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THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ABOUT RELIGIONS IN A MULTI-CONFESSIONAL LEBANON:
CASE STUDY HAIGAZIAN UNIVERSITY (1998-2008) ¹

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INTRODUCTION

Since the last decade of the 20th century, we are at the center of a great global mixing of cultural turbulences be it religious, political, and/or economic. This turbulent situation dates back to the rise of a new world order which has been striving to spread ‘western globalization’. It is in this frame that religion revamped its strategy to play a vital role on the Western scene “as a major foundation for human life and thought” (Fisher, 1999, p. 9) after many decades of a religious ‘secularism’. Unfortunately, it seems that some

¹. This paper is dedicated to all my History, Religion and Intercultural Studies students, from 1998 till present.
Western governments and societies are not yet ready for such a return, thus, theories such as ‘the clash of civilizations’ (e.g., Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington) and ‘the end of times’ (Francis Fukuyama) emerged. Meanwhile, many societies witnessed multiplicity of religions leading to denominational conflicts and divisions. Religion has always been a central institution of many Middle Eastern societies. It plays an essential role in peoples’ lives, and it expresses itself in all of their cultural traits. Lately, religious fundamentalism has flourished due to various ideological, social, political, and economic factors. Consequently, an in-depth study of religions, or ‘science of religion’ (German Religionswissenschaft), past and present, is essential to adequate understanding of these societies.

The study of religions requires that courses about religions are designed and included in school and university curricula. They should be taught in an academic way that is different from the way it is taught at home or within the religious community. Sadly, many educational institutions in Lebanon opted to subtract the study of religions from their programs due to the numerous potential conflicts and dangers. Such omission might mistakenly lead to the conclusion that religion is insignificant and unimportant to humankind although it is a central cultural trait and aspect of civilization. Moreover, such omission may lead to the conclusion that religion is only an individual activity and not a social one too. Actually, teaching about religions is an academic activity although it is not an easy task. It needs proactive measures to communicate peace, tolerance (acceptance and not permission), respect and diversity within an environment that is supposed to be built on freedom of thought, conscience and religion. On the other hand, teaching about religions is not indoctrination; it is an attempt to spread awareness about religions in order to reduce harmful misunderstandings and stereotypes and to expose diversified religious opinions among learners. Then, neither particular views nor sponsored practice are to be imposed, for the only way to impose such opinions is through threatening and coercion.

Haigazian University [HU] is one of the various private universities in Lebanon that have religious affiliation. It was founded on October 17, 1955, “to provide quality education in a Christian environment where academic freedom and the search of dissemination of truth are predominant”… “HU shall be co-educational and open to academically qualified students regardless of race,
nationality or creed” (Haigazian University Catalog 2007-2009, pp. 11-12). Each academic year, hundreds of students of diverse religious and confessional backgrounds join HU. Religion and intercultural courses are an integral part of the university curricula and its college requirements for graduation. The religion courses “aim at assisting students to reflect critically on their priorities and to attempt to develop a consistent personal theology or philosophy of life” (Haigazian University Catalog 2007-2009, p. 150). Accordingly, HU religion courses focus on the origins, development, and contemporary manifestations of ‘Eastern’ religions (e.g., Indian, Chinese, and Japanese religions) as well as ‘Western’ religions (e.g., Near Eastern religions) in addition to some modern religions. This is how students get the opportunity to logically reflect upon the essence of different faith denominations, and become capable of willingly adopting their own faith having been better enlightened and more convinced. The direct question that would be raised: ‘what is the purpose of religion courses?’ Responses would be: to spread awareness, toleration and respect; to gain some comprehension of the role of religion in human life; to show and to foster interest in other cultures; to appreciate, to defend, to criticize, and/or to interpret religious faith; to bridge cultural gaps; to better manage conflict and diversity; to know and work on thyself; to emancipate oneself from ignorance or fallacies; to develop an open identity; and most trivially for some, to graduate from the university.

Universally, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are classified in one category, whether according to their ‘monotheistic’ faith (believing in one ‘God’), or to their Near East origins. Practically, they are taught in one introductory course, despite their important, and sometimes, radical differences. They are also known as ‘Abrahamic’ religions, because their followers trace their origins to Abraham, the father of a multitude of nations (Gen. 17: 5). Smith considered that these three religions “were originated by Semites; all share a common theological vocabulary (though they use it to say different things); and all stand in a single historical tradition in as much as Christianity claims to be the fulfillment of Judaism and Islam the fulfillment of both Judaism and Christianity” (p. 127). Such a claim remains questionable, for is it true that the latter religion fulfills the former? Moreover, is it true that ‘God’, the same ‘God’, has manifested in
history and worked with the Hebrews, then with the Christians, and lately, with the Muslims?

This paper is an attempt to reflect and give practical guidance on teaching about religions at university; it exposes the major thematic differences that are encountered in the fields of theology, politics, and human rights.

1. LEARNING ABOUT OR LIVING RELIGIONS?

In a country where religion is so vital for confessional communities, some political parties, and the general population, spreading awareness regarding religion becomes a critical need: It is a need that should not be met for the conventional advocacy of “national fusion” (العيش المشترك) or “mutual living” but for an efficient management of cultural diversity. “Unity in diversity” is the epitome of slogans which are echoed here and there; there is no unity in diversity; there could be solidarity and diversity.

The modern literature, which tries to deal with the ambiguity subsequent to promoting knowledge of different religions, is rich with terms, such as religious education, religion education, confessional religious education, non-confessional religious education, teaching about religion(s), learning about religion(s), learning from religion(s), teaching religion(s), education about religion(s), education into religion(s), religious studies, the study of religion, and the dialogue of religions. With such a wide variety of terms comes a wider variety of definitions and explanations. For example, while some authors have recourse to the expression ‘religious education’ to avoid indoctrination, some other authors would still perceive this process as indoctrination since it teaches religion as the absolute truth that is to be lived and practiced rather than studied academically, and thus, teaching and learning religion take place in living and growing within the faith itself. Legitimate questions that one must raise when defining the field of teaching about religions are the following: Could someone know without believing? Could someone believe without belonging? Could someone belong without believing? Could someone believe without knowing? Is it true that religion conflicts with rational and objective thinking? Furthermore, many people assume that “the relationship between God and every particular thing or living creature is unique, with an individual quality of its own” (Brown, 1997, p.
8). Thus, is there an individualized religion? On the other hand, Smart rightly asked, "Is there some essence which is common to all religions? And cannot a person be religious without belonging to any of the religions?" (1992, pp. 10-11). To answer these questions, one has to explore further backgrounds.

It is important to define 'religion', although many scholars found it very difficult to do so. Etymologically speaking, 'religion', in Latin, is commonly related to (a) Religio meaning "to tie back, to tie again, to tie fast", (b) religionem meaning "respect for what is sacred", or (c) relegere meaning "go through again, read again" (Harper, 2001; Nigosian, 1994, p. 1). In Far Eastern context, religion is a process [Tao]. In Western and Near Eastern context, it reflects a personal contact with an invisible superhuman power, 'God' (Nigosian, 1994, pp. 1-2). Cavanagh distinguishes a wide range of characteristics included in the various definitions of the term religion; i.e., feeling, ritual activity, belief, monotheism, social valuation, illusion, ultimate reality and value. Different combinations of these characteristics could come out as new definitions and approaches to the term, and thus, religion becomes ambiguous "to the extent that (1) it is actually defined in a number of ways; (2) these definitions emphasize several distinguishing characteristics; and (3) some of them are in conflict with some others" (1978, pp. 4-10). When religion is referred to as a field of study, what is being studied? Smart devised a seven-dimensional portrait of a religion: the practical and ritual dimensions (e.g., ceremonies, festivals and services), the experiential and emotional dimensions (e.g., feelings, emotions), the narrative or mythic dimensions (e.g., sacred books, creeds, and miracles), the doctrinal and philosophical dimensions (e.g., dogmas and beliefs), the ethical and legal dimensions (e.g., canon laws), the social and institutional dimensions (e.g., denominations, orders, and movements), and the material dimension (e.g., art, architecture, and utile) (1992, pp. 12-21). One could conclude that religion denotes a specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices, generally agreed upon by a number of persons or groups, and lived individually and socially.

Religions can be taught and lived. In ancient times, heretics were those who had heterogeneous teachings with the main church. Creeds and declarations of faith were set to teach people their religion and how to live it. Ultimately, learning could occur without belonging even with the potential lack of emotional
and experiential factors, but could belonging take place without learning and believing?

2. TEACHING CONTEXT

Lebanon is a country that tries to integrate within its society the concept of human rights. In teaching about religions, it is essential to rely on the following principles as stated in various universal instruments¹: “freedom and equality in dignity and rights” (UDHR, 1948, Article 1) “without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (UDHR, 1948, Article 2), “right of thought, conscience and religion” (UDHR, 1948, Article 18), and “right to freedom of opinion and expression” (UDHR, 1948, Article 19). These instruments were developed to promote a culture of plurality, freedom from discrimination, freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion, peace, respect, and justice.

Haigazian’s motto is “Truth, Freedom, and Service”. This motto orients and motivates HU faculty and students to appreciate democratic values where everyone is encouraged to express his/her thoughts and ideas openly and freely. But how could a healthy atmosphere for a productive teaching about religions be

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created? There is no unique educational method for the teaching (and study) of religions. Hall considered that the study of religion in colleges and universities has as its task "to describe, understand, and evaluate the expressions of religion in all of its forms... religion itself is more than research and thinking about something; it involves convictions, feelings, and dedicated action. It is this difference between religion as a lived phenomenon and the study of religion that leads to the problem of method in religious studies" (1978, p. 250). Smart’s seven dimensional portrait of religion entails that a variety of methods and academic disciplines are needed, for example, historical, theological, sociological, psychological, anthropological, phenomenological, and literary of religions, besides comparative religion. Furthermore, it is highly recommended to use visual, auditory, and tactile/kinesthetic learning styles in teaching about religions. The use of multimedia is a pertinent idea despite the difficulty of their language. A great use could be made from elucidation, characterization, analysis, and correlation which are steps that could be used in the study of religions (Pye, 2001, 4) within a framework of open and liberal interaction and participation. However, to which level and depth should teaching about religions attain? Some students prefer not to go into details; they might consider that intellectual sophistication and in-depth knowledge use up an important part of their time which should have been dedicated to their major courses. It is relevant to note that "knowledge of everything in general is certainly knowledge of nothing significant at all" (Phenix, 1967, p. 7). Moreover, Alexander Pope stated that, "A little learning (knowledge) is a dangerous thing" (An Essay on Criticism, part II).

Furthermore, instructors of religion might face various problems when they try to protect their students from alienation, ignorance, dishonesty, fear, closed-mindedness, fanaticism, bigotry, intolerance, inequality, insensitivity, discrimination, stereotypes, disrespect, prejudice and denigration. Some students may have a naïve assumption that monotheistic religions exist harmoniously in the world or that authentic information and interpretation about religious issues should be only available from the religious officials who have genuine knowledge gained from experience. I believe that decent education should challenge students by openly discussing and criticizing critical and debatable ideologies and opinions about doctrines, politics, economics, human rights,
ecology, and so on. Nevertheless, many students are not fond of being mentally pushed to the edge of their parents’ comfort zones and theirs. Others, who consider themselves ‘believers’, assume that other religions have nothing to offer, for only their religion holds the whole truth. There comes another category which refuses to subject their religion to eclecticism and/or syncretism. Last but not least are the most fated, ‘insiders’ who are strongly committed to their denominations, their faith and its practices, and thus, cannot tolerate an outsider’s objective observation. Hall considers that “the obvious danger is that being on the inside of a religion with personal involvement and commitment may distort his or her capacity to be a critical scholar” (1978, p. 252). At HU, students are encouraged to be critical learners even if they consider themselves believers or just followers of this or that religion, not to mention that some students ‘criticize’ some of their instructors of religion and intercultural studies, cast their doubts on their objectivity, and express their ‘skepticism’ verbally in town-hall meetings or in writing while evaluating instructors. This criticism is the reaction to that of the instructor “who ‘criticizes’ their beliefs and practices”. As a matter of fact, sympathetic understanding, objectivity, neutrality, and scholarship are essentially relative, indeterminate, and sometimes misleading terms. Moreover, one of the basic requirements is that teachers of religion courses and intercultural studies should be trained in the fields of religious studies and history of civilizations; however, the shortage of scholars in the field of religious studies, the complex character of the field, along with some administrative load obligations, give the opportunity to faculty members of other disciplines to teach these courses, contradicting this requirement. Some students, some parents, and even a few colleagues may accuse critical instructors of making them hesitant believers if not skeptical or agnostic.

It is not uncommon to receive requests from students for ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ instructors, instructors that should not state their own opinions. Such a request would deprive those instructors of the right of expressing their opinions. For these students, teaching about religions should be a mere superficial reading and presentation of textbooks about religions, free of any analysis of the complex relationship between religion and other social systems. Due to its nature, critical thinking is difficult to understand, and thus, few students and colleagues can neither differentiate between challenge and harassment, nor
distinguish preaching from teaching. A student’s own experience and expressions are the best judge. Aline Mano (Social Work Major, Class of 2007) wrote, “Anyone who wants to be informed about the world around him/her, anyone who wants to be open to listening to others, needs to learn something about “the others”. The religion & IS courses that I took at HU led me to build an understanding, an insight about the differences that existed among the world’s different groups. Soon after I graduated, I found myself in a situation where I had to deal with people from different cultures and origins. Fortunately, I had the necessary tools to encounter the differences that arose among us. I was well prepared to cross the barriers that existed among us and thus facilitate communication and promote exchange of knowledge and interaction. Learning about religion and cultures provokes critical thinking, and helps to explore how others think and process; it helps to understand the human mind” (Mano, 2008). Moreover, Jade Noureddine (Advertising and Communication Major, Transferred to another institution) wrote: “In a country infested with religious, sectarian and ideological conflicts ever since its creation, religious ignorance by itself constitutes a sin. It’s on no account wrong to go back to the roots and unearth how religious beliefs and dogmas started, what it meant back then, how it changed and what it means now. As an atheist myself, I found the religion course at Haigazian University extremely informative, enlightening and especially entertaining. The materials contain nothing new, but since they are portrayed impartially, being in the classroom and enjoying the lectures is rewarding enough. The religion course is a must for all students who like to broaden their minds and is ought to be taken by everyone regardless of his/her beliefs, affiliations and faithfulness” (Noureddine, 2008). Finally, Raffi Feghali (Computer Science Major, Class of 2006) wrote: "Learning about religions scientifically falls under the ‘right information’ category of conflict analysis in the process of conflict transformation. It is essential in creating a new generation of individuals who understand their own religion and the religion of the others living with them and, thus, in preventing future or transforming existing conflicts arising from religion. At Haigazian University, in addition to being the mentioned tool for dealing with conflicts, the course was also methodologically presented in such a way that it was good practice for critical thinking through its discussions and the instructor’s open-ended questions" (Feghali, 2008).
3. CONSENSUS, CONFLICT OR DIALOGUE OF RELIGIONS?

Exploring and discussing the seven dimensions of religions may lead not simply to informal dialogues among students and instructors, but also to confrontation, especially in cases where some students take upon themselves the role of representatives of their religions and denominations, or even when they put themselves in defensive and sometimes offensive positions. Inquiries about whether the classroom is the right place to conduct sensitive dialogue arise. Some consider that “Religious education plays an important role in the field of Islamic-Christian dialogue, tolerance and common living” (Saad El-Dine, 2004, 3). I believe that dialogue requires setting appropriate goals, time, commitment and effort, and attention to content and process. Students who are from different social, religious, and educational backgrounds, come to class to exchange information for the sake of awareness rather than for the sake of changing status quo. Thus, I find it useless to conduct doctrinal dialogue in class. Jalali also stated, “although dialogue is not possible on theological dogmas, it is definitely possible in the realm of religious culture or in the field of religious civilization. Religions, in their theological meanings, are divine entities, but what we consider as our religious culture is this worldly atmosphere that to some extent conducts and controls our behavior” (2005, 4).

However, any polarization or partisanship, even discussion about any religious, social, or political issues, could engender confrontations especially when it is based on interpretations of passages from ‘sacred’ books. In fact, several inter-cultural and inter-religious or inter-faith organizations operate globally and locally in collaboration with the institutionalized religions; nevertheless, their attempts are very limited and their productivity is even questioned since they cannot find serious solutions to radical differences on all levels, be it theological, social, political, and economic. In fact, participants do not conduct dialogues but share monologues. On the other hand, some problematic issues, mainly tackled in both REL 218 (Introduction to Western Religions) and IS 204 (Intercultural Studies II), provoke discussion and tension among Christian, Muslim, Druze, Bahai, atheist, and agnostic students. Unfortunately, I have never had the opportunity and the enrichment of Jewish students in class. Of the several points that are usually raised and discussed in class, I would like to pinpoint the most important along with the respective questions that could be raised:
A. Theology

– 'God' and 'God's' role in history: What does it mean to believe in one 'God'? Is 'God' a He/She/It? Do people worship and believe in the same 'God'? Are 'God' of the Bible and Allah of the Quran alike? Does 'God' interfere in history, place and time? Do all people of the Earth truly affirm the unity of mankind as 'its origin is one' and that God is the creator of all people? If 'God' does really exist, and he is omnipresent and omnipotent and omniscient, where is 'God' when innocent, poor people and believers need him/her/it during wartime? Is there really 'divine victory' in wars? If 'God' gives and takes lives, why do people search for criminals? How does 'God' reveal himself/herself/itself? How can someone know the will of 'God'?

– Religion: Should the term 'religion' exclusively label the three 'monotheistic' ones? What about the Far Eastern ones? Are they divine religions or just 'beliefs'? Are religions truly revealed by 'God' (and which 'God') to mankind? If so, why are there different religions? If Islam came to correct Christianity, which religion would correct Islam? What about Druze and Bahai? Are they Muslims or not? Could religion be a positive force in the affairs of humankind? Which religion is the 'right' religion? Is Abraham more important than Jesus to label Christianity as Abrahamic religion? Do really religion and faith contradict science and reason? Could religion be spread and directed by force and violence? Is humankind free to create new religions? Is it acceptable to claim that religions have answers and solutions for every problem facing mankind? Aren't they the cause of some social problems?

– The Sacred Books: How could the three different books (Hebrew Bible, Christian Bible, and Quran) be considered sacred, inerrant and infallible? In fact, did 'God' reveal them? Whom to blame for their historical and doctrinal differences, 'God', the author or the copyist? Why is the Quran not publicly read in foreign languages in non-Arab countries?
The Triune God (Gr. Ο Τριαδικός Θεός): Why are there 3 ‘persons’ (Gr. υποστάσεις, hypostaseis)? Why did the Church use terms like Father and Son? How can Jesus be ‘God’ and Son of ‘God’? Why do some Christians recite the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed with its distant terminologies? How can someone interpret this Creed using Arab Semitic mind?

Jesus: Was Jesus the incarnated ‘God’, a prophet and/or a messenger, a Jewish Rabbi or a false prophet? Are Jesus of the Bible and Issa of the Quran alike? How can Jesus’ divinity and lordship along with his natures and his wills be discussed in simple words? Is Jesus a spiritual leader, like Buddha? What about the historicity of Jesus’ crucifixion in light of the Quranic denial? How could someone love his enemies (Mat. 5: 44)? Is ‘love’ preached in the two other monotheistic religions?

Mohammad’s Prophethood: Why is Mohammad the “Seal of the Prophets”, traditionally interpreted as the ‘Last Prophet’ (Quran 33: 40)? Do the other two monotheistic religions accept this Islamic doctrine if they all believe in the same ‘God’? Why is this Prophet different from all the previous ones in resorting to the use of force against the enemies?

The ‘Chosen People’ of ‘God’: If the Jews are criticized for their belief in themselves as the holy and chosen people of ‘God’ (Deut. 14: 2), why do the Christians consider themselves as the body of Christ (Eph. 4: 12) and as a chosen people and holy nation (1 Pet. 2: 9)? Why do the Muslims consider their umma as the best of the nations (the best community) raised up for the benefit of mankind (Quran 3: 110)?

B. Politics

Political leadership: If ‘God’ really exists, why does he appoint or allow having bad leaders on earth, leaders who are criminals and thieves?

Peace and War: Do all religions of the world have a homogeneous reading of peace? Does ‘God’ allow waging wars in his name? Is the
war conducted in ‘God’s’ name a clean and just war? Why do people feel close to ‘God’ during wartime and not during peace time? Does ‘the war on terrorism’ sidetrack religious tolerance? In other words, does ‘the war on terrorism’ awaken religious fanaticism?

– Martyrdom: Why do people mix between religious martyrdom and political martyrdom? Do all political ‘martyrs’ even the atheist ones go to heaven?

– Political identity: Which is more important, political identity or religious identity?

– Jerusalem: Do the three religions have a homogeneous understanding of Jerusalem’s religious and political symbolism? When people of knowledge and authority label Jerusalem as the ‘City of Peace’ and the ‘Land of Prophets’, do they agree with Jesus when he said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones to death those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were unwilling! Look! Your house is left abandoned! (ISV, Mat. 23; 37-38)?

– Religion-State relationship: Is secularism a practical solution for countries like Lebanon? Who gave the religious officials the right to lead politically their religious flock? Do they have the right training and education in political science and strategic leadership to do so?

C. Human Rights

– Ethics and Human Rights principles: Do the three monotheistic religions recognize the universality of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR] (1948)? Do they share the same religious and ethical values? For instance, do they all believe that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (UDHR, Article 1)? Or do they accept that everyone has the right to change his religion or belief, and to practice or not to practice religion, without fear (UDHR, Article 18)? What is the position of religions vis-à-vis the principles concerning freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, civil rights, marriage, legal status, education, and gender or sexual orientation?
– *Equality and women rights*: Do the three monotheistic religions grant undeniably total equality between all men and women? Is it acceptable to ask women to remain silent (i.e., not to teach) in the church (1 Tim. 2: 12)? What is the position of the three monotheistic religions vis-à-vis women circumcision? What is their position concerning women’s reproductive rights? Why polygamy (actually polygyny) is accepted in Islam and not polyandry? Is it acceptable, in the 21st c., to hit women in case they rebel against their husbands (Sura 4: 34)? In reference to Sura 2: 282, is it fair to make the testimony of two (literate) women equal to the testimony of one (illiterate) man, on financial transactions?

– *Freedom of speech*: Can freedom of religion be achieved without freedom of speech? Is it allowed to suppress or to put under threat the life of whoever provokes a religious group or insults or disrespects a religion or blasphemes against ‘God’ or a prophet, or defames a ‘sacred book’ or a ‘religious symbol’? Is it acceptable to ban books and movies that contradict some religious beliefs and norms? Who gave the religious officials the right to limit humans’ freedom? Why is it still unacceptable to criticize religious officials who are involved in politics whereas they criticize politicians in their turn?

– *Religious rights*: Do people have the right to change their religions in Lebanon without being threatened or discriminated against? How can some Arab countries be considered as ‘moderate regimes’ if they do not respect freedom of religion where people can freely manifest their beliefs and rituals publicly or privately? How can they be considered ‘moderate regimes’ when they do not permit religious conversion, and sometimes, they systematically discriminate against religious minorities? Is it acceptable to talk about dhimmitude in the 21st century?

– *Civil marriage*: Till when will civil marriage not be contracted in Lebanon? What was the negative role of religious officials in banning it?

– *Bioethical issues*: What is the position of the institutionalized religions vis-à-vis the main bioethical issues, e.g., abortion, euthanasia, cloning, etc.?
CONCLUSION

In summary, education, communication, and cooperation are essential to promote awareness, understanding, and respect. Thus, it is the duty of trustworthy educators to effectively promote ‘freedom of religion’ and not ‘freedom from religion’, despite the various challenges and problems they might face. It is also part of their mission and responsibility to encourage diversity and to promote pluralism and multi-cultural co-existence (i.e., political, social, linguistic, ethnic, religious, and so on), to foster critical thinking where learners are encouraged and trained to question their beliefs (not to be ‘blind followers), to face criticism, and to build a glocal society, a society that combats stereotypes and prejudices, and a society that respects human dignity and appreciates, promotes, and protects integrity, equality, mutual respect and tolerance, social justice, democracy, nonviolence, compassion and peace. These principles, however, remain meaningless and useless if learners do not adopt them and make them part of their ethos. It is crucial at this point to reiterate the following: Tolerance is to accept the other as he/she is; peace is to know about, to reconcile with, and to live with the other as he/she is. Thus, it is the duty of every religious community and leadership to protect the right of others to exist and live differently. Schools and universities are the best place to conduct discussions about similarities and differences, in a civilized and academic atmosphere. In 1770, Voltaire wrote to M. Le Riche, “Monsieur l’abbe, I detest what you write, but I would give my life to make it possible for you to continue to write” (Smith & Torres 2006).

Bibliographic references


