The Director of the school has the difficulty to choose between the contract principles and right to freedom of conscience in the constitution.

So the Director wants to articulate the fundamental right of the constitution with the contract on religious education. The question that needs to be raised is: Is the contract anti-constitutional? Or does the constitution excuse the contract in any means? Paul Lamotte⁴⁵ broadened the paradox that the director of the school is facing. He saw that religious education develops the freedom of the young and it allows them to take position with regard to the faith with full knowledge of the facts with the presence of authentic Christian’s testimonies. The author affirms that religious education presents correct religious knowledge and thus allows the young person to be free from a heap of false images and from a priori on the religion, the Church, the faith. So, for Lamotte, religious education in the school is a favorable moment to acquire important facts of one’s religion but this idea needs to focus on more than one religion.⁴⁶ The *Catechesi Trandendae* n° 69 writes on this matter too:

“Catholic establishments should respect freedom of conscience, that is to say, avoid burdening consciences from without by exerting physical or moral pressure, especially in the case of the religious activity of adolescents, they still have a grave duty to offer a

⁴³ CONCILE VATICAN II, *Dignitatis Humanae. Declaration on religious freedom*, n° 2, online on the site of Vatican: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html (consulted 2nd May 2013).

⁴⁴ CONCILE VATICAN II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, n° 2.

⁴⁵ Paul LAMOTTE, *Guide pastorale de l’enseignement catholique*, Limoges, Droguet et Ardant, 1989, p. 119-126.

⁴⁶ Cf. P. LAMOTTE, *Guide pastorale de l’enseignement catholique*, p. 121-124.

religious training suited to the often widely varying religious situations of the pupils. They also have a duty to make them understand that, although God's call to serve Him in spirit and truth, in accordance with the Commandments of God and the precepts of the Church, does not apply constraint, it is nevertheless binding in conscience."⁴⁷

Consciousness is the center of the innermost and most secret of man, the sanctuary where he is alone with God whose voice is being heard. Man must act according to his conscience so this article explained that man should not be forced to act against his conscience. This freedom means that all men are to be protected from intimidation on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power what so ever, so no one is forced to act against his conscience, or unable to act, within reasonable limits, according to his conscience in private or in public, alone or in combination with others.

1.5.5 The non-Catholic parents: The school is an opened pluralistic environment.

In the above scenario, the non-Catholic parents disagreed totally that the plural context of the school is respected. Based on Lamotte's article,⁴⁸ they underlined that the school is certainly a place of evangelization, but an opened, pluralistic environment in whom the message to be proposed does not have to aim first and foremost at the conversion or a forced Christianization, but to bring together or put students into contact of the message. The author insists that it is not good to make the schools an exclusive center of the diocesan catechesis. Religious education requires taking into account all religious walks of the society⁴⁹. This is indeed a great wake up call to the school, on how best to manage this plural religion context within the school. Having an ultimate aim does not mean not considering one's right.

1.5.6 The parents in general-Religious education is not for conversion

For the parents, they do not have the proper terms to explain the diversification of religious education but they argued that Religious education need not promote students' adhesion to any religious beliefs. Religious education needs to contribute towards the insertion of the young as capable and decent citizen in the society. Religious education

⁴⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesi Tradendae*.Apostolic exhortation,n°69,online on the site of Vatican.:http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html(consulted 16th March.2014).

⁴⁸ Cf. P. LAMOTTE, *Guide pastoral de l'enseignement catholique*, p. 119-126.

⁴⁹ Cf. P. LAMOTTE, *Guide pastoral de l'enseignement catholique*, p. 124-125

deepens the knowledge of the Church, God and the Bible, but without using any catechetical approach with the conversion as major aim⁵⁰. Motivated, on the issue of religious freedom in my context, I found an interesting sentence on the internet, on the article Faith & Freedom, on the Case for Separation of Church and State⁵¹ which shed light on understanding further the scenario. It states that when our population is growing increasingly diverse, those values (right of religion) are more important than ever. The public schools must make students from every background feel equally welcome if democracy is to endure. Students from minority religions are particularly vulnerable. No one feels more embarrassed and isolated than a Muslim child forced to participate in or remove himself from Christian-oriented activities. The public school students are by nature, young and impressionable; they must be protected from peer and official pressure⁵².

Scrutinizing the class scenario has allowed us to understand the complexity of this thesis. To ripen those ideas, we will consider pluralism in religious education using various authors.

⁵⁰ Cf. P. LAMOTTE, *Guide pastoral de l'enseignement catholique*, p. 120-121.

⁵¹ *Religion in the Public Schools. Faith & Freedom. The Case for Separation of Church and State*, online on the site of Anti-Defamation League:
http://archive.adl.org/issue_religious_freedom/faithfreedom/faith_freedom_schools.asp (consulted 30th May 2013).

⁵² *Religion in the Public Schools*.

2. PLURALISM AND CHRISTIANISM IN THE SCHOOLS

In this second part of the thesis, we will have an overview of the definition of pluralism. This will help us in better formulating the concept of pluralism. We will do a briefing on this concept in the Seychelles, and then we will have a view of the notion and the comprehension of religious plurality, after that we will deepen our knowledge on pluralism in the schools.

2.1 The understanding of the notion of pluralism by the Seychellois

The Seychelles has been impregnated with the one party state over a decade. Moreover, in the Seychelles, the Catholic ambiance that had reigned for over 100 years left the Seychellois people with a unique party and one religion attitude. In the Seychelles, it is not easy to understand and valorize this idea of diversity. Many Seychellois saw this idea of religious plurality as the key to ‘instability.’ This is because the political parties had influenced the nation on this issue; putting forward that the island needs to be stable, as the country’s economy counts on tourism to thrive, and that a country needs to be religiously, socially and politically stable. Once, President France Albert René proclaimed, there is no poverty in the Seychelles and the Seychelles is a peaceful country, so I will do my utmost to ensure that this ambiance is maintained or else our first economy, the tourism will be in great danger⁵³.

Even in politics, the opposition party is seen as the enemy of the nation. Those events have contributed for the Seychellois to deny and fight against the plural context in the Seychelles. For this thesis, I was eager to do a questionnaire, where I would be able to understand the religious plurality context in the Seychelles but this method had proven unsuccessful, as the term ‘pluralism’ itself is not familiar for the Seychellois and moreover, this term is embedded with various political terms.

This attitude of denial of the plural context is also seen in the school. Although the school entails a religious plurality environment- Muslim, Protestant, Anglicans, Catholic, Jehovah, Adventist and Hindu, yet there is no attention given to this context. Though there is

⁵³ Cf. RENE France Albert, *The Torch of Freedom*, Victoria, Ministry of Education and Information, 1981, p. 12.

this burning ambiance within the school, which had persisted in the last decade, the religious education remains the compulsory Catholic catechesis.

More than the idea of mono-religion and the one party state, there is also this attitude of relinquishment among the students. For many students, though they belong to other denominations, they will never claim the right to express their religion. For them, the religious education lesson has belonged to the Catholic Church for years and it will continue this way. This is a similar attitude in Seychelles politics; that the Islands of the Seychelles have belonged to the single party regime since 1964, the Seychelles People United Party (which is known now as '*Parti Lepep*', meaning the People's party) and this regime will remain in power for more years to come.

The teachers have also adopted this 'surrendering' attitude towards the right of religion. Though religion teachers believe in diversity and accept this religious plurality context in the school, they asserted that the school should remain mono-religious and that the other religions and denomination should find other ways to catechize their faithful. For them, the public school is a Catholic school.

This brief overview shows that the Seychelles needs to have more consideration where diversity and religion plurality are concerned. Before attempting to discuss and compare those confrontational ideas on pluralism, it would be interesting to know the definition of pluralism, so that we can better frame the concept of this thesis.

2.2 The notion of pluralism and its comprehension in the Encyclopedia ⁵⁴

It is in the Stanford encyclopedia, that David Basinger gave the explanation on pluralism, it states that, there are

'significant differences of opinion among individuals who seem to be equally knowledgeable and sincere. Individuals who apparently have access to the same information and are equally interested in the truth, affirm incompatible perspectives on, for instance, significant social, political, and economic issues. Such diversity of opinion, though, is nowhere more evident than in the area of religious thought. On almost every religious issue, honest, knowledgeable people hold significantly diverse, often incompatible beliefs⁵⁵'

⁵⁴ David BASINGER, *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*, online on the site of, Edward N. ZALTA (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2012 Edition)*: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/religious-pluralism/> (consulted 28th October 2013).

⁵⁵ D. BASINGER, *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*, introduction.

The definition of Basinger eradicates the issue of conflict in pluralism. It states, mainly that the truth affirmation which resulted in a diversity of opinion, and this is done by honest and knowledgeable people. The author explains that, ‘... the Religious diversity exists most noticeably at the level of basic theistic systems. For instance, while within Christianity, Judaism, and Islam it is believed that God is a personal deity, within Hinayana (Theravada) Buddhism God's existence is denied and within Hinduism the concept of a personal deity is, in an important sense, illusory...’⁵⁶.

The author added another element on the question of religious diversity in public education. He states that,

“Public education in Western culture has always been to some extent a ‘melting pot.’ But the increasing number of students with non-Western cultural values and religious traditions is causing public school educators to grapple in new and sometimes uncomfortable ways with the challenges such diversity poses. Some of these challenges are practical [...] how ought the increasing religious diversity to which students are exposed affect public school curricula?”⁵⁷

This is a pertinent point in understanding pluralism. Basinger explained that the diversity adds various challenges. For the author, it is the change in the environment that has triggered this question of diversity within the school in uncomfortable ways. However, Basinger saw that the “increasing student understanding of diverse religious perspectives is important as this will have positive social outcomes”⁵⁸. For him, it is by “helping students better understand the increasing diversity,[...] they face will better prepare them to live in a peaceful, productive manner with those with differing cultural and/or religious values.”⁵⁹

Basinger added another element; he illustrated it in those terms:

“Many educators, [...] think that] it is also important [...] for students to clarify their feelings about other religions and their followers. Specifically, they want to foster a more empathetic understanding of other religious perspectives, an understanding that encourages students to appreciate the other religions from the perspective of an adherent of that religion. While few challenge this as a valid goal, there is, though, continuing controversy over one common method by which educators attempt to engender this type of empathy in students. As some see it, while having students think about diverse religions is an important step past the mere dissemination of factual information toward

⁵⁶ D. BASINGER, *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*, n° 1.

⁵⁷ D.BASINGER, *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*, n° 8.

⁵⁸ D.BASINGER, *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*, n° 8.

⁵⁹ D. BASINGER, *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*, n° 8.

empathetic understanding, having students directly experience these religions in some way – for instance, having students visit a local mosque or having a representative from a Buddhist Center share with students in a class – is also necessary (or at least very desirable).”⁶⁰

This above statement added further clarification where understanding the notion of pluralism is concerned. Basinger highlights that it is essential to understand our feelings on other religion, so that an empathetic understanding of religion can be achieved. But he remains reluctant on the method used to inculcate this empathy.

2.3 The notion of pluralism and its comprehension with Geir Skeie⁶¹

Geir Skeie states that the concept of plurality is sometimes used in a general way to characterize any type of multiplicity or diversity.⁶² He added that on the other hand, we may use pluralism to indicate an evaluation of a particular kind of plurality which usually is positive⁶³. Geir Skeie finds pluralism as a constructive concept.

However, he explained that there are, ‘fundamental opposition to the pluralist view that could arise from denying the existence of a certain plurality⁶⁴.’ The author added, ‘... that the anti-pluralism version is probably that which sees plurality as a problem to be solved, by reducing it....⁶⁵’ Moreover, Skeie explained that, ‘another view opposed to pluralism suggests that the plurality in question includes conflicting truth claims and that the only way out is to choose one truth against the others⁶⁶.’

Here, Skeie added a pertinent element, he illustrated that there are indeed oppositions to this feature of pluralism, either there is a desire to reduce it or it is seen as a problem to be solved. So Skeie saw this as a drawback when in pluralism context, one truth/idea is imposed as the good one. So I think, he is suggesting that pluralism can be non-conflicting when there

⁶⁰ D. BASINGER, *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*, n° 8.

⁶¹ GeirSKEIE, *The Concept of Plurality and its Meaning for Religious Education*, in *British Journal of Religious Education*, 25(2002), p. 47-59.

⁶² Cf. SKEIE Geir, *The Concept of Plurality and its Meaning for Religious education*.

⁶³ Cf. SKEIE Geir, *The Concept of Plurality and its Meaning for Religious education*.

⁶⁴ SKEIE Geir, *The Concept of Plurality and its Meaning for Religious education*.

⁶⁵ SKEIE Geir, *The Concept of Plurality and its Meaning for Religious education*.

⁶⁶ SKEIE Geir, *The Concept of Plurality and its Meaning for Religious education*.

are varieties of truths/interests/ideas cohabiting without selecting the best one.⁶⁷ Skeie has not hesitated to show that this notion of pluralism is a challenging one for the society in general.

The author deepens our comprehension by explaining that in fact plurality means socio-cultural plurality, that the feature of life in any society, which is often, referred as multicultural society⁶⁸. Skeie summarized the understanding of the notion of pluralism, by explaining that there are three attitudes that one can adopt towards this plurality, he named them, ‘naturalistic attitudes which perceives the socio-cultural diversity to be inevitable and therefore not something that one should be lamenting with it, then there is ‘rationalistic attitude, which is based on the firm conviction, that even if human seem to be living quite different lives, they are not in separate worlds. There is a common human nature that can always be appealed to.’⁶⁹ And finally there is romantic attitude, which starts from the assumption that human beings are more or less, creative persons, who have the capacity to perceive and think differently, who may have different aims in life and they try to find their own ways of reaching these aims⁷⁰.

Skeie added a relatively new way of understanding pluralism; he saw an attitude towards the plurality pertinent. Skeie has been able to divide those attitudes in three levels, where interestingly 1) there are people who accept this diversity and see no sense in struggling with it, and 2) the others that see a form of unity through this diversity and 3) the other people who see that our vision for the future affects our attitude towards diversity. Skeie notion of pluralism had added more light, so we will consolidate those ideas with other experts⁷¹.

2.4 Expertise of religious plurality in religious education

Managing various religions in religious education can be quite difficult; there are various countries that have had experiences and interesting project in this field. In this chapter, we will have an overview of those expertises’s that can lead us to have some reflection for the Seychelles in the innovation of its first project in religious plurality in schools.

⁶⁷ Cf. SKEIE Geir, *The Concept of Plurality and its Meaning for Religious education*.

⁶⁸ Cf. SKEIE Geir, *The Concept of Plurality and its Meaning for Religious education*.

⁶⁹ SKEIE Geir, *The Concept of Plurality and its Meaning for Religious education*.

⁷⁰ Cf. SKEIE Geir, *The Concept of Plurality and its Meaning for Religious education*.

⁷¹ Cf. SKEIE Geir, *The Concept of Plurality and its Meaning for Religious education*.

2.4.1 *The minimization of religious education for the sake of pluralism*

After understanding the general notion of pluralism, we will continue to better our knowledge with Geir Skeie, as he is an expert at the University of Stavanger in the faculty of Arts and Education in Norway.

When defining pluralism, it is fundamental to see how tolerant, the educators, the agents and other bodies are, and their will of innovating in religious education. What precaution needs to be taken for religious education? Can the *raison d'être* of religious education be modified? To inaugurate the reflection Skeie explains, that there is a great tendency when trying to meet the plural context that various content are added in religious education⁷².

The question is, if considering plural religion can eradicate religious education? This is the fear that was illustrated above with the Catholic Church in the Seychelles. Geir Skeie, thinks that plural context is an open door to complementary debates which will benefit the students, as their position can be modified.⁷³ But the thing that Skeie forgot is that adding those themes like nation, culture in religious education, it can affect the objective of religious education, and this course will be like a civic education instead. So the question that school managers need to raise is how the civic education can better the religious education without eradicating the core of the subject.

2.4.2 *Religious education needs to open doors for better comprehension of its rituals to a larger public*

Hans-Günter Heimbrock⁷⁴ discusses the importance of the dialogue in religious education. He supports Jurgen Habermas on his plea for a discourse on religion and secularity. For Habermas religious education needs to open doors for better comprehension of its rituals and items to a larger public especially with the non-adherents to this faith. This subject is clearly explained by Gunnar J. Gunnarsson⁷⁵ and Pai Rose Böwadt⁷⁶, when they

⁷² Cf. SKEIE Geir, *Religious Diversity and Education*, dans SKEIE Geir (éd.), *Religious Diversity and Education in Europe*, Munster, Waxman, 2007, p. 50-53.

⁷³ Cf. SKEIE Geir, *Religious Diversity and Education*.

⁷⁴ Hans-Günter HEIMBROCK, *Encounters in Diversity: Some Suggestions for a Dialogical Religious Education*, in G. SKEIE (ed.), *Religious Diversity and Education: Nordic perspectives* (Religious Diversity and Education in Europe, 11), Münster, Waxman, 2009, p. 29-42.

⁷⁵ Gunnar J. GUNNARSSON, *"To be Honest and Truthful." Central Values in the Life Interpretation among Icelandic Teenagers*, in G. SKEIE (ed.), *Religious Diversity and Education: Nordic perspectives* (Religious Diversity and Education in Europe, 11), Münster, Waxman, 2009, p. 117-130.

stated that life-interpretation captures the young people's view. So religious education cannot resist including existential question or else it would be obsolete. This is a new pedagogy that is being put forward, compared to years ago, where Christianity was kept secret. The authors are calling upon an open up, a decompartmentalising of religion. And this open up, the authors are requesting, it is for better understanding. Open up will lead to better comprehension, which can result in a better cohabitation in a plural context.

2.4.3 Religion is a great social and powerful significance for youngster

Another expertise in pluralism is Professor Doctor Wolfram Weisse, coordinator of REDCo. Wolfram Weisse stated on the foreword of the collective book: "Encountering Religious Pluralism in School and Society"⁷⁷ that "the question of dialogue between religions [...] is gaining more and more prominence all over the world"⁷⁸. For him, this is because "there is a rising public awareness of the necessity to seek dialogue with everyone who can aid us in preventing conflict and supporting peaceful coexistence in a multireligious society"⁷⁹. The editors added that, "[religion] must be taken seriously as a powerful influence on the actions and thoughts of individuals"⁸⁰. The article sees religion as a "great social and political significance [...] that] young people are most likely to encounter [...] in one form or another"⁸¹. The challenge is "from a pedagogical and educational point of view [...] what [...] role of religion in the lives of young people. It is also important to reflect upon the (possible) role of education with regard to a growing religious diversity in society and a growing influence of religion in general"⁸².

⁷⁶ Pia Rose BÖWADT, *Education of Life Itself. A Discussion of Lebensphilosophie, Education and Religious Education According to K.E. Logstrup and O. F. Bollnow*, in G. SKEIE (ed.), *Religious Diversity and Education: Nordic perspectives* (Religious Diversity and Education in Europe, 11), Münster, Waxman, 2009, p. 69-81.

⁷⁷ Thorsten KNAUTH, Dan-Paul JOZSA, Gerdien BERTRAM-TROOST et Julia IPGRAVE (ed.), *Encountering Religious Pluralism in School and Society: A Qualitative Study of Teenage Perspectives in Europe* (Religious Diversity and Education in Europe, 5), Münster, Waxman, 2008.

⁷⁸ Wolfram WEISSE, *Foreword*, in T. KNAUTH, D.-P. JOZSA, G. BERTRAM-TROOST et J. IPGRAVE (ed.), *Encountering Religious Pluralism in School and Society: A Qualitative Study of Teenage Perspectives in Europe* (Religious Diversity and Education in Europe, 5), Münster, Waxman, 2008, p. 5.

⁷⁹ W. WEISSE, *Foreword*, p. 5.

⁸⁰ Gerdien BERTRAM-TROOST, Julia IPGRAVE, Dan-Paul JOZSA and Thorsten KNAUTH, *Encountering Religious Pluralism in School and Society: A Qualitative Study of Teenage Perspectives in Europe: Background and Contextualisation*, in T. KNAUTH, D.-P. JOZSA, G. BERTRAM-TROOST et J. IPGRAVE (ed.), *Encountering Religious Pluralism in School and Society: A Qualitative Study of Teenage Perspectives in Europe* (Religious Diversity and Education in Europe, 5), Münster, Waxman, 2008, p. 11.

⁸¹ G. BERTRAM-TROOST, J. IPGRAVE, D.-P. JOZSA and T. KNAUTH, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, p. 11.

⁸² G. BERTRAM-TROOST, J. IPGRAVE, D.-P. JOZSA and T. KNAUTH, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, p. 11.

Prof. Dr. Wolfram Weisse consolidates interesting element for the understanding of pluralism. For him, people are aware that dialogue should be a priority in pluralism context. He saw this as an important key to prevent conflict, and this will result in a peaceful coexistence of religions. This is interesting to note, how dialogue can attenuate this concentration of bitterness and render cohabitation feasible in religious plurality context. For him and the editors, there is a need to accept and consider that religion is a great social and powerful significance that the young will encounter in their life. This is crucial in understanding pluralism, that religion is not regarded as an obsolete object but as an influential factor in the understanding and promoting of a society.⁸³

2.4.4 Religious education has a key role in human development and spiritual integration

Gabriel Moran is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Humanities and the Social Sciences at New York University; he also serves as the co-director of the Philosophy of Education Program. He considers that the plural character of religious education obliges it to be creative at all means.⁸⁴ In the same book Barbara J. Fleischer states: “Religious education in the 21st century has the major task of conveying the relevance and credibility or religious discourse and a religious worldview for a generation that is [...] hungry for authentic spirituality”⁸⁵.

In the above texts, Moran and Fleischer are showing that there is a reality that needs to be put forward in this plural context, that there is a search for authentic spirituality, for them the young are starving for this authentic spirituality. And there are spaces for spirituality to pave its way among young. They are eradicating a concept that prone that there is no demand and no interest of spiritual activities among young generations. This consolidates our understanding in pluralism, that there are exceptions in religious plurality context.

Fleischer continued her idea on the availability of spiritual demands among young by detailing that:

⁸³ Cf. W. WEISSE, *Foreword*, p. 5-6; and G. BERTRAM-TROOST, J. IPGRAVE, D.-P. JOZSA and T. KNAUTH, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, p. 11-19.

⁸⁴ Cf. Gabriel MORAN, *Building on the Past*, in James Michael LEE, *Forging a Better Religious Education in the Third Millennium*, Birmingham, Religious Education Press, 2000, p. 146-154.

⁸⁵ Barbara J. FLEISCHER, *Practical Theology and Transformative Learning: Partnership for Christian Religious Education*, in James Michael LEE, *Forging a Better Religious Education in the Third Millennium*, Birmingham, Religious Education Press, 2000, p. 214.

“If religious education is to help people become integrated and develop spiritual wisdom and sensibilities, it will need to honor their human experience and help them put that experience into conversations with the insights and hopeful vision of previous ages. Such a movement toward human development and spiritual integration will also require overcoming the dualisms that have plagued the Christian tradition for centuries”⁸⁶.

Moran and Fleischer believed that religious education can help human and spiritual development only if the human experience is honored. They are pleading that school teachers and/or manager do not neglect one’s experience as those experiences are important to help one to unblock hidden feelings. For the authors, voicing out those experiences can help in overcoming all those bitterness of Christian traditions; it is an act of liberation towards a better plural context where taboos are unmasked. And the authors believed that: “A religious education rooted in practical theology offers a path toward mature Christian development that is needed to respond to the cultural realities of the emerging millennium”⁸⁷.

2.4.5 *Internet is irrefutable in religious education classes*

Norma Cook Everist, Ph.D, Professor of Church Administration and Educational Ministries, doctor of Philosophy at the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology, added her experience in the thesis in understanding pluralism in school. She thinks that: “The growing process of globalization – economic, cultural, missiological – though incomplete, is a reality from which there is no return. ‘Cross-cultural’ religious education must be assumed and transcended”⁸⁸. She gave example that: “Religious education utilizes [materials for instance] music from Nigeria and Brazil and Japan as easily as from Sweden, Germany and Italy”⁸⁹.

The author is forwarding an interesting idea, about this nostalgia of the old days, where there was no globalization. Everist said an important matter: that there is no going back in globalization process. This is interesting for school managers and teachers to understand that globalization is a fact that they need to consider in the plural context. There is no way out from the globalization process, it is progressing further and further. So, it is time to consider it

⁸⁶ B. J. FLEISCHER, *Practical Theology and Transformative Learning*, p. 214.

⁸⁷ B. J. FLEISCHER, *Practical Theology and Transformative Learning*, p. 214.

⁸⁸ Norma Cook EVERIST, *Issues and Ironies of the New Millenium*, in James Michael LEE, *Forging a Better Religious Education in the Third Millenium*, Birmingham, Religious Education Press, 2000, p. 53.

⁸⁹ N. C.EVERIST, *Issues and Ironies of the New Millenium*, p. 53.

rather than fighting against it. And the author consolidates her idea on globalization by saying that internet is irrefutable in religious education classes.⁹⁰

Everist added another point, that:

“The Church is a global reality. [and] Religious educators will need to invite people to bring their entire world, with all the inherent economic and political problems, into the religious education arena. [...] The gap between North and South is widening. Citizens of overdeveloped nations live off the labors of the poor. While people have more direct access to one another globally, fear of the foreign has not subsided. Many of the globalization issues have religious overtones, even religious foundations.”⁹¹

For the author, the world has become one village, where each partner brings along its reality and its difficulty though she realized that there are drawbacks.

2.4.6 Religious education is to re-examine the foundational principles of religion and its history to sort the essentials from the extraneous

For Ronnie Prevost: “The task for religious education is to reexamine the foundational principles of religion and its history to sort the essentials from the extraneous. This, in fact, is at the heart of Groome’s⁹² appeal for Christians to critically reflect on the ‘Christian community story and vision’ as found in Scripture, tradition, and history”⁹³. It is through this pedagogy that one will have additional knowledge on the “adherents of various eras and cultures have appropriated and applied those same essentials in their own time and lives”⁹⁴.

Here, Prevost is putting the finger on a delicate matter in religion. He is asking a critical view on religion, he even proposed questioning its foundational principles and its history. This is pertinent, but how many religions will dare take this path and question their foundation to see the extraneous for the betterment of plural context? There are little step being taken, but there is no real consideration. It is indeed a big step, towards dialogue with other denominations and other non-Christian religions. Though the proposition of Prevost remains contestable, there is a long way to go for the adoption of such idea, especially on the fact that Prevost suggested: “Nevertheless, what is at the core and nothing else must remain at

⁹⁰ Cf. N. C. EVERIST, *Issues and Ironies of the New Millenium*, p. 53-55 and 63-65.

⁹¹ N. C. EVERIST, *Issues and Ironies of the New Millenium*, p. 53.

⁹² Thomas H. GROOME, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1980.

⁹³ Ronnie PREVOST, *Creating the Undiscovered Country: Religious Education as an Agent of Forging the Third Millenium*, in James Michael LEE, *Forging a Better Religious Education in the Third Millenium*, Birmingham, Religious Education Press, 2000, p. 239.

⁹⁴ R. PREVOST, *Creating the Undiscovered Country*, p. 239.

the core. Only by ridding itself of the unnecessary will any religious education be able to keep apace of the future”⁹⁵.

Managing a plural context consists various risk taking, where even one’s identity is questioned; the root of the religion is interrogated. For additional knowledge on this issue of pluralism in the school, we will deepen our knowledge on the Islamic way of understanding religious plurality.

⁹⁵ R.PREVOST, *Creating the Undiscovered Country*, p. 239.

3. PLURALISM AND ISLAM IN THE SCHOOLS

People have the tendency of stereotyping the Islamic religious. For instance, as our research is about pluralism, we may take refuge in a simplest posture, saying that Islamic religion is a total negation of pluralism. This is not our posture, we have adopted to compare the Islamic experiences; we will see how they define the notion of pluralism and then we will take few expertises to understand this feature.

Gabriel Moran explains the role and profit of having Islam as a factor in religious plurality. He states:

“The emergence of Islam as a full participant in religious dialogue within the United States should be a very helpful contribution to the interreligious character of religious education. [...] Islam will change the dynamics of existing Jewish–Christian exchanges that tend to run along set paths. Islam is the first serious challenge to the biblical assumptions that have shaped the colonial and national periods of U.S history.”⁹⁶

He continued by detailing that:

“Like Protestant fundamentalism, Islam does not bow down to modern enlightenment. Unlike fundamentalism, which absorbed seventeenth-century science, Islam has a very different history, which includes a rich medieval heritage of science, medicine and art. The practice of Islam challenges many of the assumptions that Christians and Jews bring to the understanding of religion.”⁹⁷

The author is putting forward that in pluralism context, there is a need to consider those religions that have strong challenge against Christian, like Islam. The author believed Islam as religions that fight against modernity. And it has its contribution to add in this pluralism context; moreover the rigidity of their practice can add ingredients in our understanding of pluralism among youngster. So, for Gabriel Moran, Islam is seen as an interesting religion who knows its aims and its objectives.

⁹⁶ G. MORAN, *Building on the Past*, p. 149.

⁹⁷ G. MORAN, *Building on the Past*, p. 149-150.

3.1 The notion of pluralism and its comprehension with Professor Dr Mohammad Hashim Kamali

In his article⁹⁸ Professor Kamali, the Chairman and CEO of the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) Malaysia defines pluralism. He started up, by explaining that: “The term ‘pluralism’ is used very frequently these days, and like many words so freely and often employed it tends to become a cliché”⁹⁹. Professor Kamali detailed that: “Pluralism is not the same as diversity. People of different religious or cultural backgrounds may well be present in a place, but unless they actively engage with one another, there is no pluralism”¹⁰⁰.

This is a very important detail, which Professor Kamali is putting forward, when one should categorize that there is pluralism in a context. It is not only the presence of the plurality that defines pluralism, but there is a need of engagement towards this plural context. This eliminates the confusion that we may have between diversity and pluralism. He added that “pluralism does not simply aim at tolerance of the other but entails active effort to gain an understanding of the other. One can tolerate a neighbour about whom one remains thoroughly ignorant. That may well be preferable to conflict, yet it still falls short of active pluralism – which means acknowledging and engaging differences without any attempt to impose hegemony”¹⁰¹.

As stated above by Professor Kamali, there is pluralism if there is engagement to understand the differences. He added that: “Real pluralism also implies equal treatment of citizens before the law without any distinction being made on the basis of religion and race”¹⁰². Professor Kamali explained that,

“Islam began as a minority movement in the polytheistic setting of Mecca and [...]they were still a minority until the conquest of Mecca in 630. Under such circumstances, Islam could not but recognize the pluralist reality of its environment, and it could not have developed without actively engaging with the polytheists, and then the followers also of Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism etc. through disputation [...] and other persuasive methods of engagement.”¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Mohammad Hashim KAMALI, *Diversity and pluralism: a qur’anic perspective*, in *Islam and Civilisational Renewal*, Special Issue: Islam and Pluralism, 2009 October, p. 27-54, online on the site of Islam and Civilisational Renewal: <http://www.iais.org.my/icr/index.php/icr/article/view/245/238> (consulted 30th June 2014).

⁹⁹ M. H.KAMALI, *Diversity and pluralism*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁰ M. H.KAMALI, *Diversity and pluralism*, p. 28.

¹⁰¹ M. H.KAMALI, *Diversity and pluralism*, p. 28.

¹⁰² M. H.KAMALI, *Diversity and pluralism*, p. 28.

¹⁰³ M. H.KAMALI, *Diversity and pluralism*, p. 28-29.

The Professor concluded by saying

“we do not find a precise equivalent expression for [pluralism] in the Qur’an or *hadith*. The nearest Arabic word that occurs in these sources is *al-samhah* and *al-tasāmuh* often translated as ‘tolerance’, which is, however, less than accurate. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘tolerance’ as ‘the action or practice of enduring or sustaining pain or hardship; the power or capacity of enduring.’ The Prophet is reported to have said that God’s most favored religion is the tolerant true religion (*al-hanīfiyyah al-samhah*).”¹⁰⁴

Understanding the notion of pluralism with the Islamic religion has been proven interesting to differentiate pluralism and diversity. And great emphasis was made on the importance of one’s engagement to better the plural context.

3.2 Expertise in Islam

After understanding the notion of pluralism with Professor Kamali, we will have an overview with three experts Brigitte Maréchal, Felice Dassetto, Mohammed Faour on their experience of pluralism in schools.

3.2.1 “*Islam and Muslims represent a definitive establishment in Europe but this establishment is unfinished*”¹⁰⁵

Director of the Cismoc (*Centre Interdisciplinaire d’Etudes de l’Islam dans le Monde Contemporain*), Madame Brigitte Maréchal has changed various false conceptions of the presence of Islam in Belgium. She said that: “Islam was first considered as a religion of immigrants but it is now progressively considered as a religion that, in its full rights, is integrated as a European reality as such. Islam and Muslims now represent a definitive establishment in Europe but this establishment is unfinished. Societies are always under construction.”¹⁰⁶

The feature Maréchal is putting forward is vital for our thesis, it illustrates that considering Islam in pluralism is a wise choice. Islam is an important movement which is

¹⁰⁴ M. H. KAMALI, *Diversity and pluralism*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁵ Brigitte MARECHAL, *The (catholic) European University, welcoming place for Islam (?)*, Texte de B. Maréchal dans le cadre de l’AG FUCE 2011, p. 2, online on the site of Université de Namur – FUCE (Fédération des Universités Catholiques d’Europe et du Liban: <https://www.unamur.be/fuce/ag/agfuce2011/bmarechal> (consulted 20th June 2014).

¹⁰⁶ B. MARÉCHAL, *The (catholic) European University, welcoming place for Islam (?)*, p. 2.

influencing pluralism. The Islamist expert explains “that religious needs are changing, and even religious values are changing too”¹⁰⁷. For her,

“It is clear that in 40 years, Islam became visible and is nowadays an element, a component that is progressively inscribed in European cultures through a progressive mutual rapprochement between the reality of European Islam and that of the European non Muslim contexts. But this process is not finished. It is not accomplished. So beyond the multiplicity of identities and memberships, the future of global Islam today remains open and uncertain, torn between spiritual revivals and political radicalisms, intellectual reformulations and integrist withdrawals.”¹⁰⁸

Maréchal is helping us in our understanding of pluralism, that there are religions, which cannot be ignored on the fact, that it is influencing the society considerably. She added that: “Whatever the presence of Islam, we have to keep in mind that this presence cannot be reduced to an interreligious dialogue”¹⁰⁹. So for her, this feature cannot be resumed in little dialogue, but a real questioning of the society as for her, “this presence is also, and foremost a societal question with cultural, social and political implications as this presence of a religious pluralism in our societies has indeed consequences such as ... on discourses, actions or public politics, whatever at the local, national and European level.”¹¹⁰

The above illustration of Islamic presence in Europe shows us once more that the task of pluralism management needs to be meticulous, as there are various components that need to be adjusted to have this peaceful coexistence that many political leaders and schools manager are visioning.

3.2.2 Islamic schools inculcate the Muslim posture

In his book¹¹¹ Felice Dassetto,¹¹² noted that Islamic school ensured that the religious doctrines are taught in the school and that the posture of Muslim is inculcated in the students. This was observed in the Islamic school named *Al Ghazali* in Brussels. The aim of the schools dictates, the general scholarly necessities, and then other religious objectives. The religious objective consists of the Islamic teaching inspired by the Quran and the Sunnah. This school

¹⁰⁷ B. MARÉCHAL, *The (catholic) European University, welcoming place for Islam (?)*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ B. MARÉCHAL, *The (catholic) European University, welcoming place for Islam (?)*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ B. MARÉCHAL, *The (catholic) European University, welcoming place for Islam (?)*, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ B. MARÉCHAL, *The (catholic) European University, welcoming place for Islam (?)*, p. 2.

¹¹¹ FELICE DASSETTO, *L'iris et le croissant: Bruxelles et l'islam au défi de la co-inclusion*(Islams contemporains), Louvain La Neuve, Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2011.

¹¹² Professor Emeritus at the Catholic University of Louvain, sociologist of religion, founder of the Centre for the Study of Islam in the contemporary world, and member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, Letters and Fine Arts of Belgium.

promotes the Arabic language. Though there were changes in 1997 in this school and they abandoned the mention of Islam, the interior laws reminds, that this school is indeed a confessional one, and the students should not forget that this institution is both a school and a mosque.¹¹³ It is clearly depicted by the fact that the class starts with the recital of the *Al-Fatiha*¹¹⁴ and concluded with the recital of *Al-Asr*¹¹⁵. In the refectory, the invocation is done before and after the meal. The traditional families are very influential in this school and they follow the *communauté française* requirements.¹¹⁶

This is interesting to note that within a democratic country, like Belgium, there are debatable feature in the school. How come that the doctrines of Islam are being taught in a school managed the *communauté française*? Moreover, a religious posture is required in the school and this *Al Ghazali* school recommends that this school is also in a mosque. All those features illustrated that there is major obstacles to religious plurality in such school, and it is a school for Muslims exclusively.

However, it is interesting to note that there are also Islamic Turkish schools in Anderlecht creating Elites. It is managed the religious group *Fethullah Gülen* from Turkey. These schools constituted by the French and Flemish communities. The schools are named “*École des étoiles*”, and are affiliated with the official free education of Belgium. The philosophy of the school is less conservative. They aim to form Elites.¹¹⁷

3.2.3 Compulsory Islamic religious education in public education

Based on the Belgian law, the Islamic religious education needs to be organized, as a compulsory course in all the public schools in Belgium. So there are full time teachers and part time teachers to ensure that this course is available in all schools. There are 219 teachers teaching those courses in the public education sector, at the primary and secondary levels.¹¹⁸ This is a remarkable and interesting element in our understanding of pluralism in schools. Belgium is an interesting case, as it is a democratic and neutral country that has adopted

¹¹³ Cf. F. DASSETTO, *L'iris et le croissant*, p. 90-91.

¹¹⁴ “Al-Fatiha is the first chapter of the Quran. Its seven *ayat* (verses) are a prayer for God’s guidance, and stress His Lordship and Mercy. This chapter has an essential role in *Salaat* (daily prayer).” *Al-Fatiha* online on the site of Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Fatiha> (consulted 10th May 2014).

¹¹⁵ Al-Asr “is the 103rd sūrah of the Quran. [...] It teaches that all human beings are in loss, except those who have Iman (concept), do righteous deeds and remind others of the Haqq (truth, rights, reality) and remind others of Sabr (patience).” *Al-Asr* online on the site of Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Asr> (consulted 10th May 2014).

¹¹⁶ F. DASSETTO, *L'iris et le croissant*, p. 91.

¹¹⁷ F. DASSETTO, *L'iris et le croissant*, p. 91-92.

¹¹⁸ F. DASSETTO, *L'iris et le croissant*, p. 92-93.

policies/laws to ensure that a compulsory Islamic religious education is taught in public schools. We can question, what are causes of such decision? The budget needed to ensure the smooth running of the course is also remarkable. My view is that the Kingdom of Belgium is committed for a peaceful coexistence of religion, and as long as the fact that a religion minimizes conflicts, and other problems where religious beliefs are concerned, Belgium may continue with this line of reflection.

3.2.4 *New parties will update curricula to reflect conservative Islamic beliefs*

Whilst inquiring about the issues of pluralism, I discovered an interesting website that revealed interesting information on the question of my thesis by Muhammad Faour.¹¹⁹ The author explained that, in fact religion takes a great part in the education systems of all Arab countries, especially with the rise of conservative Islamists across the Arab world, for instance in Egypt and Tunisia. He thinks that, “there is a possibility that the new parties in power will update education curricula to reflect conservative Islamic beliefs”¹²⁰. For Muhammad Faour, “Education is very important for any ideological party that assumes political power. And in the long run, the Islamists of Egypt and Tunisia will target education reform to ensure more Islamic content is included in all students’ schooling”¹²¹. This is in fact a drawback for pluralism, and we can see that education is an important tool in either promoting or rejecting pluralism. In the case above, we can see that the conservatives’ parties will utilize education to prevent the feature of pluralism to be installed.

3.2.5 *The Tunisian education considers universal values*

Muhammed Faour alleged that there is a different approach to religious education, he noted: “The values and learning objectives of Tunisian religious and civic studies are more compatible than in Egypt, and the school curriculum for various subjects aims, much more explicitly than in Egypt, at the development of the universal values of responsible freedom, cooperation, equality, social justice, and respect for the other. Tolerance is a recurrent theme in Tunisian school books.”¹²² He detailed that,

¹¹⁹ Muhammad FAOUR, *Religious Education and Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia*, online on the site of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/08/13/religious-education-and-pluralism-in-egypt-and-tunisia/dd5s?reloadFlag=1> (consulted 23rd January 2013).

¹²⁰ M.FAOUR, *Religious Education and Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia*.

¹²¹ M.FAOUR, *Religious Education and Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia*.

¹²² M. FAOUR, *Religious Education and Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia*.

“tolerance has roots in reforms implemented during the authoritarian presidency of Zine el-Abidine Bel Ali. In 1989, Ben Ali appointed Mohamed Charfi – a lawyer, longtime human rights activist, and critic of the president – as his minister of education, perhaps as a way to keep an eye on him or to purge the education system of anti-Western content. Charfi implemented important reforms that included the scrutiny of all school textbooks.”¹²³

In the above text, it is interesting to see that though some conservative leaders close doors to pluralism, but there are countries like Egypt that has universal values element in their education. This shows that pluralism remains an engagement of political leaders. Thus politics forge pluralism, like we have stated earlier in the Belgium case. For Muhammad Faour, “Charfi’s reforms may have contributed to the democratic and pluralistic worldview of the young generation of Tunisians who rebelled against the regime in December 2010”¹²⁴.

3.2.6 *Minority religious has its role in religious plurality*

Author Faour, puts forward an audacious debate, he explained that: “Today, as 98 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, with Jews and Christians comprising less than 2 percent of the population, the only religion taught in public schools is Islam. Yet as part of social studies in public secondary schools, the history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all taught”¹²⁵. Like Professor Kamali stated earlier, an engagement towards pluralism renders the environment advantageous for religious plurality. The question that needs to be raised, why should the government consider a minority religion, does it have any influence for the nation? Such reflection helps us to have an open up attitude in our research for pluralism, it shows that in religious plurality, every things should be done to eradicate this monopoly posture of religions’.

3.2.7 *“Public schools aim to nurture tolerance and respect for other religions and Islamic sects”*¹²⁶

Muhammad Faour added another audacious content in our research on pluralism. He exclaimed:

¹²³ M. FAOUR, *Religious Education and Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia*.

¹²⁴ M. FAOUR, *Religious Education and Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia*.

¹²⁵ M. FAOUR, *Religious Education and Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia*.

¹²⁶ M. FAOUR, *Religious Education and Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia*.

“The Tunisian experience in reforming school education, particularly the Islamic education curriculum, offers important lessons for the rest of the Arab world. Islamic education in Tunisian public schools aims to nurture tolerance and respect for other religions and Islamic sects, to promote the acceptance of Western democratic values as universal values that transcend national and regional boundaries, and to develop students’ interest in analytical thinking on issues related to the meaning of religion and its role in life.”¹²⁷

For the author: “These objectives are compatible with a modern, democratic conception of education for citizenship and are far more advanced in promoting democratic values and pluralism than those in Egypt. For that reason, one international study that analyzed the contents of school textbooks for several Arab countries praised the Tunisian education system as the model for all Arab states”¹²⁸. Faour gave this example:

“There are also lessons to be learned from Egypt. There was an attempt during Mubarak’s rule to design a course that incorporated the common values and morals of Islam and Christianity; [...] The initiative calls for preparing a new religious education program by focusing on values that are common to Muslims and Christians, and a special committee was formed to design the program, planning to receive government approval and implementation in schools in the fall of 2012.”¹²⁹

It is just interesting how Islamic countries open door to Christianity and for the author, “this initiative [...] will be a fundamental step in the right direction towards democracy and pluralism in Egypt that can serve as a model for other Arab countries. All new education reform efforts should incorporate this approach as an integral part of their plans [in religious education programs]. The Egyptian Family House initiative is based on Al-Azhar’s recent document of ‘basic freedoms’”¹³⁰. Islamic countries can be exemplary in the religious plurality the above example had illustrated this, so it is of great importance that no religion is left behind as we do not know where the innovative project to better diversity can come from.

This thorough outlook on the Islamic pluralism experiences had lightened our research. Gabriel Moran asserted that, though every religion has a role to play in this plural context, Islam with all its integrity can improve the debate of inter-religions.¹³¹ Gabriel Moran

¹²⁷ M. FAOUR, *Religious Education and Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia*.

¹²⁸ M. FAOUR, *Religious Education and Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia*.

¹²⁹ M. FAOUR, *Religious Education and Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia*.

¹³⁰ M. FAOUR, *Religious Education and Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia*.

¹³¹ Cf. G. MORAN, *Building on the Past*, p. 148-150.

explained that although it is not always evident how best to articulate various disciplines under one roof, there can be a “interreligious” (cross disciplinary) thinking in religious education.¹³²

The complexity of religious plurality is so alarming that it is fundamental, that there is an overview of various religions and denominations, so that they can help in upgrading the plural context. The interesting part in managing this plural context is that most religions had consensus on the question of existence of man and women existence. So on that line, various solutions can be gained to move forward and better the religious education in school and the right of religion for the students. The will to improve religious plurality is present; we just need various innovative ideas and projects that can fall right in each other. Therefore we will have a look, what are the various perspectives and consequences in adopting religious plurality.

¹³² Cf. G. MORAN, *Building on the Past*, p. 146-150.

4. NEW PERSPECTIVES OF PLURALISM BASED ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SCHOOL AND THE RELIGIOUS/THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

In this part of the thesis I will emphasize on two disciplines, which are important for religious plurality in education. It would be educational organization based generally on sociological analysis after that we will overview the theological reflection.

4.1 The school organization (education) point of views some usual consequence of the inclusion of pluralism

We have seen, in the countries experiences and with the various experts, how taking into account pluralism in schools, can lead to various consequences. In this part of the thesis, I will focus on them.

4.1.1 *The management of pluralism in schools depends on the church–state and school–religion relation*

Jean-Paul Willaime, the sociologist, wrote an article entitled “Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe”¹³³ He said that: “The relationship between school and religion, like that between state and church, is a matter of national sovereignty in each European country and the European Union does not have any uniform approach towards teaching religion in public schools”¹³⁴. The sociologist is putting forward that, it is the right of the nation-state to lay laws and policies to enhance this relationship of the schools and the Nation State. For him “school instruction about religious faith is a strong indicator of the way church–state and school–religion relations are constructed inside a given national framework”¹³⁵.

So, Willaime suggested that the way school instruction is managed and/or instructed is the reflection on how best or bad the relationship church and state is. So he saw that “in countries where national identity is strongly tied to a particular confession (such as

¹³³ Jean-Paul WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, in Robert JACKSON, Siebren MIEDEMA, Wolfram WEISSE and Jean-Paul WILLAIME (ed.), *Religion and Education in Europe: Developments, Contexts and Debates* (Religious Diversity and Education, in Europe, 3), Münster, Waxman, 2007, p. 57-66.

¹³⁴ J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 57.

¹³⁵ J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 57.

Lutheranism in Denmark, Orthodoxy in Greece, or Catholicism in Italy) there are notable effects on the way school education is understood. [...] in some countries the very definition of the goals of school education encompasses the religious dimension.”¹³⁶ For instance, he presents that “in Germany, the goals of public education in several Länder are defined in connection with religion”¹³⁷.

The feature described by Willaime, proposed two major things, firstly it is showing that, school Managers or Director cannot take major decision, how the organization of religious education should be in their respective schools. Then, Willaime is showing that the Nation State can lock or unlock initiative for religious plurality. So, based on the organization of religious education in schools, it remains under the monopole of the Nation State to render this religious plurality, feasible or not. I am just queering if, other bodies cannot ensure the good management of religious plurality in schools, for instance the parents’ and teachers association I think that at time, change does not necessarily have to come from management level; the ordinary people are important factor in their schools.

4.1.2 Respecting rights of parents affect the organization of religious instruction at non-confessional public schools

Another consequence when considering pluralism was observed by Willaime, in Belgium religious instruction at non-confessional public schools. He presents with the “Article 2 of the first additional protocol of the European Declaration of Human Rights [that] forbids, among other things, all state monopolies on education, stating:

‘[...] The state, in the exercise of the functions it assumes in the domain of education and instruction, shall respect the rights of parents to ensure an education and instruction conforming to their religious and philosophical convictions.’

However, [continues Willaime] it places no financial obligations towards private education on the state.¹³⁸ However, this law puts strains on the organization of the schools. In this case, it shows that parents can modify the religious instruction in schools. If there is a demand for this instruction, the school is called upon to organize it. So, this is interesting to note, how the parents can play decisive role in the instruction of their children. But, the question that we need to rise is if the demand increases, how would the schools manage this

¹³⁶ J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 57.

¹³⁷ J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 58.

¹³⁸ J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 58-59.

flow of demand? This illustration shows all the organizations that need to be in place to ensure that the rights of parents are respected.

4.1.3 School approaches on the teaching and treatment of religion affects pluralism in schools

For the sociologist, secularization remains a paradigm. He observed that

“the lack of religious acculturation among school students and their loss of contact with religious life, the existence of strong Muslim minorities in some countries, an overall religious pluralisation manifest in European societies through the presence of all sorts of religious groups and networks, worries about sectarian splinter groups of various kinds, the current interrelationship of religion and politics in various international conflicts, Antisemitism and Islamophobia, and the question of limits to religious expression in the educational context are issues facing European societies.”¹³⁹

It is just remarkable, how religions are taken as an aid to eradicate those social ills. Willaime is showing that within religion there are ingredients or elements, which can trigger men and women to give their best of what they have in life. So, for the sociologist, losing contact with such important institution can be disadvantageous for the society.

For Willaime, those situations are key indicators that there should be a “rethinking how schools approach, treat and teach religion”¹⁴⁰. The question that needs to be raised is what is the role of the school where the treatment and the teaching of religion is concerned? Are the schools the decision-makers in those issues mentioned? And, this brought about, reflection on, what are the perspectives for the organization of pluralism, and what are the new approaches, laws and policies that need to be installed to ensure that there is an adequate program of religious education? What are the principles of religion treatment in schools? Are there laws stipulated on this matter? This reflection can articulate with all the issues of discrimination of religion in schools. Which religion, should we prioritize in our schools? What treatment, would the minority religion have? These arguments touched important factor, that the schools needs to work on, in the school organization in general and also the management of religious plurality in religious education.

¹³⁹J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 59.

¹⁴⁰J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 59.

Willaime, emphasized: “Faced with these challenges [...] the need to give much more importance to the study of religions in the school curriculum”¹⁴¹. For him, this course can inculcate in students important values.

4.1.4 Schools can use education as a tool to combat ignorance, stereotyping and incomprehension of religions

Another consequence of taking in consideration pluralism is the fact that education is essential to combat ignorance, stereotyping and incomprehension of religions. Willaime draws attention, that: “There is also a European consensus about the need to strengthen the role of religious knowledge in public school education. In Recommendation 1720, adopted on 4 October 2005, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe declared:

‘6. Education is essential to combat ignorance, stereotyping, and incomprehension of religions. Governments must also do more to guarantee freedom of conscience and religious expression, to encourage religious instruction, to promote dialogue with and between religions, and to further the cultural and social expression of religions.

7. The school is an important element in the education and the formation of the critical faculties of future citizens, and also in intercultural dialogue.’”¹⁴²

This is another example, where education is called upon to better the society. In this case, it is not only the problem in the society, but also the conflicts among religion, like incomprehension. Freedom of conscience and religious expression in education are delicate matters. It is not an easy method to adopt in education, important structures needs to be in place to cultivate in students those qualities. Freedom of conscience and religious expression is not necessarily the key to dialogue; it can result in conflict too. It is interesting only if the teachers have had the proper teaching pedagogy. This is a major challenge, which required not only an organization in school, but also the innovation of a proper teacher training.

Willaime continues to quote Recommendation 1720: “[the school] shall lay the foundation of tolerant conduct based on respect for the dignity of every human being. It shall teach its students the history and philosophy of all major religions in a measured and objective fashion, respecting the values of the European Convention of Human Rights, and it shall fight fanaticism, effectively. It is essential to understand the history of political conflicts on the

¹⁴¹ J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 59.

¹⁴² J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 59.

name of religion.”¹⁴³ The Recommendation 1720 puts forward that: “8. The understanding of religion is an integral part of understanding the history of humanity and its civilizations. It is entirely different from belief in one particular religion or its practice. Even the countries in which one confession largely predominates must teach the origins of all religions rather than privilege one or promote proselytising.”¹⁴⁴

The statement above illustrates the power of education, where a good organization is done in schools to insert those programs against stereotyping and religion incomprehension, this can be great forces in the schools. The sociologist hope is that “in spite of a high degree of difference which shows no sign of disappearing, there is a broad consensus in Europe on the need for instruction on religions in public schools”¹⁴⁵.

4.1.5 *Pluralism is resourced when mutual enrichment is restored and cultures are not hostile*

Schools can initiate projects to valorize cultures and ensure mutual enrichment, as these are beneficial for religious plurality. This idea was illustrated in the document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools. Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love*.¹⁴⁶ The document explained that: “It is a fact that [...] overlapping presence of different cultures is a great resource, as long as the encounter between those different cultures is seen as a source of mutual enrichment. However, significant problems can arise if multicultural society is seen as a threat to social cohesion, or as a threat to the protection and exercise of rights pertaining to individuals or groups.”¹⁴⁷ An important consideration the document is putting forward, is considering that multicultural societies can be cause of various problems if it is not seen as a mutual enrichment. The question of mutual enrichment depends on the posture of the individual, only if, he sees the richness of other culture. If this basis is absent, there won't be any encounter thus the mutuality will be absent. But the

¹⁴³ J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 59.

¹⁴⁴ J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 59.

¹⁴⁵ J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 59.

¹⁴⁶ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION (FOR INSTITUTES OF STUDY), *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools. Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love*, 28 October 2013, online on the site of Vatican :

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20131028_dialogo-interculturale_en.html (consulted on 6th April 2014).

¹⁴⁷ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, Introduction.

document measures the complexity of this idea and thus suggests that, there is a need “to study the phenomenon and undertake specific projects in the field”¹⁴⁸.

To effectively establish the idea of pluralism in the Catholic sphere, the document clearly highlights that it is only when there is mutual enrichment that multiculturalism can be a great resource. It proposed ways that those recommendations can be done. It suggested, that it is essential: “(1) discovering the multicultural nature of one’s own situation; (2) overcoming prejudices by living and working in harmony; and (3) educating oneself ‘by means of the other’ to a global vision and a sense of citizenship. [And]Fostering encounters between different people helps to create mutual understanding, although it ought not to mean a loss of one’s own identity.”¹⁴⁹ These are interesting projects that schools can consider in their organization to render pluralism more effective, it can be elaborated in school curriculum too.

4.1.6 Respecting students’ identity though seeking pluralism in schools

When the schools are seeking for a better plural context, they may have this temptation of creating a melting pot of cultures and religions within the school where students’ religious identity is dissolved. The document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*, added a new element. It states that: “Education, by its nature, requires both openness to other cultures, without the loss of one’s own identity, and an acceptance of the other person, to avoid the risk of a limited culture, closed in on itself”¹⁵⁰. This can be seen as the starting point for a real dialogue when seeking pluralism in schools. It was often, the question of attenuating one’s identity in dialogue. This document is reaffirming, the fact of one’s identity. Another question rises here, what if one does not know its identity? This is a delicate matter as it would be difficult to enter in a dialogue. On what ground can a dialogue be place, when one’s identity is flawed out or lost? The document is warning against the loss of one’s characteristics or its uniqueness that can happen in dialogue. But this does not mean that in dialogue, there is no movement in one’s identity, or else dialogue would not be feasible.

So it recommends that,

“through their experience of school and study, young people must acquire theoretical and practical tools for amassing greater knowledge both of others and of themselves, as well as greater knowledge of the values both of their own culture and of other cultures. They can achieve this by open-mindedly comparing cultures. In this way, they will be helped to

¹⁴⁸ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, Introduction.

¹⁴⁹ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, Introduction.

¹⁵⁰ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, Introduction.

understand differences in a way that does not breed conflict, but allows those differences to become opportunities for mutual enrichment, leading to harmony.”¹⁵¹

This idea entails a great spirit for plural context, where everyone is respected for who he is. This illustrates that school remains the ideal environment for the meeting up of different cultures, thus it is the place to promote this ideal of pluralism. It is by confronting other cultures that open-mindedness can take place. Therefore nurturing only monoculture and isolating cultures are not at all the idea behind this document. In this struggle of enhancing religious plurality in schools, many societies are reluctant in this process, and emphasize that they should protect their people, as they believe in a pure nation. But the document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*, criticizes that, stating that: “there is no such thing as a ‘pure’ culture. Different conditions of environment, history and society have introduced wide diversity within the one human community, in which, however, ‘each individual man is truly a person’.”¹⁵²

4.2 The religious and theological point of views have some usual consequences of the inclusion of pluralism

Including pluralism in school entails various theological reflections. For the 48th anniversary of the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* these reflections were collected together by the Congregation for Catholic Education under the direction of Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski in the document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*.

4.2.1 Religion and culture specific vocation is to be opened to others and to God

The document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools* states: “Religions have certainly contributed to the progress of culture and the construction of a more humane society. Religion is incultured, and culture becomes fertile ground for a richer humanity that measures up to its specific and profound vocation to be open to others and to God.”¹⁵³ The document is highlighting that culture will be at its best ability and it would be

¹⁵¹ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, Introduction.

¹⁵² CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 3.

¹⁵³ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 7.

fertile if only there is openness to others and to God. So a culture is fulfilled with the contact of others. So, he is like pleading to adopt an open culture to God and others.

The document quotes John Paul II, who said in 1995: “it is time ... to understand in a more profound way that the generating nucleus of every authentic culture is constituted by its approach to the mystery of God, in whom alone does a social order centered on the dignity and responsibility of the human person find its unshakeable foundation”¹⁵⁴. In this statement, John Paul II is emphasizing that the social order of every authentic culture is gained when it approaches to the mystery of God. So, it is the mystery of God that gives the authentic culture its dignity and responsibility. And this connection to the mystery of God gives the culture its firm foundation: valorizing every culture, and its dignity. This is interesting especially for our reflection on pluralism in showing that God plays an important role in solidifying the foundation of the culture.

4.2.2 *Men expect religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition*

The document highlights the importance of religions to men. It quotes the n° 1 of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* of Second Vatican Council: “Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men”¹⁵⁵. This shows the important role of religion in men’s life. But this role can only be practiced where religions “dialogue not only among themselves, but also with the various forms of atheistic, or non-religious, interpretations of the human person and history”¹⁵⁶.

The above statement is not only showing the role of religion, it is in fact showing that religion remains fundamental in the discernment of men, and that men have a major role in utilizing it effectively by meeting with others. This document explains the importance to meet with the other who has another point of view. And it is connecting with others, who are against your fundamental point of view too. It is in fact showing that the solutions for religious plurality are meeting with our differences. And this is feasible as, men expect answers to those unsolved riddles.

¹⁵⁴ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 7.

¹⁵⁵ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 8.

¹⁵⁶ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 8.

4.2.3 God has a place in the public realm

The question of the place of God, but more specifically the place of religion is a hot debate especially when dealing with question on pluralism. The document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools* continued this debate by affirming with Benedict XVI that: “Religion can make its contribution to intercultural dialogue ‘only if God has a place in the public realm’.”¹⁵⁷ This is fundamental in the managing religious plurality context, that the identity of the person, for instance for the Christians, God is vital, therefore, such matter needs to be considered for fruitful debate.

The document continued with Benedict XVI by suggesting that: “Denying the right to profess one’s religion in public and the right to bring the truths of faith to bear upon public life has negative consequences for true development. The exclusion of religion from the public square – and, at the other extreme, religious fundamentalism – hinders an encounter between persons and their collaboration for the progress of humanity.”¹⁵⁸ This is the never ending battle between the religious right and religious freedom with the secularists which can put at risk the peaceful coexistence of religions and politics. The document affirmed that,

“religion is a decisive contribution to the building up of social community, in respect for the common good and with the intention of promoting every human being. Therefore, those who wield political power are called to judge carefully the possibilities for emancipation and universal inclusion demonstrated and effected by each culture and each religion. An important criterion for such evaluation is the effective capacity that the religions have for showing the worth of the whole person and of all people. Christianity, the religion of *God with a human face*, carries a similar criterion within itself.”¹⁵⁹

As stated above religion remains a fundamental actor in the building of community. So the questions are: why should it be put aside, or why should it be seen as a private practice? Benedict XVI explains the various risks in those terms:

“Public life is sapped of its motivation and politics takes on a domineering and aggressive character. Human rights risk being ignored either because they are robbed of their transcendent foundation or because personal freedom is not acknowledged. Secularism and fundamentalism exclude the possibility of fruitful dialogue and effective cooperation between reason and religious faith.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 11.

¹⁵⁸ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 11.

¹⁵⁹ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 10.

¹⁶⁰ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 11.

“Faith and reason, therefore, must recognize each other and enrich each other.”¹⁶¹ This can be a resolution of this conflict of God in the public realm.

4.2.4 *The Gospel inspires the Church on the honor and love for men*

For, our theological reflection on pluralism, it is interesting to note that the Church is rooted by the Gospel for pluralism. It is the mystery of the Word’s Incarnation which powered the Church to “proclaim that man deserves honour and love for himself and must be respected in his dignity. Thus, brothers must learn again to call each other brothers, to respect each other, to understand each other, so that man himself can survive and grow in dignity, in freedom and in honor.”¹⁶² – said John Paul II. For the Church, it is very important to adopt the above principles if we want a dialogue with other culture to happen. As this is the key to prevent the world from endangering the human civilization. The Holy Father suggests that, “Beyond prejudices, cultural barriers, divisions of race, language, religion and ideology, men must recognize each other as brothers and sisters, accepting each other in their diversity”¹⁶³.

4.2.5 *Jesus prayed that they all be one*

Another theological reflection is based on the Gospel of John. John in his gospel is calling for unity, but not uniformity. The document states, that “the dialogue cultivated by the Catholic Church with other churches and Christian communities does not stop at what we have in common, but tends towards the highest goal of rediscovering lost unity. Ecumenism has as its goal the visible unity of Christians, for which Jesus prayed for his disciples: *Ut omnes unum sint*, that they may all be one (Jn 17:21).”¹⁶⁴

This is a pertinent idea when dialoging with others. We often have the temptation in entering in a conciliation mode; the document puts an awareness that a dialogue is not conciliation. Moreover, it calls upon the person in the dialogue to rediscover lost unity, this is so interesting that being one in Christ, is also a call to look back in the past, on things that united us, things that we have had good reconciliation on. And the document adds: “Clarity in dialogue means especially faithfulness to one’s own Christian identity”¹⁶⁵. So, it deepens the question of dialogue by explaining that it is a place where transparency is primordial. Pope

¹⁶¹ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 11.

¹⁶² CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 12.

¹⁶³ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 12.

¹⁶⁴ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 13.

¹⁶⁵ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 16.

Francis encourages this plural context, when he was “addressing an Albanian school, which ‘after the long years of repression of religious institutions, resumed its activity in 1994, accepting and educating Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim children as well as several pupils born into agnostic milieus’, declared that, ‘the school is thus becoming a place for dialogue and serene exchanges to encourage attitudes of respect, listening, friendship and a spirit of collaboration’.”¹⁶⁶

4.2.6 *Mission of Christ to the Church is to make disciples of all nations*

Additional reference for religious plurality is also seen in the gospel of Mathew. This is debuted by the creation of the world by God. God has no intention of a closed world, but God revealed a world where relations are prevailed. It is not only a simple intention but a great mission that Christ had given to his Church. The document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools* states:

“In fact, the patient pedagogy of God has been revealed to us from the very creation of the world. Throughout salvation history, God educates his people to covenant – that is, to a living relationship – and to open themselves ever more to all peoples. This covenant has its high-point in Jesus, who, by means of his death and resurrection, has made it ‘new and eternal.’ From that moment, the Holy Spirit continues to teach the mission that Christ has entrusted to his Church: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ (Mt 28:19-20).”¹⁶⁷

So, every Christ followers had the great mission to meet up with all nations. It is an inclusive world the Gospel of Mathew is putting forward, ‘all nations’. Making disciples can be talking to people about God, spreading the good news of God, to love one another, and this can open path to a better religious plurality.

4.2.7 *Every human being is called to communion because of his nature which is created in the image and likeness of God*

In the book of Genesis, it is noted that every human is called to communion, this is because of our nature, we are created in the image of God, and God is communion. So, man will go against its nature if he is isolated, as its nature called upon him to be relational to God and others. The document quotes a preceding document of the Congregation, which states:

¹⁶⁶ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 17.

¹⁶⁷ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 34.

“Every human being is called to communion because of his nature which is created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26-27). [...] man is not an isolated individual, but a *person*: a being that is essentially relational. The communion to which man is called always involves a double dimension that is to say vertical (communion with God) and horizontal (communion with people). It is fundamental that communion be acknowledged as a gift of God, as the fruit of the divine initiative fulfilled in the Easter mystery.”¹⁶⁸

This is very interesting for our theological reflection on pluralism, as it is focusing on the nature of God who allows us to enter in a relationship. It clearly indicates that God orients our way of life. The question raised is how does, the non-Christians see this argument? There are interesting reflections for instance the formulation of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which according to *Gaudium et spes* n° 22 and *Redemptoris missio* n° 28-29 states that: “the Holy Spirit, working after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is always the Spirit of Christ sent by the Father, who works in a salvific way in Christians as well as non-Christians.”¹⁶⁹

4.2.8 “*With the richness of the salvation wrought by Christ, the walls separating the different cultures collapsed*”

Theological reflection on pluralism can also be illustrated on this argument that God’s promise in Christ became universal; everyone is included in the family of God’s children. So, in a plural context, children of the same family are called to be not only brothers or sister, but are in fact God’s children. The document quote the Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (n° 70) of John Paul II, which states, “With the richness of the salvation wrought by Christ, the walls separating the different cultures collapsed. God’s promise in Christ now became a universal offer ... extended to all as a heritage from which each might freely draw. From their different locations and traditions all are called in Christ to share in the unity of the family of God’s children.”¹⁷⁰ So, the document is calling everyone to do as families, not to “submerge the

¹⁶⁸ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (8 September 2007), n° 8, quoted in CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 34.

¹⁶⁹ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Notification* on the book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York 1997) by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J., III. 5 online on the site of Vatican: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html#_ftnref10 (consulted 30th May 2014).

¹⁷⁰ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 35.

identities of its individual members”¹⁷¹. The document states with the words of *Caritas in Veritate* (n° 53), the Encyclical Letter of Benedict XVI:

“Relationships with other people and with God are, therefore, fundamental, because through them men and women increase their own worth. Relationships among peoples, too, among cultures and among nations strengthen and enhance those who enter into relationship. In fact, ‘the human community does not absorb the individual, annihilating his autonomy, as happens in the various forms of totalitarianism, but rather values him all the more because the relation between *individual and community* is a relation between one totality and another. Just as a family does not submerge the identities of its individual members, just as the Church rejoices in each new creation (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17) incorporated by Baptism into her living Body, so too the unity of the human family does not submerge the identities of individuals, peoples and cultures, but makes them more transparent to each other and links them more closely in their legitimate diversity’.”¹⁷²

4.3 Interesting pathways of pluralism for the Seychelles

As stated in the situation of Seychelles, there are various obstacles that prevent the Seychelles either in adopting the religious plurality in the religious education or to open doors to other religions in schools. After reflecting with various experts of pluralism and considering how the Christianity and Islamic religions dealt with this, we will see the possible pathways that the Seychelles can adopt to better the plural context in the schools.

4.3.1 *Religious plurality is a plain fact, in the islands of Seychelles*

Before suggesting the various paths, there are major foundations that need to be laid to ensure that religious plurality pave its way smoothly in those islands. It is important that Seychelles had a specific approach to pluralism. The foremost step for these islands is to accept the fact of religious plurality in the Seychelles. Instead of revolting against it, and reminiscing that there will be a time of going back to the old days of mono-religion, it is vital to accept it, and try to see the benefit, it can bring to the islands. It is only after that, that we can start to reflect if there is a possibility of dialogue. As G. Skeie had explained above, when

¹⁷¹ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 36.

¹⁷² CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 36.

detailing with the notion of pluralism, that the “anti-pluralism version is probably that which sees plurality as a problem to be solved, by reducing it”¹⁷³.

The Creole had great difficulty in defining and accepting the plural context. I think that an important moment of mobilization will be pertinent in the process of accepting religious plurality in the country. The question raised, is the degree of commitment for dialogue of all the partners? But as the government of the Seychelles meets often with the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, this can be a pathway that can be deepened for this religious plurality project in the schools. As the document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools* states that, “every culture’s vocation means choosing intercultural dialogue as a guiding concept, open to the future, when faced with the various interpretations of pluralism advanced and put into effect in society, politics and (with regard to our field of interest) education”¹⁷⁴. But dealing with this project there are two principles approaches: relativism and assimilation.

4.3.2 Seychelles needs to choose between relativistic and/or assimilation approach

In the case of the Seychelles, the relativistic approach can procure various problems on the islands, as there is a separation of cultures “into autonomous spheres, considering them as isolated and impermeable”¹⁷⁵. As Seychelles is not only a plural religion context, it is also a plural cultural context, there should not be any denigration of cultures. The document of the Congregation for Catholic Education proposes rather “to recognize that reality is historical and changeable does not necessarily lead to a relativistic approach. [However, the document argues that] relativism, on the other hand, respects differences [... and], in fact, endorses the absolute nature of every culture within its own sphere, and impedes the use of metacultural critical judgment, which would otherwise allow for universal interpretations”¹⁷⁶.

I hesitated a lot on this relativistic approach, but I have seen that,

“The relativistic model is founded on the value of tolerance, but limits itself to accepting the other person, excluding the possibility of dialogue and recognition of each other in mutual transformation. Such an idea of tolerance, in fact, leads to a substantially passive meaning of relationship with whoever has a different culture. It does not demand that one take an interest in the needs and sufferings of others, nor that their reasons may be heard;

¹⁷³ G. SKEIE, *The Concept of Plurality and its Meaning for Religious Education*.

¹⁷⁴ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 21.

¹⁷⁵ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 22.

¹⁷⁶ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 22.

there is no self-comparison with their values, and even less sense of developing love for them.”¹⁷⁷

This is a debate that the various personals launching in the religious plurality project need to be cautious. As the document said: “An approach of this kind is at the basis of the political and social model of *multiculturalism*. This model offers no adequate solutions for co-existence, and fails to encourage true intercultural dialogue.”¹⁷⁸ If the key for the Seychelles remains dialogue, this approach needs to be attenuated, as “cultures are simply placed alongside one another [...] remain separate, with no authentic dialogue and therefore with no true integration”¹⁷⁹ – with the expression of Benedict XVI in his encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*.

But the assimilation approach,

“rather than [adopting] indifference towards the other culture, this approach is characterized by the demand for the other person to adapt. [...] In educational models based on assimilation, the *other person* must abandon his cultural references, to take on those of another group or of the receiving country. Exchange is reduced to the mere insertion of minority cultures in the majority one, with little or no attention to the other person’s culture of origin.”¹⁸⁰

The danger is evident – states Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* – “that of *cultural levelling* and indiscriminate acceptance of types of conduct and life-styles”.¹⁸¹ Here, again various discernments need to be done to ensure that the people’s identity is not flawed out and resulted in a melting pot. So, for the assimilation and relativistic approach the school managers and personals, enhancing religious plurality need to sit down and reflect on the benefits and drawbacks of those two postures towards religious plurality, which remain pertinent for the Seychelles.

4.3.3 *The consideration of a paradigm shift as Leni Franken and Patrick Loobuyck suggestion*

Seychelles needs to modernize this religious education which aims in educating the students in their own religious tradition to broader topics, for instance preparing them for a

¹⁷⁷ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 22.

¹⁷⁸ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 23.

¹⁷⁹ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 23.

¹⁸⁰ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 24.

¹⁸¹ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 25.

multicultural society.¹⁸² In other words, religious education needs to adopt new objective that enhance multicultural society, rather than memorizing the doctrines of their respective religions. With this as change, the students will be more apt to accept other differences and tolerance and respect of others will be reigned. Those two authors had clearly indicated in their book, that a shift is required, or else there are no interesting moves. The Seychelles had various shift that had to be adopted, but this paradigm shift remains primordial for the religious plurality.

4.3.4 New evangelization objectives for the Catholic mission

Though the Catholic Church has the mission to bring the Good news into all strata of humanity, there is also the consideration of other religions. The Catholic Church needs to adopt a religious plurality evangelization program, where it is no longer a monopoly and one's freedom of conscience is respected. It is no longer, the time to eradicate others to transplant its faith and doctrine, it is time for a peaceful cohabitation where each religion has its own role to play. It is important that the Catholic Church accepts that religious educations are not for conversion. Though, this institution said that religious education meets a vast majority of its faithful. It needs also to accept, that the religious education in the secondary is obsolete and the students seem to have a lack of interest in it.

Therefore, several structures need to be innovated on the parish level to ensure that there is a catechesis program for the adolescent too. A school pastoral care can also be innovated for the Christian students. The diocese cannot rely on the school to do the major parish work. Catechesis is not right to be taught in public schools. In plural context school, religious education should take into consideration all religions. Even the non-Catholic parents disagreed with the obligation feature of religious education. Therefore the school needs to initiate the parental permission for religious education. The Catholic Church has the necessity to adopt a new evangelization project and it needs to be a pertinent one.

4.3.5 Sensitization of the Seychellois for religious plurality

In pluralism, D. Basinger had stated in the encyclopedia¹⁸³, that there are various misconceptions, and among the various problems, that plural context is often regarded as a conflicting environment. Such attitude should be adopted, if there is a research of truth for all

¹⁸² L. FRANKEN et P. LOOBUYCK (ed.), *Religious Education in a Plural, Secularised Society*,

¹⁸³ Cf. D. BASINGER, *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*.

partners involved in this plural context. Basinger added also, that the truth affirmation will result in a diversity of opinion by honest, knowledgeable people. So, a proper structure needs to be in place to sensitize the Seychellois of the pluralism benefit for the country. Like Professor Kamali suggested for the pluralism to pave its way smoothly, a real engagement towards this plural context needs to be adopted as pluralism is not simply the cohabitation of diverse ideas/religions together.¹⁸⁴

4.3.6 *Inter-religious discussions for better comprehension*

The various churches had been quite reticent in meeting to discuss on various matters of life, and even on theological reflection. The time has come for the doors to be opened to larger public like stated above. It is not longer a time for closed doors rituals and discussing only among same church adherents. Such attitude had led to various misconceptions and critics in the past years. The Churches needs to have the audacity and laid their beliefs and the way of seeing things on the table, for debates, discussions. I know that it is important to respects one's identity like stated above in the document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*¹⁸⁵ but discussion had always be proven to be a rich activity either to know others and/or to enrich your own idea.

4.3.7 *Consideration of Islamic religion*

Gabriel Moran¹⁸⁶ had shown the importance of considering Islam because of its emergence, the same idea can be applied to the Seychelles, especially on the fact that Islam challenges some Christian notions, and it does not bow down to modernity. Such religion can be an ingredient in this religious plurality context and it can give other models of being religious. The Catholic had been monopole for so many years, so those challenges will help not only the faithful to reaffirm their faith, but it will give new dimension of believing in the society in general. So, Islam can help in attenuating this critic of hypocrisy among Christians. Implanting Islam on one's land needs to consider thoroughly as there are also conservative Islamic that can make way in religious instruction and mould the students for a specific Islamic posture.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. M. H. KAMALI, *Diversity and pluralism*, p. 27-54.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. G. MORAN, *Building on the Past*, p. 134-154.

Professor Brigitte Maréchal¹⁸⁷ encourages the above reflection as she thinks that Muslims represent a definitive establishment, and moreover, there is no returning back to mono-religion environment. Islamic religion is a minority in the Seychelles; things can be put in place also to respect those important minorities.

4.3.8 Key factor for a comprehensible pluralism is about the Church and the Nation State relation

There will not be any efforts or innovation in the religious plurality environment in the Seychelles if the relationship between the Church and the Nation State is not fixed. There are various issues that need to be dealt with firstly it is about the role of the memorandum of understanding in the plural context in schools. This has been the lock for so many years and even the Ministry of Education has been cornered with this agreement. So the time is right to fix all the ambiguities on this issue. Another question that needs to be addressed is the presence of other religions in schools, how can this be organized, is it a feasible project or not?

The pertinent question is the role of the Catholic Church in the religious education in all public schools. The government has the necessity to understand that the islands of Seychelles are mainly a Christian domain and God needs to have a place in the public realm. The people are so religious that religion is impossible to be eradicated in the public realm. I know that those points that we are discussing bring about challenging debates, but things need to be clarified for a pertinent religious plurality project to be debuted.

4.3.9 Inspiration for pluralism is present in the Gospel

When the islands of Seychelles are considering plural religion context, it is not against the Churches principles. In the Gospel, there are various supports for such project. Jesus had the preoccupation to meet with the other, who is different from him. Jesus had done his ministries with those people that we can consider enemy of the churches for instance, the tax collector, Mary Magdalena the prostitute, the Samaritan lady. This shows, as if Jesus wants to uncover this taboo not melding with other nations. The Gospel inspires the Church on the honor and love for men and Jesus prayed that they all be one. Another fundamental point is that the Mission of Christ to the Church is to make disciples of all nations. As Christ

¹⁸⁷ Cf. B. MARÉCHAL, *The (catholic) European University, welcoming place for Islam (?)*, p. 1-15.

followers, Jesus remains our example, the document of the Congregation for Catholic Education: *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools* has not hesitated to highlight that there can be pluralism when mutual enrichment is restored. Moreover, it added that religion and culture specific vocation, it is to be opened to others and to God.¹⁸⁸

As Seychelles is a melting pot group of islands whose the origin came from various continents, (Africa, Europe and Asia), it falls right that these islands became a real example of peaceful cohabitation of different cultures and religions. Religion in the Seychelles remains an important factor for the islanders, as men expect religious answers to the unsolved riddles of their condition. So religion needs to play right this role. Religions need to give an example to its faithful to open up to others for the betterment of the society.

The above pathways for a first elaboration of plural context in the Seychelles can be considered as an audacious religious plurality project for the diocese of Port Victoria. I think that this is a feasible and contextualized project, as this April 2014; President James Michel has called upon the Diocese of Port Victoria to modernize the religious education. So the time is right for my thesis to pave its way in this ‘movement’ started in religious education in the school.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been a thrilling moment of reflection because it was a major instant of adjusting the various documents I have read with reference to the situation of the Seychelles. Like you might have noticed, there are documents from several corners of the world, like Europe, USA, Tunisia and Egypt. So, working with those documents requires full consciousness and a strong ability to contextualize.

The four moments of reflections: (1) the Situation of religious education in Seychelles, (2) the pluralism and Christianity in the schools, (3) the pluralism and Islam in the schools, (4) the new perspectives of pluralism based on the organization of the school and the religious and theological reflection, had help us to realize the complexity of religious plurality in the Seychelles. This thesis has even surpassed our expectation, that there has been time of readjustment of the objectives for the research.

In the first section of the thesis, based on the Seychelles' context, it was clear to see the monopoly of the Catholic Church trying its utmost to teach religious education adequately. But the installation of modernity had shattered its ambition. This is because of the environment of the school, which became multi-religions and the Nation State had taken over the schools. The Catholic Church wanted to put pressure on this paradigm evolving in the school, but there were various oppositions. The parents and the non-Catholic wave within the school rendered the monopoly of the Catholic Church more fragile. Then an indemnity contract between the Catholic Church and the Nation State had attenuated some issues, but for the Catholic Church the religious education remains challenging.

The zeal of evangelization was not enough to counter this movement, even within the Catholic Church; there was the Second Vatican Council documents that attenuated this “aggressive” of evangelization. For instance *Catechesi Tradendae*, highlighted the necessity of freedom of conscience.¹⁸⁹ And it is against moral pressure for the adolescents. And *Dignitatis Humanae* declared that the right for the human person to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of human person.¹⁹⁰ So, the Catholic Church was seen in an impasse, on one hand it has the zeal for evangelization, its objectives of reaching the

¹⁸⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesi Tradendae*. Apostolic exhortation, n°69.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. CONCILE VATICAN II, *Dignitatis Humanae*. Declaration on religious freedom, n° 2.

maximum of its young faithful in schools, but on the other it has the new wave of evangelization considering other religions right, as expected by the constitution of the Seychelles and the pressure of non-catholic movements.

The concern of the Catholic Church was mainly how to cater the school, what if all religions want to teach religious education, what will happen with this autonomy of the Catholic Church? Another concern was that there is no proper structure on the parish level for such catechesis. The trauma remains whole, especially with the difficulty of the clergy to cater this increase in the demand of spirituality. Moreover, the indemnity contract is seen to be problematic too, and it can no longer guarantee the position of the Catholic Church in the schools.

The school manager and Directors were in a challenging position too. The problem is how to deal with the various actors of religious education within the school. On the one hand, there is the Catholic Church with the contract on the other there is the Constitution of the Seychelles, the non-Catholic parents, and other religious leaders. The school had refused to rule on this matter, and this situation has remained in the flu, and it has disintegrated too. The lack of interest of students and teachers in Catholic religious education has been so revealing. The school is hoping that an event can unlock this situation. This first moment of my thesis on the situation of religious education in Seychelles remains problematic, that is why, it was of extreme importance, that we look upon other countries' experiences and other religions situations to see if there is a way out in this paradox.

In the second moment of my thesis, it was an important moment of seeing the path that religious plurality had paved in schools. Based on our concern of contextualization it was vital to see how the notion of pluralism is considered in the Seychelles. Then we enter in a moment of defining the term of pluralism itself. This debuted with the article of D. Basinger in the encyclopedia¹⁹¹; he stated that there is a seeking of truth among knowledgeable people. Another interesting point is that religious education needs to open doors for better comprehension of its rituals and items to a larger public. This is because religious education cannot resist including existential questions or else it would be obsolete.

Another point is the fact that Religion is a great social and powerful significance for youngster. This has been denied by so many actors in the society, but the time is absolutely primordial to consider the role of religion in the society. Professor Doctor Wolfram Weisse¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Cf. D. BASINGER, *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*.

¹⁹² Cf. W. WEISSE, *Foreword*, p. 5-7.

is recommending this point as for him, most young will encounter religion one day in their life, so the society in general, should not ignore the influence that such institution can have on the life of the young.

Religious education has a key role in human development and spiritual integration, Gabriel Moran¹⁹³ and Barbara J Fleischer¹⁹⁴ affirmed that there is a search for authentic spirituality, for them the young are starving for this genuine spirituality. They see that there are spaces for spirituality to pave its way among young.

Internet is irrefutable in religious education argues Norma Cook Everist. She thinks that: “The growing process of globalization – economic, cultural, missiological – though incomplete, is a reality from which there is no return. ‘Cross-cultural’ religious education must be assumed and transcended”¹⁹⁵. This is interesting for school managers and teachers to understand that globalization is not history, it is a fact that they need to take in great consideration in the religious plurality context. There is no way out from the globalization process, it is moving ahead further and further.¹⁹⁶

For Ronnie Prevost¹⁹⁷, the task for religious education is to re-examine the foundational principles of religion and its history to sort the essentials from the extraneous. Here, Prevost is focusing on a delicate matter in religion. He is requesting religions to be critical in the way of seeing things; he even proposed questioning its foundational principles and its history of religious education. This is pertinent, but how many religions will dare take this path and question their foundation of a specific project to see the extraneous for the betterment of plural context?

The third moment of our reflection had brought great light on the experience that Islam is facing with the plural environment. The author Gabriel Moran had put to light on the importance of Islam in our reflection on pluralism. He states that “the emergence of Islam as a full participant in religious dialogue [...] should be a very helpful contribution to the interreligious character of religious education.”¹⁹⁸

The reflection of the third moment articulated with the notion of pluralism and its comprehension with Professor Dr Mohammad Hashim Kamali. He gave a new element in the

¹⁹³ Cf. G. MORAN, *Building on the Past*, p. 134-154.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. B. J. FLEISCHER, *Practical Theology and Transformative Learning*, p. 203-225.

¹⁹⁵ N. C. EVERIST, *Issues and Ironies of the New Millennium*, p. 53.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. N. C. EVERIST, *Issues and Ironies of the New Millennium*, p. 53-55 and 63-65.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. R. PREVOST, *Creating the Undiscovered Country*, p. 226-242.

¹⁹⁸ G. MORAN, *Building on the Past*, p. 149.

description of pluralism. Professor Kamali detailed that, “Pluralism is not the same as diversity. People of different religious or cultural backgrounds may well be present in a place, but unless they actively engage with one another, there is no pluralism.”¹⁹⁹

Like in the second moment of the thesis, in this third moment we call also upon various expertises in Islam to better our comprehension on religious plurality. We considered the explanation of Madame Brigitte Maréchal to open the reflection. And she didn’t hesitate to put a fundamental point in plural religions debate. She said that, “Islam was first considered as a religion of immigrants but it is now progressively considered as a religion that, in its full rights, is integrated as a European reality as such. Islam and Muslims now represent a definitive establishment in Europe but this establishment is unfinished. Societies are always under construction.”²⁰⁰.

The other expert where pluralism and Islam is concerned for our thesis was Felice Dassetto, who observed within the kingdom of Belgium a conservative Islamic school named *Al Ghazali* in Brussels. The aim of the schools dictates, the general scholarly necessities, and then other religious objectives. The religious objective consists of the Islamic teaching inspired by the Quran and the Sunnah.²⁰¹

However, it is interesting to note that there are also Islamic Turkish schools in Anderlecht creating Elites. It is managed the religious group *Fethullah Gülen* from Turkey. These schools constituted by the French and Flemish community. The schools are named “*École des étoiles*”, and are affiliated with the official free education of Belgium. The philosophy of the school is less conservative.²⁰²

Another remarkable feature in our thesis is the Belgian Compulsory Islamic religious education in public education. This feature interests various religious specialists. For them, it is just amazing how a Nation State can disburse budget to ensure that there are full time teachers and part time teachers for such courses. Like I have stated earlier, we can question, what are reasons behind such decision? My view is that Belgium Kingdom is committed for a peaceful coexistence of religion, and as long as the fact that a religion is considered and minimizes conflicts, and other problems where religious beliefs is concerned, Belgium will continue with this line of reflection. This is an interesting element that can help the Seychelles

¹⁹⁹ M. H. KAMALI, *Diversity and pluralism*, p. 28.

²⁰⁰ B. MARÉCHAL, *The (catholic) European University, welcoming place for Islam (?)*, p. 2.

²⁰¹ Cf. F. DASSETTO, *L’iris et le croissant*, p. 90.

²⁰² Cf. F. DASSETTO, *L’iris et le croissant*, p. 91-92.

context: the compulsory Islamic religious education in public school in a non-Islamic country. More than that, subsidiaries and teachers that are being paid to ensure this right of religion for the students, this is great lesson for pluralism. Is it solely the vivre ensemble concept? This is a point that can open debates.

Other interesting move in the Islamic experience is the consideration of universal values by Tunisian education, by deleting all statements that promoted intolerance of different religions and groups and keep the liberal aspects of Muslim thought in religious education. This is a way forward that can inspire even other Arab countries. Though this advancement, there are also conservative ideas where Islamic religious education changes the school ethos and student behavior into a true Islamic model.

The question of minority religions in pluralism can trigger various nationalist debates. The questions that need to be addressed are, why should the government consider a minority religion? Does it have any influence for the nation? Such reflection helps us to have an open up attitude in our research for pluralism, it shows that in religious plurality, everything should be done to eradicate this monopoly posture. The door should be opened, for minority and majority religions.

Interesting sociological analyst improve the pluridiscipline aspect of my thesis, on the fact that the way school instruction is managed and/or instructed is the reflection on how best or bad the relationship church and state is. “In countries where national identity is strongly tied to a particular confession [...] there are notable effects on the way school education is understood, [...] the very definition of the goals of school education encompasses the religious dimension.”²⁰³ It was pertinent to note that in the way forward to plural context, the way a religion being treated can affect pluralism.

For Jean-Paul Willaime, the sociologist, those situations are key indicators that there should be a rethinking how schools approach, treat and teach religion. He gave a great inspiration for the Seychelles context suggesting that the understanding of religion is an integral part of understanding the history of humanity and its civilizations. It is entirely different from belief in one particular religion or its practice. Even the countries in which one confession largely predominates must teach the origins of all religions rather than privilege one or promote proselytizing. Other, interesting element was added to lighten the Seychelles

²⁰³ J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 57.

context: this is where religion is seen as an element of culture, which can help in molding the culture and/or eradicating cultures.²⁰⁴

The final moment for the thesis is the new perspectives based on the organization of the school and the religious and theological reflection. It has been a time of considering the best organization of religious plurality in the school. It is important to note in the above reflection, we have come to a point that the inclusion of pluralism in the school will have various consequences. As the sociologist said, “the relationship between school and religion, like that between state and church, is a matter of national sovereignty”²⁰⁵. He added that: “School instruction about religious faith is a strong indicator of the way church–state and school–religion relations are constructed inside a given national framework”²⁰⁶. When schools decide that for religious plurality to be at its best there is a great importance in respecting rights of parents, this entails various organization within the school. This law puts strains on the organization of the schools. It shows that parents can modify the religious instruction in schools depending on the number of demand for the respective courses. Parents play decisive role in the instruction of their children.

This has brought about a similar concern in my thesis, the school approaches on the teaching and treatment of religion affects pluralism in schools. The question on the religion treatment puts forward the issue of minority religion. Which religion needs to be considered in playing a role in religious education? Majority religion should be on the top list and minority religion should follow? Or should there be equal treatment for all religions? This matter has great consequences but the sociologist warns, on the lack of religious acculturation among school students as this can result in various important social ills in the schools. For, Willaime, within religion there are ingredients or elements, which can trigger men and women to give their best of their ability. For, him loosing contact with such important institution can be disadvantageous for the society. This issue was articulated with a significant factor, the school’s pedagogy. It highlights that schools can use education as a tool to combat ignorance, stereotyping and incomprehension of religions. Education is a tool to improve the society. This should be done especially where there is incomprehension among religions. Freedom of conscience and religious expression in education are delicate matter. It is not an easy method

²⁰⁴ Cf. J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 57-66.

²⁰⁵ J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 57.

²⁰⁶ J.-P. WILLAIME, *Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe*, p. 57.

to adopt in education, important structures need to be in place to inculcate those qualities in students.

As religious plurality is enhanced when mutual enrichment is restored and cultures are not hostile. Resentment among religions happens when there is no valorization of one culture. The question of mutual enrichment depends on the posture of each individual. And it happens only if, the individual sees the richness of the other culture. If this basis is absent, there won't be any encounter thus the mutual enrichment be absent. But the document of the Congregation for Catholic Education measures the complexity of this idea and thus suggests that, there is a need "to study the phenomenon and undertake specific projects in the field"²⁰⁷.

This last moment of reflection, on the new perspective had opened doors to various innovations. There are various postures one can adopt when dialoging, the document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools* called for a respect for one's identity. This is a delicate matter as it would be difficult to enter in a dialogue when one's identity is flawed out or lost? The document is warning us against the loss of one's characteristics or its uniqueness that can happen in dialogue. But this does not mean that in dialogue, there is no movement in one's identity, or else dialogue would not be feasible.

My thesis had opened an important phase in the new perspective for religious plurality in the Seychelles: it is the religious and theological point of views. It was so enriching to see that the idea of religious plurality can have its support in Christian theology. It was noted that religion and culture specific vocation is to be opened to others and to God. The Congregation for Catholic Education highlighted through the document celebrating *Gravissimum educationis*, that culture will be at its best ability and it would be fertile, only if there is openness to others and to God. So a culture is fulfilled with the contact of others. The document is like pleading to adopt an open culture to God and others.

With the words of John Paul II: "it is time ... to understand in a more profound way that the generating nucleus of every authentic culture is constituted by its approach to the mystery of God, in whom alone does a social order centered on the dignity and responsibility of the human person find its unshakeable foundation"²⁰⁸. In this statement, John Paul II is emphasizing that the social order of every authentic culture is gained when it approaches to the mystery of God. This is interesting especially for our reflection on pluralism in showing

²⁰⁷ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, Introduction.

²⁰⁸ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 7.

that God plays an important role in solidifying the foundation of the culture. The document gave innovative ideas for plural context by affirming that God has a place in the public realm. The document argued with the words of Benedict XVI that: “Denying the right to profess one’s religion in public and the right to bring the truths of faith to bear upon public life has negative consequences for true development”²⁰⁹. This is fundamental in the managing religious plurality context, that the identity of the person. It is interesting to note that the Church is rooted by the Gospel where religious plurality is concerned. It is the mystery of the Word’s Incarnation which powered the Church to “proclaim that man deserves honor and love for himself and must be respected in his dignity”²¹⁰. As God has no intention of a closed world, but God revealed a world where relations are prevailed. It is not only a simple intention but a great mission that Christ had given to his Church: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ (Mt 28:19-20)”²¹¹. This mission is enriched by the fact, that “every human being is called to communion because of his nature which is created in the image and likeness of God”²¹².

My thesis had not remained only as a sharing of reflections: it had proposed interested pathways for the Seychelles. Those pathways can be elaborated in a religious plurality project for the secondary schools and the society in general. The utmost step is the acceptance of the plain fact in the islands the Seychelles, the presence of religious plurality in schools and the society. This acceptance of religious plurality fact, articulates with the consideration of a paradigm shift. Religious education needs to adopt new objective that enhance multicultural society, rather than memorizing the doctrines of their respective religions. In other words, the diocese of Port Victoria needs new evangelization objectives.

The Catholic Church needs to adopt a religious plurality evangelization program. It is no longer, the time to eradicate others to transplant my faith, it is a peaceful cohabitation where each religion has its role to play. As religious plurality environment does not have to be conflicting at all time. Like Professor Kamali suggested, for the pluralism to pave its way smoothly, a real engagement towards this plural context needs to be adopted as pluralism is not simply the cohabitation of diverse ideas/religions together.²¹³

²⁰⁹ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 11.

²¹⁰ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 12.

²¹¹ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 34.

²¹² CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue*, n° 34.

²¹³ Cf. M. H. KAMALI, *Diversity and pluralism*, p. 27-54.

For the Seychelles to move forward and better the plural religious context, an audacious coherent and pertinent project needs to be adopted. This project should entail an intensive sensitization of the Seychelles, inter-religious discussions, consideration of religions in great emergence like the Islamic, and a Church and nation state relation installed.

In his Encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate* Benedict XVI stated that: “One of the deepest forms of poverty a person can experience is isolation. [...] Poverty is often produced by a rejection of God’s love, by man’s basic and tragic tendency to close in on himself, thinking himself to be self-sufficient or merely an insignificant and ephemeral fact, a ‘stranger’ in a random universe.”²¹⁴ The Pope added, that:

“Man is alienated when he is alone, when he is detached from reality, when he stops thinking and believing in a foundation. All of humanity is alienated when too much trust is placed in merely human projects, ideologies and false utopias. Today humanity appears much more interactive than in the past: this shared sense of being close to one another must be transformed into true communion. The development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side.”²¹⁵

This thesis can lead to other research for the Seychelles Island, for instance the understanding of the Creole as a religious nation and the peaceful cohabitation of Roman Catholic with other religions in the schools and the society in general. This thesis, could have taken an orientation on seeing only how the memorandum of understanding can unlock or lock opportunities towards religious plurality, but I have chosen to limit my research on understanding the situation of the religious education in the schools and finding possible pathways in this impasse. This work had been rewarding for a first view of a future project on religious plurality for the Seychelles.

²¹⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*. Encyclical letter, n° 53, online on the site of Vatican: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html (consulted 30th May 2014).

²¹⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n° 53,

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