

The topic of war in Catholic religious education in the Republic of Croatia

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Abstract

Three decades ago, the war for independence from the then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia took place on the territory of the Republic of Croatia. Only after the independence was won, the subject of confessional religious education got its place in the educational system of the Republic of Croatia. Today, wars are fought on other European and world fronts, among which the Russian-Ukrainian and Israeli-Palestinian armed conflicts capture the most media attention. All of them cause population migrations, which consequently affect religious education due to changes in culture, demography and interpersonal relations. The topic that this paper deals with is the extent to which the topic of war is present in the subject of Catholic religious education in the Republic of Croatia, especially in relation to the experience of the recent war of the Croatian people, and how and in what way this topic can be dealt with didactically and methodically in the teaching process, having in view of the actuality of war conflicts in the world and the curiosity of educational subjects.

Keywords

church – war – religious education – catholic social teaching – Croatia

Das Thema Krieg im katholischen Religionsunterricht in der Republik Kroatien

Abstract

Vor drei Jahrzehnten fand auf dem Gebiet der Republik Kroatien der Krieg um die Unabhängigkeit von der damaligen Sozialistischen Föderativen Republik Jugoslawien statt. Erst nach der gewonnenen Unabhängigkeit erhielt das Fach konfessioneller Religionsunterricht seinen Platz im Bildungssystem der Republik Kroatien. Heute werden Kriege an anderen europäischen und weltweiten Fronten geführt, wobei die bewaffneten Konflikte zwischen Russland und der Ukraine sowie zwischen Israel und Palästina die größte Aufmerksamkeit in den Medien erregen. Sie alle verursachen Bevölkerungswanderungen, die sich aufgrund von Veränderungen in der Kultur, der Demografie und den zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen auch auf den Religionsunterricht auswirken. Die vorliegende Arbeit befasst sich mit der Frage, inwieweit das Thema Krieg im katholischen Religionsunterricht in der Republik Kroatien präsent ist, insbesondere in Bezug auf die Erfahrungen des jüngsten Krieges des kroatischen Volkes, und wie und auf welche Weise dieses Thema angesichts der Aktualität kriegerischer Konflikte in der Welt und der Neugierde der Unterrichtsfächer didaktisch und methodisch im Unterrichtsprozess behandelt werden kann.

Schlagworte

Kirche – Krieg – Religionsunterricht – katholische Soziallehre – Kroatien

Introduction

The world was caught by surprise when the multi-year tension between the Russian Federation and Ukraine erupted in February 2022. The Russian army launched a military invasion of Ukraine, causing the loss of many human lives, new waves of refugees to the west of Europe and additional political instability in the world. Just a year and a half later, the Palestinians and Israelis went to war in the Middle East as a result of unresolved relations between the two nations. The Croatian people, on the other hand, are suffering from an even fresher and not completely healed wound of the defensive Homeland War, which took place in the territory of the present-day Republic of Croatia in the period from 1991 to 1995. It is ironic that these and many other wars are taking place at a time of relatively fresh memory of the most destructive war in history – the Second World War – who's still living witnesses were probably convinced that the human race had once and for all learned a lesson about itself. Yet war seems to be an inevitable part of human history.

If this is so, then the task of mankind is to make wars as rare as possible, and states of war as short as possible. In this task, the Catholic Church stands out, which throughout its history takes a negative attitude towards wars, calling in the name of Jesus Christ for universal peace, dialogue and brotherhood in the world.¹ There is a whole series of church documents that emphasize opposition to war and warn of its destructive force. The council fathers unconditionally condemned war, which should always be contained and avoided, calling for peace that must spring from mutual trust between nations.² Peace, therefore, is not the mere absence of war, nor does it arise from violent rule, but it is the fruit of order that God himself has impressed upon human society. It can never be acquired once and for all but must be built permanently. Building peace is not based on equal armed forces but on mutual trust and, at the same time, on the call for complete disarmament, and above all on the prohibition of atomic weapons.³ Peace is the premise and foundation for the realization of complete and solidary humanism, which is realized within the very principles of the Church's social teachings: the dignity of the human person, human rights, solidarity, subsidiarity, privileged care for the poor and the common good. Every war violates what the stated principles want to achieve, and in particular it encroaches on the dignity

1 Cf. POPE FRANCIS: *Fratelli tutti*: Encyclical letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship, Royal Press 2020, 103-111; 256-259.

2 Cf. PAUL VI.: *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world: Gaudium et spes*, Boston: MA: Pauline Books & Media 1965, 79-82.

3 Cf. JOHN XXIII.: *Pacem in Terris*: Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty, Catholic Truth Society 2002, 109-112.

of the human person, human rights and the common good, and therefore can never be the right answer to any situation in the world.⁴ The Church condemns the inhumanity of war, emphasizing the moral difference between aggressive war, which in itself is always immoral, and 'defensive' war as a permissible means of defense against aggressors. The latter belongs to the form of the so-called just war, which again must meet certain conditions of moral justification.⁵ The Christian faith is thus additionally promoted as one that advocates for peace. This postulate has its basis in the words of Christ, who calls for forgiveness and love for enemies (cf. Matt 18:21–35; Luke 6:27). Moreover, the Church teaches precisely that the only and true peace is possible only in forgiveness and reconciliation.⁶ At the center of forgiveness and reconciliation is Jesus Christ himself, who in the act of reconciliation with God, the sacrifice on the cross, gave man the possibility to break free from the embrace of violence and hostility.⁷

At a time when the subjects of the educational process are exposed daily to information from Ukraine and the territory of Palestine, we ask the question of how the topic of war reflects on children, how it affects them and whether there are any methodical didactic approaches that would be particularly useful in teaching religious studies. In addition, the topic that this paper intends to deal with is what the Catholic Church in the Republic of Croatia is doing in the field of school education to prevent war and establish (a mentality of) peace. For this purpose, we are investigating the extent to which the topic of war is present in the subject of Catholic religious education in the schools of the Republic of Croatia, especially if we take into account that the Croatian people have experienced many oppressions throughout history, from the period of the Venetians and the Ottomans, through the world wars to the last Homeland War, the victims of which are still fresh memories. All the more so since there is almost no family that did not lose one of its members in the defensive Homeland War from 1991 to 1995. The justification of this topic is additionally found in the fact that the subjects of the educational process in the Republic of Croatia are direct descendants of parents and grandparents or other members of the extended family who, as civilians or soldiers, were affected by the Homeland War and as such felt its direct consequences. In other words, the topic of war is present and influential in the

4 Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE: *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2005., 494-500.

5 BUZAR, Stipe: *Teorija pravednog rata sv. Tome Akvinskoga*, in: *Obnovljeni život*, 70/3 (2015), 308-311

6 Cf. IOANNES PAULUS II.: *Messagio per la Giornata Mondiale della Pace 2002*, in: *Acta apostolica sedis*, 94 2002, 136-137.

7 Cf. VOLF, Miroslav: *Exclusion and Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Nashville: Abingdon Press 1996, 29.

upbringing of children in Croatia. In Croatia, on important dates, such as the day of the fall of the city of Vukovar on November 18, 1991, in which about two thousand people lost their lives⁸, candles are lit all over the country, a holy mass is prayed and celebrated for the fallen veterans and its inhabitants and other cities. In this way, together with the telling of stories, the ritual rites of lighting candles and the sacrifice of the mass, and the common prayer, the traumatic memories of a people are healed and integrated into the potential for peace, reconciliation and forgiveness. Ivan Šarčević states that „facing the past, building a culture of memory in truth and justice, is one of the urgent tasks for the health of the individual, family, ethnic and religious community, especially in multi-ethnic and multi-religious post-war societies.”⁹ In addition, war is an important topic in the Church and its social science, and for the Croatian people this topic is also important for historical reasons. But is the topic sufficiently and adequately present in religious textbooks?

The Role of Religious Education in the Educational System in the Republic of Croatia

The subject of religious studies in the educational system in the Republic of Croatia has a relatively short recent history. Unlike most countries in Western Europe, in Croatia, the communist authorities of Yugoslavia gradually abolished religious education in schools, starting in 1945 until it was completely abolished in 1952. In that period, religious education was replaced by parish catechesis to the extent that this was possible despite atheistic propaganda and the persecution of believers and religious officials.¹⁰ Together with the democratic changes at the beginning of the 90s of the 20th century an expert debate was held in Croatian society about the introduction of religious education in primary and secondary schools. Confessional religious education was re-introduced in Croatian schools in 1991, at a time when war was raging in the area. This was followed by an international agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the Holy See on cooperation in the field of education and culture, which is still one of the fundamental documents for today's organization of religious education in Croatian schools.

According to the current curriculum of Catholic religious education, its role refers to giving students the opportunity to systematically, gradually and as comprehensively as possible get to know, deepen and adopt the Christian doctrine and

8 Cf. GUZMEJ, Jakov: *Od balvana do Dayton*, Zagreb: Hrvatski blok 2003, 75-76.

9 ŠARČEVIĆ, Ivan: *Kako ući u kulturu sjećanja?*, in: *Fondacija Centar za javno pravo*, 2020, 1.

10 Cf. AKMADŽA, Miroslav: *Katolička Crkva u komunističkoj Hrvatskoj 1945-1980.*, Zagreb: Despot Infinitus d.o.o 2013, 8.

the Catholic faith for the purpose – among other things – of achieving full human, moral and Christian maturity.¹¹ The course contributes to the complete education of a person and the realization of all their intellectual, moral and spiritual potential, which is part of the general goals of a democratic and humane school. Based on this, the contents and goals of the religious education course itself are inspired. Religious education also provides a valuable contribution to the humanization of the school and the education of students for solidarity, humanism and the construction of the so-called ‘civilization of love’. It does this by developing argumentative and critical thinking, building religious attitudes and values, ethical and moral awareness and conscience, moral principles and values such as freedom, responsibility, justice, solidarity, dialogue and the like. This is in accordance with some of the fundamental socio-cultural and moral values that stand out within the educational system of the Republic of Croatia.

In the context of speech on the subject of war and peace, religious education plays an indispensable role in the school system because the subject conveys evangelical values and the teachings of the Magisterium, in which peace and reconciliation are an integral part of the Christian message.¹² Religious education encourages students to engage in dialogue, tolerance and intercultural and interreligious cooperation that helps them understand the viewpoints of other ethnic or religious groups. In this way, religious education contributes to peace and reduces the misunderstanding that incites hatred and violence.¹³ The curriculum of the religious education subject offers competencies for the education of peace in all domains from the first to the last year. Among other things, they learn about the importance of peace and reconciliation for life in the community, faith that leads to freedom and peace, then about the values of the kingdom of God for the realization of peace and other things, especially in the domain “Christian love and morality in action” and “Church in the world”. In addition, religious education is interdisciplinary connected with other educational areas, cross-curricular topics and other teaching subjects, and, in this way, additionally promotes the fundamental competences of students that are connected with individual and social responsibilities and civic competences, among which building peace

11 Cf. MINISTARSTVO ZNANOSTI I OBRAZOVANJA: Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Katolički Vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije, in: [https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Publikacije/Predmetni/Kurikulu m%20nastavnog%20predmeta%20Katolicki%20vjeronauk%20za%20osnovne%20skole%20i%20gimnazije.pdf](https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Publikacije/Predmetni/Kurikulu%20nastavnog%20predmeta%20Katolicki%20vjeronauk%20za%20osnovne%20skole%20i%20gimnazije.pdf) (accessed on January 3, 2024), 5.

12 Cf. JOHN XXIII.: *Pacem in Terris*: Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty, Catholic Truth Society 2002, 169-172.

13 RAZUM, Ružica: *Odgojno djelovanje suvremene škole: izazovi i mogućnosti za religiozni odgoj*, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 77/4 2007., 870.

plays an important role.¹⁴ In this way – among other things – the acquisition of the competence ‘learning for life’ is achieved. This was confirmed by the research of the Center for Peace Studies, which states that most of the knowledge, skills and values of peace education are represented in religious education.¹⁵

The International Commission for the Development of Education for the 21st Century under the authority of UNESCO states the principle of ‘learning to live together’ as one of the fundamental pillars of education.¹⁶ The Republic of Croatia is not multicultural like some Western European countries where intercultural dialogue is a demanding and complex challenge, but it is not exempt from the influence of rapid social changes. In the last ten years, the population replacement process has been at work in Croatia, because the outflow of the local population to the countries of the European Union has opened up space for the influx of hundreds of thousands of foreign workers from Nepal and Pakistan. For this reason, in the subject of religious studies, the adoption of the competence of intercultural dialogue has become even more important, so that students – through building personal identity and relationships of mutual respect, friendship and peace between religions and other worldviews¹⁷ – really learn to ‘live together’.¹⁸ Dialogue is not only important for achieving results at the level of shared life, but also for the maturation of each individual.¹⁹ Dialogue is an indispensable element for building peace²⁰ because only in meeting another person, other cultures and other religions does a person really grow and mature. However, for a Christian, dialogue is not just a learned competence. It always stems from spirituality and one’s relationship with God as an expression of (un)faith.²¹ Therefore, dialogue, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace-building are integrative elements of the Christian message and form the core of Catholic confessional teaching.²²

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- 14 Cf. MINISTARSTVO ZNANOSTI I OBRAZOVANJA: Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Katolički Vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije, in: [https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocImages/dokumenti/Publikacije/Predmetni/Kurikulu m%20nastavnog%20predmeta%20 Katolički%20vjeronauk%20za%20osnovne%20skole%20i%20gimnazije.pdf](https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocImages/dokumenti/Publikacije/Predmetni/Kurikulu%20nastavnog%20predmeta%20Katolički%20vjeronauk%20za%20osnovne%20skole%20i%20gimnazije.pdf) (accessed on March 3, 2024), 156.
- 15 Cf. CENTAR ZA MIROVNE STUDIJE: *Učiti za mir. Analitička i normativna podloga za uvođenje vrijednosti, sadržaja i metoda mirovnog obrazovanja u formalni obrazovni sustav*, Zagreb: Nacionalna zaklada za razvoj civilnog društva, 62.
- 16 Cf. DELORS, Jacques: *Learning: the treasure within; report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*, Unesco Publishing 1996, 85-86.
- 17 Cf. MANDARIĆ, Valentina Blaženka / HOBLAJ, Alojzije / RAZUM, Ružica: *Vjeronauk – izazov Crkvi i školi*, Zagreb: Glas koncila 2011, 73.
- 18 Cf. RAZUM, Ružica / JURISIĆ, Marija / ŠEGINA, Tomislav: *Religijska dimenzija interkulturalnog obrazovanja: doprinos katoličkog vjeronauka interkulturalnom obrazovanju*, in: *Crkva u svijetu*, 56/4 2021, 592.
- 19 Recently, Pope Francis has emphasized the importance of dialogue the most, especially in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, in which the entire sixth chapter is dedicated to talking about dialogue and friendship in society. Cf. POPE FRANCIS: *Fratelli tutti: Encyclical letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship*, Royal Press 2020, 198-224.
- 20 Cf. RAZUM, Ružica: *Vjeronauk u školi u službi dijaloga i pomirenja*, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 87/3 2017, 568.
- 21 ŠARČEVIĆ, Ivan: *Međureligijski dijalog pred alternativom vjere i nevjere. U povodu 30. obljetnice Asiškoga međureligijskog susreta*, in: *Služba Božja*, 57/1 2017, 23.
- 22 RAZUM, Ružica: *Vjeronauk u školi u službi dijaloga i pomirenja*, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 87/3 2017, 565.

The Topic of War in Religious Education Textbooks

School is one of the most important educational institutions. In it, students acquire the necessary knowledge for future coexistence with others.²³ According to the curriculum of religious studies, a key component of its teaching and learning is connected to the idea of self-research in such a way that students learn about religion, in religion and from religion. This is based on the fact that the subject of religious education is not only in the service of learning information about faith and religion, but also encourages the strengthening of the student's personal and religious identity and encourages them to make decisions and choices in the field of religion and morality.²⁴ What role should religious education play in relation to violence and war? In reality, many believe that religion can play an important role in promoting violent behavior.²⁵ It is true that, throughout history, as well as today, it happened that wars and violence had a religious dimension, whether it was wars and conflicts between religions or within a religion. The Crusades and the Inquisition, in which the Church was directly or at least indirectly involved in war events, show how religion was often the cause of conflict. The connection between religion and war has proven to be important in the modern world as well. The Croatian people who largely live in the neighboring country of Bosnia and Herzegovina, have personally experienced what it means when religion is connected with nationalistic goals. Namely, in parallel with the development of the Homeland War in the territory of the Republic of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina also sought independence from Yugoslavia. In that war, three ethnic groups clashed: Serbs, predominantly of the Orthodox faith, Bosniaks, predominantly Muslim, and Croats, predominantly Catholic. Today, almost 30 years after the end of the mutual conflict, it is still possible to observe strong intolerance among the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

For this reason, it is necessary in the broader context of Central, Eastern and Southern European countries to promote those values on which the building of peace and reconciliation is based,²⁶ which create resistance to violence,²⁷ and to

23 Cf. PUHARIĆ, Zrinka / KIRALJ, Rudolf / ČAVIĆ, Dalibor: Znanje učenika osmog razreda osnovne škole o Domovinskom ratu, in: Radovi Zavoda za znanstvenoistraživački i umjetnički rad u Bjelovaru, 8 2014, 365.

24 Cf. MINISTARSTVO ZNANOSTI I OBRAZOVANJA, Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Katolički Vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije, u: <https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Publikacije/Predmetni/Kurikulum%20nastavnog%20predmeta%20Katolički%20vjeronauk%20za%20osnovne%20skole%20i%20gimnazije.pdf> (accessed on January 3, 2024), 8.

25 The topic of war and the relationship between war and religion occupied the important Croatian sociologist of religion Željko Mardešić (alias: Jakov Jukić). See: MARDEŠIĆ, Željko: Svjedočanstva o mirotvorstvu, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2002; MARDEŠIĆ, Željko: Mirotvorstvo, rat i religije, in: Crkva u svijetu, 36/4 2001, 385-388.; JUKIĆ, Jakov: Rat i protiv-rat u monoteističkim religijama, in: Obnovljeni život, 49/3-4 1994, 361-384; JUKIĆ, Jakov: Društvo, rat i religija, in: Društvena istraživanja, 3/2-3 1994, 165-189.

26 Cf. SILVESTRI, Sara / MAYALL, James, The Role of Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding, London: The British Academy 2015, 14.

27 Cf. Ibid, 42.

do everything to ensure that there is political will for peace.²⁸ In Croatia, as in all developed democratic societies, one of the fundamental roles of the school is to promote peace, freedom and social justice. Some of the basic socio-cultural and moral values that stand out within the school system in the Republic of Croatia are: knowledge, equality, solidarity, justice, respect, identity, responsibility. In this way, educational activity becomes an extremely powerful and important tool available for achieving a more harmonious and just society, and thus can reduce hatred, violence and war.²⁹ The values and roles present within the subject of religious education are listed. Consequently, religious upbringing and education can encourage students to accept the viewpoints of other ethnic or religious groups, which can significantly contribute to avoiding the lack of understanding that causes hatred and violence, which can consequently lead to war.³⁰

For this research, it was necessary to review Catholic religious education textbooks, since they are the basic teaching tool of every educational subject. We reviewed all textbooks from the first to the eighth grade of primary school and secondary school textbooks that are currently in use in schools.³¹ Initially, we focused on searching for the words war', warfare' and the like, AND THEN IN WHAT CONTEXT THESE WORDS ARE MENTIONED. THEN WE EXPANDED THE RESEARCH TO INCLUDE words that can refer to war, such as 'violence', 'hatred', 'suffering', 'evil', 'murder', and opposite terms such as 'peace' and 'human dignity'. The following tables and graphs, which we analyze throughout the paper, reveal the results of our efforts.

28 Cf. FALK, Clifford: All Pedagogy is Military, in: Kverbekk, Tone / Simpson, Harold / Peters, Michael (ed.): *Military Pedagogies and why they matter*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers 2008, 35.

29 Cf. RAZUM, Ružica: Odgojno djelovanje suvremene škole: izazovi i mogućnosti za religiozni odgoj, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 77/4 2007, 868.

30 Cf. *Ibid*, 875.

31 We list religious education textbooks for primary school in order by grade: PETKOVIĆ, Tihana / ŠIMUNOVIĆ, Josip / LIPOVAC, Suzana: *U Božjoj ljubavi*. Udžbenik za katolički vjeronauk prvog razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Glas Koncila 2020.; PETKOVIĆ, Tihana / ŠIMUNOVIĆ, Josip / LIPOVAC, Suzana: *U prijateljstvu s Bogom*. Udžbenik za katolički vjeronauk drugog razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Glas Koncila 2020.; PAŽIN, Ivica / PAVLOVIĆ, Ante / DŽAMBO ŠPOREC, Mirjana: *U ljubavi i pomirenju*. Udžbenik za katolički vjeronauk trećeg razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2020.; PAŽIN, Ivica / PAVLOVIĆ, Ante: *Darovi vjere i zajedništva*. Udžbenik za katolički vjeronauk četvrtog razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2020.; NOVAK, Mirjana / ŠIPINA, Barbara: *Učitelju, gdje stanuješ?* Udžbenik za katolički vjeronauk petog razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2020.; NOVAK, Mirjana / ŠIPINA, Barbara: *Biram slobodu*. Udžbenik za katolički vjeronauk šestog razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2020.; PERIŠ, Josip / ŠIMIĆ, Marina / PERČIĆ, Ivana: *Neka je Bog prvi*. Udžbenik za katolički vjeronauk sedmog razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2020.; PERIŠ, Josip / ŠIMIĆ, Marina / PERČIĆ, Ivana: *Ukorak s Isusom*. Udžbenik za katolički vjeronauk osmog razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2020. We list religious education textbooks for high school in order by grade: PERIŠ, Marin / VUČICA, Mirjana / VULETIĆ, Dušan: *Dođi i vidi 1*. Udžbenik katoličkog vjeronauka za 1. razred srednjih škola, Zagreb: Salesiana 2019.; VARGIĆ, Hrvoje / DŽEBA, Ivo / MILOVAC, Mario / ZUPČIĆ, Šime: *Dođi i vidi 2*. Udžbenik katoličkog vjeronauka za 2. razred srednjih škola, Zagreb: Salesiana 2020.; ŽIVKOVIĆ, Ivica / KUZMIČIĆ, Nikola / KOŠTA, Sandra: *Životu ususret*. Udžbenik katoličkog vjeronauka za 3. razred srednjih škola, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2021.; FILIPOVIĆ, Ana Thea / HAC, Ivana / ŽIVKOVIĆ, Ivica: *Gradimo bolji svijet*. Udžbenik katoličkog vjeronauka za 4. razred srednjih škola, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2021;

Grade	war	violence	hate	suffering	evil	murder	peace	dignity	total
1. grade					1				1
2. grade				1	4	1	1		7
3. grade	2	1		2	8	3	4		20
4. grade	9	1	2	2	3	4	15		36
5. grade			2		4		4		10
6. grade	7		1		10	1	2		21
7. grade	1	1	1	6	11		1		21
8. grade	6	1		1	10	1	1	6	26
Total	25	4	6	12	51	10	28	6	

Graph. 1. Table of terms by year – primary school

Searching through the primary school textbooks, we saw that very little is said about the mentioned terms in Religious Studies. Among them, the concept of evil stands out the most, which is mentioned a total of 51 times in all grades. The amount of representation of this term seems to increase proportionally with the age of the child, as it is mentioned only once in the first grade, eight times in the third grade, and ten times from the sixth to the eighth grade. Although we cannot say for sure, it seems that the concept of evil appears so often because it unites everything that is contrary to God's will and purpose.³² The second most common term is peace, which is mentioned 28 times. Violence is mentioned the least often, while students may hear about the concept of the dignity of the human person for the first time only in the eighth grade, and only in one place in the textbook.

The central concept of war is mentioned 25 times, most of which are in the fourth, sixth and seventh grades. In the fourth grade, the concept of war is mentioned in the title 'Guard the gift of life' in the context of studying God's fifth commandment „Thou shalt not kill”. In doing so, for the first time in the religious studies textbook, the student encounters the mention of a specific war, and, in this case, it is the Homeland War in the Republic of Croatia. In the column 'Investigate' the textbook states „A war took place in our homeland about twenty years ago. With the help of a religious teacher, research what happened in your town during the war. Were there any casualties? Maybe you can talk to someone about it. Maybe even do an interview and publish it.”³³ This proposal, which can be encouraged by the religious teacher as part of the lesson or done independently by the student, is the first concrete confrontation with the topic of war in religious education. Here, the task is set quite neutrally, and it depends on the religion

³² We avoided researching the concept of sin because we believed that the concept of evil is much broader and better describes and encompasses the concept of war.

³³ PAŽIN, Ivica / PAVLOVIĆ, Ante / DŽAMBO ŠPOREC, Mirjana: U ljubavi i pomirenju. Udžbenik za katolički vjeronauk trećeg razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2020,41.

teacher whether they want to talk more about the topic and present the position of the Christian faith and the Church on war to the students in an appropriate way. In the sixth grade, the concept of war is mostly mentioned in the context of learning about the Crusades, where, among other things, it is stated that „No war can be good, and the most terrible thing is when religious enthusiasm turns into hatred and fanaticism. The evils that happened during these wars are condemned today by both Christians and Muslims.“³⁴ In the same place, explaining the reasons for the crusades, it is stated that the noble intention to protect holy places often turned into the evil that every war brings: looting and bloodshed.³⁵ Unlike the reference to war in the fourth grade, here, in two sentences in two different places, the Christian moral judgment of war is explicitly stated. Then, in the eighth grade the topic of war is addressed incidentally through the title „The horrors of world wars and new ideologies“, where the emphasis is more on the state of the Church in Yugoslavia throughout the 20th century.³⁶ The concept of war is also mentioned in passing in other lessons during the year. For example, in the fifth grade they talk about King David and his victory over Goliath during the war against the Philistines, and in the seventh grade war is mentioned only once in the context of talking about the prophet Ezekiel.

Concepts related to murder are mainly related to the lesson about God's fifth commandment, „Thou shalt not kill“, which we can definitely relate to the theme of war. The concept of hatred, which we can take as a cause-and-effect relationship of war, is mentioned very rarely and not always in the context of war, just like violence and suffering. The concept of peace that favors the promotion of a non-war environment and the cessation of war is also scarcely mentioned, except in the fourth grade when talking about the general feature of Christ's peace and in the fifth grade when talking about the kingdom of Jesus.

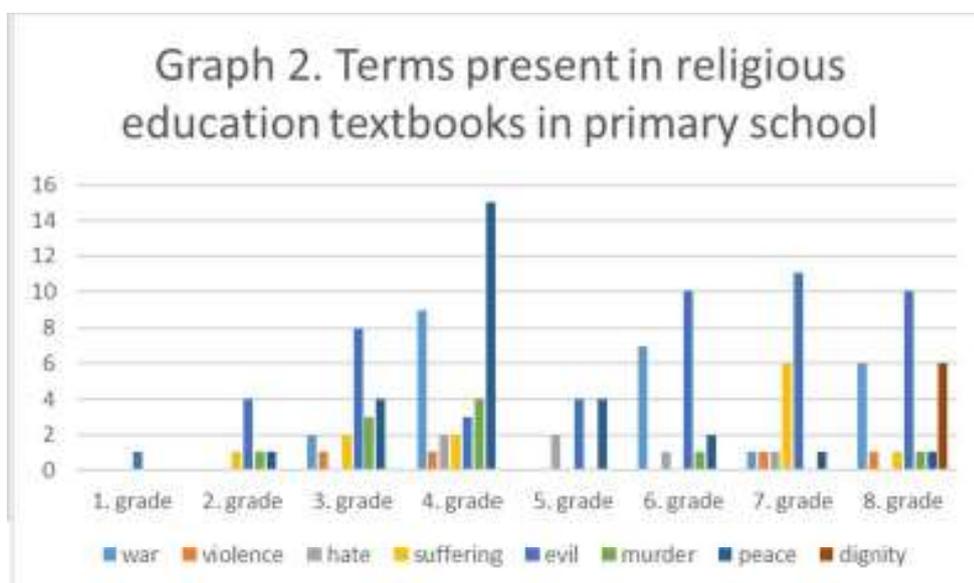
When we collect all the mentioned terms in a graph, we discover that their variety and frequency depend on the grade. Thus, in the first grade, only the concept of evil is mentioned – and only once – while in the fourth and eighth grades,

34 NOVAK, Mirjana / ŠIPINA, Barbara: *Biram slobodu. Udžbenik za katolički vjeronauk šestog razreda osnovne škole*, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2020, 38.

35 Cf. *Ibid.*

36 As a note, we consider it important to note that students in the Republic of Croatia start learning about wars throughout history in the 5th grade of elementary school, while they learn about the Homeland War in the 8th grade of elementary school and in the 4th grade of high school, if they attend four-year high school programs. However, the topic of the Homeland War is not dealt with long enough and in detail, such as the case with the Second World War, to which the textbook devotes several pages. Cf. BARIĆ, Nikica: *Povijest. Udžbenik iz povijesti za osmi razred osnovne škole*, Zagreb: Alfa 2021. As a result, a significant part of the students has little knowledge of the key events and people of the Homeland War. Given the historical importance of the Homeland War for the Croatian people, the above facts seem devastating. Cf. PUHARIĆ, Zrinka / KIRALJ, Rudolf / ČAVIĆ, Dalibor: *Znanje učenika osmog razreda osnovne škole o Domovinskom ratu*, in: *Radovi Zavoda za znanstvenoistraživački i umjetnički rad u Bjelovaru*, 8 2014, 361.

seven of the eight required terms appear in varying proportions. On the one hand, the reasons for avoiding negative concepts such as war, hatred and murder in the first two grades seem clear, considering the cognitive and emotional maturity of the students. The topics are more focused on the positive aspects of faith, where students are primarily introduced to the basics of the Christian faith and – among other things – experiencing God as a good Father, and Jesus as a friend who forgives and reconciles. On the other hand, students seem to remain out of step with real events in the world and their environment. Here we can add in passing that in the workbooks the term and theme of war explicitly appears only in two grades. In the workbook from the fifth grade of primary school, we find a task about the Crusades where the student is asked to state why the Crusades were something bad³⁷, while in one task from the workbook from the eighth grade, the student is explicitly asked the question of where wars and conflicts between people come from.³⁸



Graph 2. Terms present in religious education textbooks in primary school

After primary school, we list the Table of terms by grades – high school (Graph 3), which is systematized in the same way as the previously mentioned table for primary school. It should be mentioned here that Catholic religious education textbooks for high school were created for the gymnasium program but are also used in vocational schools. The only difference is in the teaching programs that are adapted to different types of vocational secondary schools.

37 Cf. NOVAK, Mirjana / ŠIPINA, Barbara: Učitelju, gdje stanuješ? Radna bilježnica za katolički vjeronauk petog razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2020, 38., 56-57.

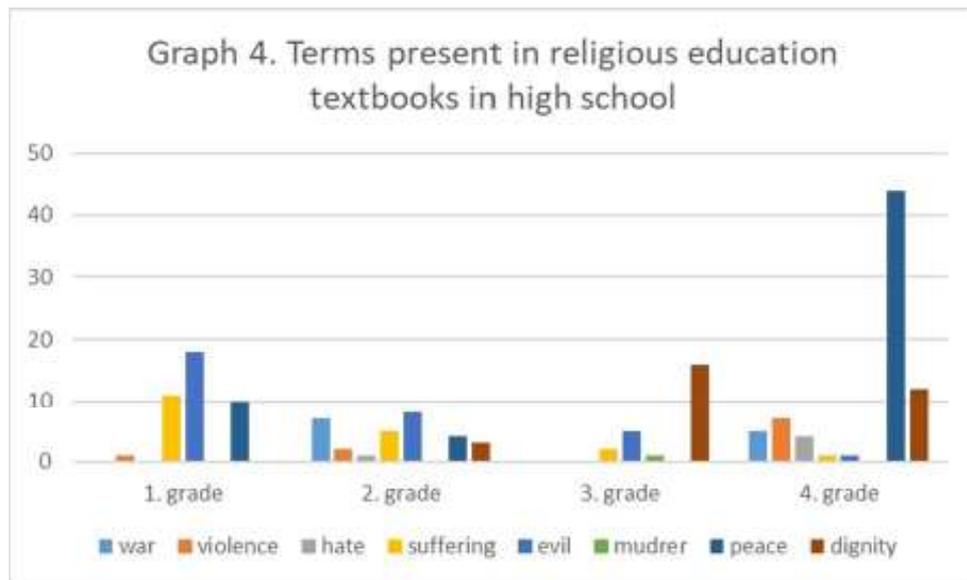
38 Cf. PERIŠ, Josip / ŠIMIĆ, Marina / PERČIĆ, Ivana: Ukorak s Isusom. Radna bilježnica za katolički vjeronauk šestog razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2020, 38., 67.

Grade	war	violence	hate	suffering	evil	murder	peace	dignity	total
1. grade		1		11	18		10		40
2. grade	7	2	1	5	8		4	3	30
3. grade				2	5	1		16	24
4. grade	5	7	4	1	1		44	12	74
total	12	10	5	19	32	1	58	31	

Graph 3. Table of terms by grade - high school

Secondary school is different from primary school in many ways. Among other things, it is expected that students are much more mature in high school, and cognitively and emotionally capable of facing more demanding topics. We can immediately see this by the total number of terms that are key to us within one year. Also, it is noteworthy that the term war is mentioned only in the second and fourth grade of high school, with the latter referring only to four-year types of high school education. In the second grade of secondary school, the theme of the Crusades is dealt with again within the teaching topic "Sins of the Church in the Middle Ages: truth and myths". In this context, the concepts of violence, suffering and evil are also mentioned. In contrast to textbooks from the sixth grade of primary school, there is more emphasis placed on the reasons for starting the First Crusade here, while only those remembered as shameful events committed in the name of God and the Church stand out from the others. The concept of war is further mentioned in the context of the relationship between media and truth in the modern world. The fourth-grade high school textbook mentions the concept of war in two lessons. The first is in the context of speaking about the principle of the common good of the Church's Social Doctrine, and the second is in the Church's actions in the circumstances of the Homeland War. Admittedly, the textbook does not say much about the Homeland War itself, but basically talks about the call of the Church to avoid hatred and revenge, lay down weapons, resolve conflicts peacefully and call for prayer for peace.

In the following graph, we can see how the terms are represented by grades.

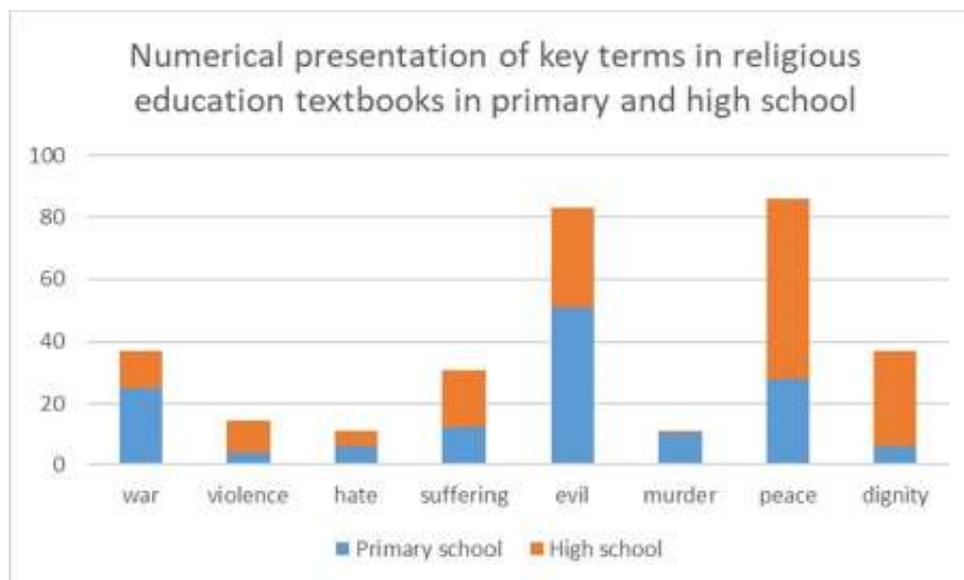


Graph 4. Terms present in religious education textbooks in high school

According to the numerical representation of key concepts in religious education textbooks in primary and secondary schools (Graph 5), the concept of peace is generally the most represented in secondary education, in contrast to primary school, where the concept of evil is the most represented. If we look at it as a whole, then the concepts of evil and peace are mentioned equally often (83–86). Perhaps we could interpret this in the way that students in primary school are more focused on getting to know the evil that they should avoid, while students in high school, when they are between the ages of 14 and 18, are focused on the peace that they are called to build. We could consider it positive that the concept and topic of peace appears relatively often in religious education during primary and secondary school education. However, the term is represented in ten out of a total of twelve grades. This seems extremely important to us, since, among other things, the pastoral constitution “Gaudium et Spes” teaches us that our most important concern is to implant new peaceful attitudes in everyone’s minds³⁹, which are very necessary for building a mentality of peace. For that, quality education is needed, which religious education has the opportunity to offer. For example, in order for students to stand up for the issue of peace, and at the same time for the issue of solidarity and brotherhood, it is necessary to build competence that enables quality coexistence of all. This competence will often begin with the treatment of painful memories and deep wounds that are the result of old conflicts and wars, ethnic intolerance, exclusion of the other and

³⁹ Cf. PAUL VI., Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world: Gaudium et spes, Boston: MA: Pauline Books & Media 1965, 82.

the different, and the like, as is the case in the Republic of Croatia.⁴⁰ The theme of peace and the presentation of Jesus Christ as the king of peace thus becomes the starting point for building a mentality of peace.



Graph 5. Numerical presentation of key terms in religious education textbooks in primary and high school

Analyzing the textbooks, we see that the topic and concept of war is not mentioned very often, and yet students sometimes encounter this topic and concept. We see a certain deficiency in this matter because, since the topic of war is specifically and concretely addressed for the first time only in the fourth grade, it seems as if students from the first to the third grade learn religious education without being aware of living in a time where there is war. Therefore, it is important that children deal with the topic of war in order to competently, multidimensionally and critically know how to judge the current situation in the world, even under the theme of peace. Here we must be extremely critical of positive topics that would go in the direction of building peace, respecting the dignity of the human person and preserving human rights. The question arises, how it is possible that the social teaching of the Church is only discussed concretely in the eighth grade, and the topic of peace is just as incidental in that class as the topic of war. Since eighth grade is attended by children at the age of 14, it is necessary to start much earlier with the adoption of the principles of the Church's social teachings, especially the principle of the dignity of the human person derived from the concept of 'Imago Dei', humanity in the image of God.⁴¹ Only if the dignity of the human person comes to the fore will it be possible to talk about

⁴⁰ Cf. GARMAZ, Jadranka / MENDEL, Hans: Neki elementi međureligijske kompetencije iz perspektive vjeronaučne didaktike, in: Crkva u svijetu, 56/2 2021, 255.

⁴¹ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE: Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2005, 108-111.

the principles of personality, tolerance, interpersonal dialogue and everything else that definitely helps in building peace. In principle, there are teaching subtopics in all grades of religious education through which one can learn about community as a prerequisite for peace, about mutual brotherhood, connection and solidarity between people. When children learn these positive aspects, the topic of war and war conflicts will automatically appear as something bad, undesirable, unacceptable and harmful, and as something related to threats and violence towards others. This critical attitude can be developed starting from the first grade of primary school. For example, in the textbook of the first grade, we find the subtopics „We are all brothers and sisters“ and „Jesus calls us to forgive“; in the second year, the Golden Rule (cf. Matt 7:12) and the subtopic „Life has both bright and dark sides“ and the like are covered; in the third year we find the subtheme „Jesus' call to forgiveness and reconciliation“; in the fourth grade, the subtopic „Keep the gift of life“; in the first grade of high school, students work on the topic „Challenges of evil and suffering“, and similar themes. All these topics are present in the textbooks so that the religion teacher, in accordance with the dynamics of the group, encourages the development of the competencies of tolerance, cooperation, peace, reconciliation and good quality coexistence in the students.

Some Teaching Suggestions on the Topic of War in Religious Education

It would be wrong if the reader, on the basis of what has been stated so far, draws the conclusion that the more frequent appearance of the theme of war (and peace) is a priori better. In principle, this is indeed true, because more frequent processing of any topic gives students the opportunity to acquire competencies and outcomes better and more clearly, and further deepen them. Or as the proverb says: “Repetition is the mother of knowledge”. In this context, it is worth mentioning that many biblical, theological, anthropological and other topics are repeated in different years. Of course, the quantity of representation of any topic is not of crucial importance, but its quality is. A number of factors depend on this, among which the religious teacher plays a key – perhaps even decisive – role: the course of the lesson/process mostly depends on their commitment, creativity, engagement and other elements pertaining to personality. They are not ordinary lecturers, but creators of mutual relationships that, among other things, enable teaching based on mutual understanding, equality and inter-

cultural sensitivity.⁴² In this final part, we try to offer competencies for coexistence, peace and tolerance, and give concrete and high-quality suggestions for teaching on the topic of war (and peace) in religious education, which each religious teacher can implement in their work in their own way.

However, before that, additional reasons for dealing with the subject of war should be highlighted. The process of globalization and technological progress has led to access to information with unprecedented speed and ease. In just a few swipes of the finger, we can find out what is happening on the other side of the world, and especially about the negativity in the world, given the media's focus on bad events. This is the case, for example, with the war in Ukraine and in the territory of Palestine. Children are easily exposed to information about these events, and curiosity often arises about the reasons for such events. Here we can ask why the subject of war would be important for study and teaching in the first place – and especially in the subject of religious studies. The Roman orator Cicero said that „*historia magistra vitae est*“. Applying this in the context of learning about war, it would mean that understanding the causes and consequences of war can help us avoid such and similar scenarios in the present and future. Learning about war is at the same time learning about human nature and what humans are capable of doing, be that positive or negative. Second, on an emotional level, learning about war can encourage a sense of empathy and solidarity for those who have suffered the consequences of wars in students, while a sense of respect and tribute can be created for the victims themselves. This reason is particularly important for students belonging to those nations that have experienced war in their history, just like the case of the Republic of Croatia. In addition, it is a fact that many wars have shaped the socio-political picture of the world as we know it today, and the wars in Ukraine and in the Palestine area may have the same result in their final outcome. Therefore, learning about war in religious education aims at developing critical thinking, promoting peace, but also practicing concrete solidarity with those affected and helping victims of war. All this can also be harmonized with the general goals of religious education, which are the education of students for solidary humanism and the construction of the so-called ‘civilization of love’, and, moreover, by building moral principles and values such as freedom, responsibility, justice, solidarity, dialogue and the like.⁴³ Furthermore, in general, in religious education classes, students

42 Cf. PRIŠL, Elvi, Odgoj i obrazovanje za interkulturalnu kompetenciju (vjero)učitelja, in: RAZUM, Ružica / MALOVIĆ, Nenad / VUJICA, Kristina (ed.): *Religijsko obrazovanje u interkulturalnoj Europi*, Zagreb: Katolički bogoslovni fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2022., 13-15.

43 Cf. MINISTARSTVO ZNANOSTI I OBRAZOVANJA, Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Katolički Vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije, u: [https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Publikacije/Predmetni/Kurikulu m%20nastavnog%20predmeta%20Katolicki%20vjeronauk%20za%20osnovne%20skole%20i%20gimnazije.pdf](https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Publikacije/Predmetni/Kurikulu%20nastavnog%20predmeta%20Katolicki%20vjeronauk%20za%20osnovne%20skole%20i%20gimnazije.pdf) (accessed on January 3, 2024), 5.

learn about the consequences of bad behavior as a consequence of abandoning God's way and his commandments many times, in many ways and through different biblical examples, and thus also about the importance of closeness to God and the positive aspects of authentic living of faith.

Therefore, the topic of war in religious education can be treated in different ways, according to the needs and possibilities of the class group. It can be processed through the adoption of values, encouragement of cooperation, acceptance of differences, emphasis on critical thinking, active solving of individual problems, and the like. If students need to develop empathy with the victims, to present them with an emotional world, a multi-perspective and a holistic approach, then the subject of war can be approached interpretively-analytically or using the method of bibliology or bibliodrama through various biblical passages. With the help of interpretation competences, students will be able to recognize, understand and respect themselves and others. This attention focused on the religious dimension of intercultural education can contribute to peace, tolerance and respect.⁴⁴ There are many biblical texts that can be taken as an example, such as Jesus' speech about kissing the enemy (cf. Luke 6:27), turning the other cheek in case of receiving a blow (cf. Matt. 5:29) or the call to „put the sword back in its sheath“ (Matt. 26:52), the attitude of Saint Paul and Silas in captivity (cf. Acts 16:16–40) and the like. Where it is necessary to develop a critical attitude towards war in students, it is possible to set up the lesson in a problem-creative way where students would discuss the term just war, grapple with the biblical passages in which we find that God calls for war (cf. 1 Sam. 15:3; Josh. 4:13, etc.) and the like. In principle, in religious education, attention should be directed towards education for solidarity because solidarity can be understood as a matter of justice and world peace.⁴⁵ This means that the subject of war needs to be dealt with in the context of the principle of solidarity, which belongs to the core principles of the Church's social doctrine itself. Of course, for the promotion of peace and tolerance, the principle of the dignity of the human person is important, which reveals to us that in terms of dignity, all people are equal because they were created by the same God the Father. This same principle, in turn, reveals to us the originality and uniqueness of each person within the framework of intercultural education. Individuality in appearance, ethnic and religious affiliation, attitudes, opinions, experiences and the like are natural phenomena. There-

44 Cf. RAZUM, Ružica / JURIŠIĆ, Marija: Religijska dimenzija interkulturalnog obrazovanja u europskim i hrvatskim dokumentima, in: RAZUM, Ružica / MALOVIĆ, Nenad / VUJICA, Kristina (ed.), *Religijsko obrazovanje u interkulturalnoj Europi*, Zagreb: Katolički bogoslovni fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2022., 218.

45 RAZUM, Ružica: Odgojno djelovanje suvremene škole: izazovi i mogućnosti za religiozni odgoj, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 77/4 2007, 874.

fore, it is necessary to encourage the acceptance of one's own and other people's diversity and uniqueness as an asset, not as a disadvantage. Acceptance is more than the existence of an awareness of diversity: it is based on the entire education that enables the student to develop as a social being through coexistence and cooperation with others. Among other things, students can acquire competences for making every day and life decisions from the earliest days on by understanding the value of equality, and for actively working to prevent and suppress prejudices, discrimination and other factors that can encourage violence.⁴⁶

In the context of intercultural education, interreligious dialogue should be mentioned. Religious education enables the acquisition of interreligious competences, which essentially require the processing and healing of painful memories and deep wounds caused by religious conflicts, ethnic intolerance and exclusion of the other. Interreligious competence is focused on what religions have in common and on their comparison, and the education process itself places emphasis on mutual encounters, getting to know each other's views, as well as learning with and from others.⁴⁷ This brings us to the fact that for complete, integrative learning and teaching about the topic of war, it is very important to include the educational outcome on an emotional level, since interreligious competences always imply a fundamental emotional connection.⁴⁸ Immersing themselves in the situation allows the students to learn better and learn the teaching content in a way that touches their emotions. In other words, the goal is to make students active participants in the teaching process and not passive listeners of the teacher's presentation.⁴⁹ In order to succeed, it is crucial to create internal motivation⁵⁰ and empathy in class in a way that connects with their own lives. Both motivation and empathy are relevant because they make a difference in overall cognition, action and emotion.⁵¹ How to succeed and achieve this depends not so much on proposals and models as on the willingness, determination and

46 Cf. PRIŠL, Elvi, Odgoj i obrazovanje za interkulturalnu kompetenciju (vjero)učitelja, in: RAZUM, Ružica / MALOVIĆ, Nenad / VUJICA, Kristina (ed.): *Religijsko obrazovanje u interkulturalnoj Europi*, Zagreb: Katolički bogoslovni fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2022., 13-15.

47 Cf. GARMAZ, Jadranka / MENDEL, Hans: Stjecanje transreligijskih kompetencija, in: RAZUM, Ružica / MALOVIĆ, Nenad / VUJICA, Kristina (ed.): *Religijsko obrazovanje u interkulturalnoj Europi*, Zagreb: Katolički bogoslovni fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2022., 25-28.

48 Cf. *Ibid*, 35.

49 Cf. FILIPOVIĆ, Ana Thea: Vjeronauk i promicanje duhovnog razvoja učenika u ozračju novog interesa za duhovnost, in: Radovi Zavoda za znanstvenoistraživački i umjetnički rad u Bjelovaru, 11 2017, 137.

50 Cf. LINIĆ JOGAN, Dajna: Motivacija u nastavi vjeronauka, in: Kateheza, 25/1 2003, 45-48.

51 Cf. WEINBERGER, Yehudith: The Role of Empathy in Dealing with the Complexity and Uncertainty within the Educational Field: Meaningful Learning at the „Museum Adventure Course“, Kondo, Makiko (ed.): *Empathy – An Evidence-based Interdisciplinary Perspective*, InTechOpen 2017, 129-144.

authenticity of the religious teacher himself.⁵² Some of the proposals could be to connect students with the experience of war in the immediate vicinity or among their family members. In the Republic of Croatia this is very possible considering that almost every student today is related to a direct participant in the war. Through research work, students can find out more information about the war from direct experience, and how faith, and especially the prayer of the rosary, had a great significance among the soldiers and the people as hope for success in the defense mission. This is because almost every soldier who participated in the defensive war possessed a rosary, they prayed and carried a rosary around their neck or around their arm.⁵³ The truthfully told events of the past are an important model for building peace. In addition, narration has a therapeutic and pedagogical function in its essence.⁵⁴ As we have already said, a specific proposal already exists in the textbook of the fourth grade of primary school.⁵⁵ With regard to the current war in Ukraine and in the territory of Palestine, it may be possible and entirely appropriate for refugees from that area to share their experience, if they wish to do so. For example, in the first year since the beginning of the war, a total of 22,407 Ukrainian refugees arrived in the Republic of Croatia, of which 7,433 were children.⁵⁶ A good number of refugees are still present, and some of the children attend classes.

Meeting with refugees is, in most cases, perceived as meeting with unknown people, which always arouses feelings of anxiety, fear, resistance and challenge. Therefore, it is necessary to consider ways of dealing with the unknown, where it is necessary, among other things, to train students to change their perspective. Today's world is marked by pluralism, and the ability to understand people who come from other cultures and religions is the basis for building social and cultural unity, and thus peace.⁵⁷ From the experience of our own Homeland War and the numerous refugees who flooded Croatia in the nineties of the 20th century, we know that it is necessary to provide support to refugees. Transferred to schools, this means that every religion teacher should be able to have an open

52 For example, history teacher Perica Vujić brought the experience of the First World War closer to the students of the seventh grade of the elementary school by drawing an analogy with the flood of the Sava River, which the students personally experienced in their area. VUJIĆ, Perica: Prvi svjetski rat – kako ga povezati s iskustvom svojih učenika?, in: *Povijest u nastavi*, 13/1 2015, 27-28.

53 Cf. BURILLOVIĆ, Silvana / PARLOV, Mladen: Krunica u domovinskom ratu. Znak vjerskog rata ili vjere u ratu?, in: *Služba Božja*, 53/2 2013, 167-171.

54 ŠARČEVIĆ, Ivan: Kako ući u kulturu sjećanja?, in: *Fondacija Centar za javno pravo*, 2020, 1.

55 Cf. PAŽIN, Ivica / PAVLOVIĆ, Ante / DŽAMBO ŠPOREC, Mirjana, U ljubavi i pomirenju. Udžbenik za katolički vjeronauk četvrtog razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2020, 41.

56 Data found in: <https://hrvatskazaukrajinu.gov.hr/> (accessed on January 3, 2024).

57 Cf. GARMAZ, Jadranka / MENDL, Hans: Stjecanje transreligijskih kompetencija, in: RAZUM, Ružica / MALOVIĆ, Nenad / VUJICA, Kristina (ed.): *Religijsko obrazovanje u interkulturalnoj Europi*, Zagreb: Katolički bogoslovni fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2022., 33-34.

conversation about the war, no matter how demanding the topic may be. This means that the religious teacher should develop a special sensibility, knowledge and attitude about the subject of war in basic education and be able to approach this subject more prospectively, calmly and in an appropriate way, depending on the age, the situation and the experience of the students. In the end, it is always very important to check whether the conversation with the students ended with understanding, in a good positive atmosphere of security, and with hope and attitudes that lead to forgiveness and reconciliation. In higher grades, when students are more mature and capable, it is possible to discuss the topic of war more seriously and in detail, where it is necessary to emphasize the development of critical thinking. Whether it would be useful to show video clips of wars and war consequences should be very carefully and prudently considered. The use of videos in the educational process has long been examined, but it is still a matter of debate because videos take new forms and can be adapted in multiple learning scenarios. However, as newer generations become increasingly digital and visually literate and accustomed to learning through visual forms, the educational process must be adapted to their needs and ways of understanding.⁵⁸

According to the curriculum of religious education in primary school and according to the domain Church in the world, it is necessary for the religious teacher to develop communicative competence.⁵⁹ Teachers should be able to assertively speak about the war and its consequences, bearing in mind the history of the Croatian nation, which was traumatic and included many victims of war and destruction. This is necessary in order to encourage students to communicate about their knowledge, experiences and feelings that arise when the topic of war is mentioned. Moreover, in order for students to be able to take a personal stand regarding the main social problems of today, among which are the question of the value and meaning of human life, the arms race and unjust wars, it is necessary not to make the topic of war taboo, but to gradually open it up. In this way, religious education helps students to accept and live according to the values of peace, justice and coexistence⁶⁰, and thus the subject itself proves to be relevant in society in terms of peace and social cohesion.⁶¹

58 Cf. GALATSOPOULOU, Fani / KENTERELIDOU, Clio / KOTSAKIS, Rigas / MATSIOLA, Maria: Examining Students' Perceptions towards Video-Based and Video-Assisted Active Learning Scenarios in Journalism and Communication Courses, in: *Education Sciences*, 12/2 2022, 16.

59 Cf. MINISTARSTVO ZNANOSTI I OBRAZOVANJA: Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Katolički Vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije, u: <https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocImages/dokumenti/Publikacije/Predmetni/Kurikulum%20nastavnog%20predmeta%20Katolicki%20vjonauk%20za%20osnovne%20skole%20i%20gimnazije.pdf> (accessed on January 3, 2024), 11-12.

60 Cf. RAZUM, Ružica: Odgojno djelovanje suvremene škole: izazovi i mogućnosti za religiozni odgoj, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 77/4 2007, 870.

61 Cf. GARMAZ, Jadranka / MENDL, Hans: Neki elementi međureligijske kompetencije iz perspektive vjeronaučne didaktike, in: *Crkva u svijetu*, 56/2 2021, 256.

Conclusion

Since the Republic of Croatia was under war occupation in the 1990s and the current generation of parents was a witness to that war, memories of suffering and war victims are very vivid and traumatic. Therefore, it was to be expected that the themes of war, reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue and cooperation are represented in religious education textbooks in all classes, according to the age and abilities of the students. However, the qualitative research of religious textbooks using the method of analysis of concepts and conceptual groups produced different results.

Analyzing a total of twelve textbooks in primary and secondary schools, we observed a mostly subtle and almost imperceptible presence of the concept of war, while greater emphasis is placed on talking about evil in general. The topic of war is dealt with in certain years in the context of speaking about the state and actions of the Church in certain historical events, such as the Crusades, world wars and the Homeland War. The textbooks approach the topic and concept of war objectively, emphasizing that „no war can be good, and the most terrible thing is when religious enthusiasm turns into hatred and fanaticism.“⁶² The concept of fanaticism, especially religious fanaticism, was to be expected in religious textbooks, but it is almost absent. Therefore, it is to be expected that war, enmity, hatred, fanaticism and religious fanaticism, as well as the topic of intolerance are dealt with more in religious education curricula and textbooks. This in itself does not mean that the quantitative representation of these topics would result in the acquisition of greater competences for peace, given that the work in class depends to a greater extent on quality presentation. However, for the purpose of education for peace, we believe that a greater presence of this topic in current events in the world is a good start. Since the textbooks in Croatia have been revised for the fifth time since the introduction of religious education in schools, it is to be expected that the theme of war will be more intensively, comprehensively and critically introduced in the religious education content in the newer religious education editions. The possibilities and methods are diverse: from discussions, open conversations, performative religious education, to bibliology and bibliodrama, role playing, video and film – all of this can help students experience the complexity of war and the benefit of peace that is not in

62 NOVAK, Mirjana / ŠIPINA, Barbara: Biram slobodu. Udžbenik za katolički vjeronauk šestog razreda osnovne škole, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 2020, 38.

itself understandable from the everyday life that we enjoy from the grace of peace.⁶³

Religious education undoubtedly supports the building of peace in the world and understanding between people. Unlike other subjects, education for peace in religious education is represented in all three dimensions: knowledge, skills and values. One of the goals of religious education is to train students to treat themselves and others responsibly. And, in order for students to stand up for peace and solidarity against war and violence, it is necessary to build competence that enables quality coexistence of all people. This includes communicative competence, competence in the field of acquired experiences and intellectual knowledge of the truth, goodness and beauty of an act and objective observation and learning, and generic competencies that can be partly integrated into specific educational outcomes in an atmosphere of mutual dialogue. This work indicated that, although there is a lack of talk about the theme of war, the theme of peace is still to some extent explicitly present and permeates through all ages. Competencies for peace – we could say – are fundamental life competencies that enable students to become mature, (self-)critical and responsible citizens in society, and are thereby also contributing to the prevention of violent behavior. However, it is precisely the competence for peace that often begins with the treatment of painful memories and deep wounds that are the result of conflicts or wars, as is the case in the territory of the Republic of Croatia.⁶⁴ In addition, given the necessary competencies of the students, it is expected that it is approached from multiple perspectives, dealing with it as part of the topics of human dignity and also the topics of interreligious cooperation and dialogue, which are a necessary means of protection from any violence, especially from (religious) war conflicts.

63 Miroslav Volf speaks significantly about peace, forgiveness and reconciliation in: Cf. VOLF, Miroslav: *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Nashville: Abingdon Press 1996.

64 Cf. GARMAZ, Jadranka / MENDL, Hans: Neki elementi međureligijske kompetencije iz perspektive vjeronaučne didaktike, in: *Crkva u svijetu*, 56/2 2021, 254-255.