Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue "There is a Crack in Everything—Education and Religion in a Secular Age"

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The Sacred Canopy

The seemingly paradoxical contrast between an expected decline of religion in the public domain and an increase of the importance of religiosity and spirituality in people's lives, led Peter Berger to revisit his prophecy about secularisation. In 1967, in his publication *The Sacred Canopy*, Berger initiated the exploration of religion in the present-day world from a sociological perspective.

The Sacred Canopy is a readable publication, well received by a wide range of scholars and interested lay persons. The book consists of two parts. The first part focuses on the role of religion in the formation of society as a community of people living together—in German, denoted as a *Gesellschaft*. According to Berger, three processes are pivotal in the formation of a society: externalisation, objectification and internalisation. Externalisation refers to collective actions that construct society; objectification refers to the reification of social structures; internalisation refers to socialisation and enculturation that results in the positioning of society and its role expectations in people's internal worlds. This latter process is accompanied by tensions that result from the confrontation between accepted and internalised roles, and assigned roles [1,2]. In Berger's view, institutionalised religion is, first of all, perceived as a collection of roles that ought to be internalised. If internalisation is not possible, and the social world and the socialised 'I' resist an authentic 'I', this is coined as alienation [3] (p. 100). A chapter on alienation bridges the first and second part of the book with its emphasis on secularisation as a seemingly universal, irreversible and irrevocable process, at least in the Western world, but which is expected to occur all over the world.

Once *The Sacred Canopy* was published, the concept of 'secularisation' became an evaluative concept. In circles of anti-clericalism and in circles of self-appointed 'progressives', secularisation became associated with the liberation of modern men and women from the patronalistic power of religion over people's positioning in the world. However, some Christian theologians embraced the concept in a different meaning entirely, namely, as the realisation of the core of the Christian tradition, referring to the practice of a faithful life. By doing so, they connected the concept of secularisation with interpretations taken from early Christianity, where 'secularisation' was understood as a term referring to the return into the world of an ordained priest who had dedicated his life to God. According to Berger's perspective, secularisation can be understood as the process of withdrawing spheres of society from the predominance of religious institutions and symbols [3] (p. 123). As a result of this process, it is to be expected that more and more people will reflect on worldly and personal affairs without the blessing of religious interpretations [3] (p. 123). In Berger's view, the power of secularisation lies in its global influence due to the westernisation and modernisation of all continents with its roots in the

ever-expanding capitalist-industrial economy [3] (p. 125). However, Berger did not want to play the 'blame game'. In terms of historical origins, he points to the way in which the Protestant Christian tradition may have sown the seeds for secularisation, since this tradition minimalised the place and size of a sacred world within society by referring to stories about Jesus, and the notion of the incarnation of the Son of God in particular, which can be interpreted as a movement from radical transcendence to radical immanence. According to such an interpretation, the umbilical cord between heaven and earth has been tied off, thereby leaving mankind thrown upon its own resources [3] (p. 128). In Berger's theory, secularisation is related to all aspects of culture and can be noticed in the decline of religious content in the arts, in philosophy, in literature, and last but not least, in the rising influence of science as an autonomous secular perspective on the world. According to this line of thought, modernity will necessarily bring about a decline in the use of religious sources for the formation of society, and an increase in people's reliance on research-based knowledge [3] (p. 123). In 1967, Berger concluded his publication with the expectation that all over the globe, religion would be (re-)shaped according to processes of secularisation, polarisation and subjectification, and by the way in which religious institutions would respond to these processes [3] (p. 189).

In later years, and due to encounters with religiosity in other contexts—in the so-called 'third world', among others—and as a result of encounters with evangelical Protestantism in the United States, Berger qualified his previous conclusion that resulted from the line of thought in *The Sacred Canopy*. It turns out, Berger admitted, that modernity does not inevitably lead to a decline of religion. In the decades following the publication of *The Sacred Canopy*, instead of a decline in religion, secularisation produced a reflective process on people's religious positionality, resulting in subjectification and a pluralisation of religion(s). Nowadays, Berger states, people live in a plural context that brings with it the need to make a personal choice between competing beliefs, values, and lifestyles [4]. Following this analysis, two kinds of pluralism are identified by Berger [4] (p. 17 ff.). On the one hand, pluralisation can be understood as the situation in which different religious traditions coexist in the same public domain. In Europe, for example, as a sign of institutionalised religion, we see mosques next to churches, where Muslims gather to pray. On the other hand, the coexistence of religions in the West is situated within a dominantly secular discourse. Present-day society, according to Berger, cannot exist without the pluralism dialogue(s) [4] (p. 18). What follows from this, in line with Berger's vision, is the need to teach about—and learning to speak and understand—each other's languages, which enables people to enter into a dialogue about a religious and moral pluralism that might evolve from religious diversity [4] (p. 25). In Berger's view, we cannot do without dialogue because of the human need for recognition and (some) social cohesion (see also Van Meijl, 2010 [5]). If we interpret Berger's recent publication correctly, and in case Berger's most discussed publication would be revised, then the title might change into 'Religion(s), the Plurality of Sacred Canopies'.

Varieties of Religion Today

Forty years after Berger gave his sociological perspective on the development of the Christian religious tradition in Western countries, Charles Taylor recorded his view in 2007 in *A Secular Age*, a solid publication of more than eight hundred pages. Whereas Berger focused on the Christian religion, Taylor's focus is on the secular society. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor raises the question of what the position of religion is in a secularised/secularising world. This publication was preceded by a shorter publication in 2003 (a booklet of only one hundred pages), with the challenging Dutch title '*Wat betekent religie vandaag?*' ['What Is the Meaning of Religion Today?']. The English title of the 2003 booklet clearly indicates the starting point of Taylor's reflections: *Varieties of Religion Today. William James Revisited.* Here, Taylor does not focus on institutionalised religion and its decline—as Berger did in *The Sacred Canopy*—but on religious experiences in the lives of modern people. The question Taylor raises in his 2003 publication, which can be seen as a forerunner of his *A Secular Age* (2007) [6]—his major contribution to the discussion about religion, religiosity, spirituality and secularisation—is 'how can religion be experienced and professed' these days? Taylor's starting point is William James'

foundational work on religion. According to James, religion is best described as 'the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine' [7] (p. 42); [8] (p. 24). Taylor, for his part, acknowledges that the language used to express one's religious experience is a language embedded in a linguistic (religious) community [8] (p. 11), while at the same time, the individual's own way of thinking is the starting point for her/his religious experience [8] (p. 12). Following James' line of thought, the individual religious experience is pivotal; however, in institutionalised communal religiosity, 'the intense heat of the original experience cools down, and what started as an 'acute fever' results in a 'dull habit" [8] (p. 34). James even speaks of institutionalised religion as 'second hand' religion. According to Taylor, however, James pays no attention to the 'phenomenon of a collective religious life, which is not only the result of (individual) religious relations, but to a certain extent, is [also] constitutive for individual religious experience [8] (p. 37). In other words, Taylor holds that religion is not a matter of 'either'/'or', but that individual religious experiences and institutionalised religion can be seen as complementary. The same applies in his view to individual and institutionalised Islam. For some Muslims, living according to the rules of their religion as institutionalised in the *Sharia* law is crucial, while others focus on their individual understanding of tradition and an individual experience of longing for unification with God. Sufism is an example of the latter denomination in Islam; the poet and mystic Rumi (1207–1273) is an important representative of this movement [8] (p. 33).

In Taylor's perspective, individual religiosity and institutionalised religiosity cannot and should not be separated. The development of individual religiosity cannot take place without a dialogue with a minimum of verbally and non-verbally expressed, and societally endorsed, forms of religiosity [9,10]. After all, human beings have the desire to communicate about their inner experiences, especially about moving experiences. 'There is *something* people have faith in, there is *something* people pin their hopes on' [8] (p. 39). In addition to the stories people tell each other, different ways to verbally and non-verbally express intense and deep emotions are required. Religious communities offer narratives, symbols, rituals and ceremonies for the expression of these kinds of profound and moving experiences.

As Taylor perceives it, people today have a feeling that 'something' is missing in their lives, in spite of the ongoing processes of secularisation. A deep longing seems to be neglected; an access to a transcendent reality seems to be blocked. Delving into a variety of sources, people look for different ways to express their uneasiness, but none of these can satisfy the deep longing that lies underneath their discomfort—a deep longing to put their faith in 'something' and admit some kind of dependency on that 'something'. The need to dependent on 'something' and the need to be autonomous, in control and respected, are given priority in the lives of modern men in successive turns. According to Taylor, the end of this 'struggle' is by no means in sight [8] (pp. 59–60).

Since religion is not a given anymore in today's world, but a matter of personal choice, people have to find their own way amidst a plurality of views, instead of walking the beaten track as provided by a religious community or prescribed by a religious/political authority [8] (p. 77; see also [11] (p. 123)). The search for one's own way results in new forms of religiosity, which balances between solitude and solidarity, and between belief anchored in an institutionalised context and belief unrelated to religious practices. 'Bricolage' [12], 'believing without belonging' [13] and 'multiple religious belonging' [14] are just a few concepts to describe people's innovative ways to fulfil their need for belonging [8] (pp. 86, 90). In Taylor's view, 'new terms of religiosity can begin in a moment of dazzling insight, continuing in a demanding perseverance of spiritual discipline' [8] (p. 100). Prayer, and—in its adapted form—meditation and mindfulness, can be seen as new forms of spiritual discipline. In addition to these roads towards fulfilment of a need to belong, the longing for solidarity can also express itself in joint actions, also in joint actions outside the sphere of religion. The 'wave' in a football stadium, erupting into song, or striking up the national anthem can be seen as examples of expressions of the need to belong. This is exactly why sport is seen as the new religion nowadays.

Present underneath the variety of religious experiences is the demanding requirement of our contemporary world to be authentic and self-directed, i.e., to be the architect of your own life and

to concretise your own humanity in an individual way, making your own moral choices regarding the realisation of a good life. Self-fulfilment and self-realisation are high on the agenda in the West. However, this self-directedness and authenticity is often confused with being independent of any authority. 'Being and becoming yourself' is interpreted as developing yourself in disconnection from all kinds of rules and moralities, which are seen as given from the outside and as not corresponding with an inner voice. Here, Taylor points to the risk involved in the decline of institutionalised religion as an authority or dialogue partner in society's existential conversation. Institutionalised religions have huge supplies of imagination that stimulate narratives on 'the good life', called 'strong evaluations' by Taylor. In his opinion, the retreat of religion in its institutionalised form as a guaranteed order of the good in the public domain—Taylor even speaks of religion as the 'soul of society' [8] (p. 15; see also Vroom, 1996 [15])—entails the risk that the opposite pole in the dichotomy of 'good and evil' will disappear, which would open up a clear passage for evil. The rise of moralism, in Taylor's view, can be seen as a defence mechanism against the omnipresence of evil in modern times [8] (p. 49). The same holds for the rise of radicalism as a way of escaping what is perceived as an 'inconvenient' plurality of beliefs in a secularised world.

With this Special Issue, we wish to contribute to the ongoing debate on secularisation and pluralisation, focusing on the meaning thereof for the education of today's young people, who are the builders of the world of tomorrow. Before we begin our exploration of different aspects of the relationship between education and religion in the secularized context of the 21st century, we want to create clarity about the use of the concept 'secularisation'.

Secularization: A Variety of Interpretations

Secularisation is very often interpreted as an ongoing process in the history of religions, namely as a decrease in the active participation in religious communities and as a decline in church/mosque/temple attendance. Other scholars refer, in particular, to the diminishing influence of institutionalised religion in the public domain. Secularisation, however, does not merely refer to decreased church attendance, which is the focus of quantitative research in sociology of religion, nor is the meaning of the term limited to the societal fact that religious symbols, as an expression of the strong relation between institutionalised religion and the public domain, become prohibited. The French conception of *laïcité* is an example of this interpretation. In addition, secularisation is often understood as a process in which religious thought, religious practices and religious institutions lose their impact on people's lives and on society as a whole (Wilson, in Paul, 2017 [16] (p. 78)).

Secularisation as understood by the Dutch history scholar Herman Paul refers to the fact that believing in God does not go without saying anymore. Nowadays, it is not just religion anymore that people put their faith in. These days there are many alternatives to put one's faith in. There is no single 'sacred canopy' anymore, plurality is the sound conclusion. For religious communities, that makes it more difficult to keep their beliefs alive, a situation that may result either in an unwilling secularisation of beliefs, or in fossilised traditions. Going back to Taylor's perspective, religion(s) should adapt to modern times and distance themselves from violent passages in their holy scriptures, relegate hell to the realm of fiction, and recognise the legitimacy of the human pursuit for worldly happiness (Taylor in: Paul, 2017, [16] (p. 50)). The secular characteristic of modernity and the ready availability of religious and secular alternatives give rise to people's severe doubts about their own positionality vis-à-vis their own religion and other religions, including its 'strong evaluations'—those values that 'distinguish between good and evil, noble and base, virtuous and vicious' [6] (p. 544). Some of these 'strong evaluations' are 'incommensurably higher that others' [6] (p. 544). For many people, these 'strong evaluations' have been ingrained during their religious socialisation, in the context of a religious community and/or religious education. For them, 'morality without God may be no longer conceivable' [6] (p. 545). Encounters in a plural society between people adhering to different 'strong evaluations', or practicing similar 'strong evaluations' in a completely different way, can result in disruptive moments (Ter Avest, 2014) [17], putting the finger on the problem of the fragility of people's

self-constructed worldview identities. This fragility is partly due to the fact that large numbers of people nowadays are not firmly embedded in a religious community anymore, and remain 'puzzled, cross-pressured, or have constituted a sort of in-between position by bricolage' [6] (p. 556). This may possibly result in an intergenerational change, whereby children adopt a position that differs from that of their parents [6] (p. 833). Taylor points to different strategies that people pursue in responding to the new situation. Some no longer make room for 'the beyond'; they close off the passage to the vertical or transcendent. Others try to create an alternative—or: alternatives in plural—for the lost 'one and only' 'sacred canopy'; 'paradise lost'. Pop festivals, football matches and sports activities seem to be a satisfactory substitute for what religion used to be in earlier days.

Secularisation: A Contested Concept

While Taylor describes secularisation as an inevitable and ongoing process, a surprisingly different perspective is taken by the Dutch history scholar Herman Paul. Secularisation, Paul asserts, is an essentially contested concept. This scholar is of the opinion that secularisation is not an inescapable process, but an interpretive framework. In his publication, *Secularization. A Short History of a Grand Narrative* (2017) [16], he points to the fact that we should make a clear distinction between 'secularisation' and 'secularism'. 'Secularism' is defined by Paul as a closed, unconscious conviction in conflict with religious traditions. In this way, he provides, alongside Peter Berger's interpretation of secularisation, another interesting view on this societal phenomenon. While in Berger's interpretation—including in his revised interpretation—secularisation is understood as a process in itself, which involves people who are unable to resist the process in question, according to Paul, it is precisely the other way around. Things happen to take place in history and human beings—who are in need of a frame of reference—constructed the discourse of secularisation over time. According to Paul, people 'invented' the secularisation thesis for the purpose of their own relief, because they were in need 'of a script' [16] (p. 18). 'Secularisation is not a fact but a frame of interpretation', he states [16] (p. 23). Secularisation is not the fact that church attendance is in decline, it is the narrative people tell each other to make this fact understandable and acceptable. Paul is of the opinion that fact and narrative are closely related. In hindsight, (grand) narratives serve as justification; thinking ahead, they serve as inspiration and motivation.

In the texts that follow, we see that scholars—explicitly or implicitly—take a particular understanding of the concept of secularisation as their starting point, and approach the relation between education and religion accordingly.

The focus of six authors is on the **secular societal context** and the existing (im)possibilities for religious education—as a compulsory subject or as an elective subject.

The Dutch scholar, Marianne Moyaert, opens this part with a conceptual elaboration of inter-worldview education, as advocated by European politicians and education policy makers. The starting point for her article is key policy documents on the subject in question. Moyaert is critical of the pedagogical approach of 'learning to live in peace', an approach that also ignores socio-political problems. Critical examination of ideologies and societal structures is a must to keep a psychological burden off the shoulders of citizens.

Like Moyaert, Ömer Gürlesin pays attention to the socio-political context. In his article, which is based on his PhD research into the religiosity of Dutch–Turkish Muslims, Gürlesin describes the changing role, the self-image and the perception of imams within the Dutch–Turkish population in the Netherlands. He studies these changes from the perspective of the transition from a secular, mono-religious state in which religion is managed to the societal context of the Netherlands: a secular, plural state with freedom of religion. A lack of well-educated, culturally sensitive imams might increase young people's sensitivity to radical interpretations of Islam.

Fatih Genç gives an introduction to the history of religious education in Turkey. In addition to the new 3 × 4 curriculum with electives in religious education, the Imam Hatip schools are very popular. In order to avoid the constantly recurring dilemmas about the position of religious education in public

schools, Genç proposes 'value education' as an alternative to (and possibly preparatory study track for) the subject of religious education.

John Exalto and Gerdien Bertram-Troost discuss the position of religious schools in the Dutch society. Their discussion relates to the highly valued freedom of education in the Netherlands, which goes hand-in-hand with heated discussions about the significance of religious schools in a secular society. For orthodox Reformed schools, they recommend that these educational institutions express their pedagogical ideas about living together in a context of diverse life orientations, and clearly indicate how they as schools contribute to the development of their students as future citizens of the Dutch society.

Yaacov Katz describes the heterogeneous population of Israel, resulting in compulsory religious and heritage education for each population group separately. To bridge the differences and to create (more) social cohesion, Katz proposes citizenship education coupled with religious education and heritage education as a compulsory subject for all the students in all sectors of education.

Abdulkader Tayob informs the reader about religious education as envisioned in a policy document of the South African government. His plea is for a contextual understanding of secularisation, keeping an eye on the representation and putting in an appearance of religion in the public domain. Tayob advocates a delicate balance between the study of religion as an educational practice and the appearance of religion as a public and religious practice.

Ten authors focus on the positionality of **teachers and students** regarding religion(s) in a secular world, and their struggle for inclusive education in the secularised classroom. This part opens with a contribution from Robert Bowie and Lynn Revell. In their article, they discuss the way British Christian universities respond to extremism. According to Bowie and Revell, there is an urgent need for teacher expertise in responding to the complexity of the danger to the students, for independence of universities, for freedom of expression and shared values, as well as for public accountability.

Soo-Young Kwon et al. present a Korean case study on CRISPR/gene-driven technology in which theological and educational perspectives intermingle. Soo-Young Kwon and his colleagues believe that the related ethical issues require a Christian theological response, and offer new possibilities for Christian religious education in a secular society.

The Dutch scholars Bertram-Troost et al. discuss the tension that can arise because of an inconsistency between a school's religious identity and the positionality of teachers regarding the religious tradition of the school. On the basis of their research, they recommend an open attitude towards the variety of positions teachers can take with regard to the Christian identity of the school. The personal 'pilgrimage' of teachers requires serious attention as part of their developing expertise in teaching 'for', 'about' and 'from' the commitment to a (Christian) worldview.

The article written by Janieta Bartz and Thomas Bartz takes its starting point in the heterogeneous student population of the German schools—a heterogeneity in terms of religious and ethnic backgrounds, mother tongue and a variety of disabilities. The authors present 'inclusive education' as a way to respond adequately to this diversity. 'Reflective inclusion' in teacher training and 'learning in the presence of the other' are introduced as possible ways out of the embarrassment teachers experience when confronted with their multi-religious classroom population.

The multi-religious classroom population is also at the centre of Karin Kittelmann Flensner's contribution. She pays special attention to the polarisation that takes place within the debate between 'us' and 'them'. To overcome these excluding positions, a seemingly neutral 'secular' position is favoured by teachers to cope with diversity. However, this might (negatively?) influence the possibilities for a nuanced dialogue between students with different backgrounds who adhere to different belief systems.

Yusuf Öğretici explores what happens to the morality of students when religious belief disappears, changes, or evolves into a type of spirituality. He refers to the 'subjective turn' and discusses a traditional kind of religious education that cannot respond adequately to this challenge. As a result, students are 'lost in translation', without a solid foundation for their morality.

The interest of Stephanie Tremblay et al. goes to the majority–minority positions in Quebec (Canada) that influence the religious identity development of Muslim youth—fluctuating between an authentic subjective identity and a given, assigned identity as construed within the myth of the Quebecan majority, and as experienced by the Muslim minority itself. Border negotiations between 'us' and 'them' centre around cultural identity and arise, among other things, from the need for acceptance.

Paul John Isaac focuses on the changing role of Christianity in Namibian society, where it is feared that there will be a loss of morality if the subject of religious education would disappear from the curriculum. The author considers the recently introduced subject 'religious and moral education', in which religious diversity is linked to the political, social and economic issues of the country, as well as to moral values.

Jean Agten's starting point lies in narrative psychology. He describes in detail the theory and practice of bibliodrama as a way to include religious and secular narratives as 'partners in interreligious dialogue', by familiarising the students with their biographical narrative and a variety of cultural and religious narratives. In this way, the students' life orientation development can be explored and facilitated in a non-verbal way. A case study is presented to illustrate this theoretical approach.

Bas van den Berg and Cocky Fortuyn-van der Spek explore a form of bibliodrama adapted to religious education in the secular classroom context. They focus on increasing the pupils' knowledge of, and experience with, religious narratives. Their approach is illustrated with the biblical narrative of the Book of Esther.

We conclude this publication with an epilogue. We are proud of the richness of context-related approaches and reflections on the relationship between education and religion that have been brought together in this publication. We expect that the various contributions, with the presented examples and case studies, will stimulate the ongoing exploration and elaboration of the relationship between education and religion in the world of today and tomorrow—work-in-progress for coming generations.

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