

## **Religious Interculturalism (‘Diakoultourismos’) – Interreligious Ethics**

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**Abstract:** *Through history, the concept of ‘culture’ has been differentiated from the meaning of “civilization”. Culture is linked to religious education, since it refers to the spirituality of people. The differentiation between the terms culture and civilization can be utilised so that the superficial content of interculturalism is distinguished from a substantial interculturalism, using the following meanings: interculturalism (intercivilization) and interculturalism (“diakoultourismos”). Through this separation, the second term interculturalism (“diakoultourismos”) refers to an authentic communication. Religious “diakoultourismos” is the spiritual culture, which every religion offers to the students, so that they can communicate with internal politeness. In primary education, faith and moral ideas and religious and humanitarian values in cultural patterns, associated with existential questions of human being, are crucial. As a result, existential self-consciousness, cultural awareness and inter-religious ethics are formulated. For this reason, the necessity of faith in childhood is inculcated. Religious education prevents cultural amalgamation when education targets in respect for diversity. Interreligious ethics and religious interculturalism (“diakoultourismos”) require cultural and religious diversity. Comparison of religions’ culture can contribute to an objective and judicial investigation of religions, avoiding cultural and religious uniformity and relativism. In conclusion, the significance of implementing an impartial investigation is considered essential, so that universal human rights and values, arising from each religion, are utilized for each country’s education.*

**Keywords:** *culture, civilization, interculturalism, “diakoultourismos”, interreligious ethics.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

After the 19<sup>th</sup> century, inside history, the concept of ‘culture’ was differentiated from the meaning of “civilization”. Culture obtained a slightly imperialist connotation, which was based on external human achievements, according to the positivist direction. The conceptual content of culture refers to the internal culture/ ‘cultivation’ of the soul and does not follow the global commercialization, individuality or profit, which are some negative signs of modernism. Therefore, culture is linked to religious education, since it refers to the spirituality of people, shaping consciousness and illuminating the unconscious of human being. At this point, this particular distinction could be followed by the quality of global communication of people. The acquisition of qualitative internal relations is a matter of mental ‘cultivation’ of each nation’s spirit. Consequently, the differentiation between the terms culture and civilization can be utilised so that the superficial content of interculturalism is distinguished from a substantial interculturalism, using the following meanings: interculturalism (intercivilization) and interculturalism (“diakoultourismos”). Through this separation, the second term “interculturalism” refers to an authentic communication that is not based on financial transactions or superficial considerations. In primary education, faith and moral/ethical ideas and religious, humanitarian and social values in cultural patterns, associated with existential questions of human being, are crucial. As a result, existential self-consciousness, cultural awareness and inter-religious ethics are formulated. For this reason, the necessity of faith in childhood is inculcated.

Subjective approaches and influence, deriving from the global power of alienation, are focused on social and economic power and individuality, as well. Therefore, these are negative manifestations of modernism and are likely to deprive education from the psycho-pedagogical character of each religion.

Schooling in a religion’s ethos and morality or in an indigenous culture and its history is not simply connected to knowledge, since it is related to the notion of the person and his destination. An ethical

religiousness, reinforced by its universal value, can be interpersonally ethical, intercultural and interreligious. Being trained in ethics, a cultural attitude to life is composed. In that way, diversity is constantly gaining support and contributes to the acquisition of intercultural consciousness when expressing humanism with ontology and identifying the universality of human rights and values.

Combining interculturalism with the negative sense of globalization may cause intercultural distortion due to the repulsion of diversity. This occurs in cases when:

- Heresies and denominational differences that arose within a religion are underrated or ignored,
- it is argued that all religions are the same, aiming at the creation of a pan-religion.

Religious education prevents cultural amalgamation, caused by the economic imperatives and acts of selfishness, when education targets in respect for diversity. The negative aspect of globalization is indifferent to the criteria of cultures' and religions' diversification. Interreligious ethics and religious interculturalism ("diakoultouralismos") require cultural and religious diversity.

Comparison of religions' culture can contribute to an objective and judicial investigation of religions, avoiding cultural and religious uniformity and relativism, too. This constitutes a cognitive process by capturing and understanding individual and unique objects in both subjective terms (personal experiences) and at an objective level, based on the observation and investigation of each religion's principles.

In terms of education and utilization of universal virtues, raised in a religion, an apathetic (impassive) comparison of the religions is going to be developed. The 'cultivation' of love and tolerance for diversity is a religious comparison without empathy or fear. For instance, internalization of pedagogical principles of Christianity (love, respect for diversity) does not create resentment. On the contrary, Christianity contributes to an objective religious comparison which promotes respect for other religions.

Moreover, comparison of religions' culture is legitimate, since it explores the differences and similarities of religions, on existential issues and on considerations related to humanism, social relations and ecology. However, a religious comparison is negative when citizens and believers use their culture and their faith to denigrate heterogeneous citizens and those, who believe in other religions, creating feelings of superiority and arrogance.

In conclusion, the significance of implementing an impartial investigation is considered essential, so that universal human rights and values, arising from each religion, are utilized for each country's education. Finally, respect to the uniqueness of each religious culture and for its pedagogical principles is signalized, in order the constitution of young people's personality to be achieved.

## **2. CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE**

The approach and analysis of the title requires the interpretation of the terms culture and civilization. This will enable an in-depth and thorough dialectic of civilization and culture in relation with religion. The history of the terms civilization and culture and their distinction begins in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The idea of culture, "born" in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was firstly used by the humanists Thomas Moore and Roger Bacon as "cultura intellect", that means as "cultivation of the mind". Then, culture was linked to spiritual creation. However, an important station of the term culture is the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Eagleton, culture, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, became somewhat imperialistic, being able to degrade its value. It was connected with the emergence of capitalism and of rationality and identified with the "external materiality".

The idea of civilization is widely used, both in social sciences and in the field of the development and application of sciences. The necessity of the creation of a word expressing how life should be, in contrast with the way it was appeared, led the Germans to borrow the French word "culture". Thus, "Kultur"/culture became the main name of the critique of the romanticism period and of early capitalism [1].

The term culture is a loanword taken from the French language. The Latin root of the word "culture" is "colere", which is a polysemous word. That means that it can be interpreted as cultivation, "occupancy" till worship and protection [2].

The concept of culture refers to the internal cultivation of the soul and does not follow the global commercialization and individualism or financial gain, which are negative signs of modernity. Culture is a word that its meaning is defining a complex “whole” (entirety), “is the set of values, customs, beliefs and practices that make up the lifestyle of a particular group” [3]. Herder prefers the term “cultures” than the concept “culture”. This means that “cultures” identify different nations and historical periods and different social and economic cultures within the nation [4].

Also, Eagleton notes that “culture is a complex affair, characterized by spirituality, criticism and aristocratic content, rather than physical comfort in relation to the world” [5]. The distinction between culture and civilization fosters the postmodern critique of modern societies and promotes their development [6]. The concepts of culture and education are essential cores of the civilization and its evolution.

The naturalistic conception of civilization and the concept of monism (unilateralism) of the great inventions “have rekindled” the natural philosophy and the ethics of ancient world and have created cultural concern. However, could numerical calculations and measurements substitute aesthetic awareness?

The existence of two cultures is broadly accepted; the one relating to “intellectuals” and the other to “scientists” [7]. A holistic pedagogy educates the whole spiritual structure of man being, as Plato analyzes through the “tripartite of soul”. In this particular analysis, the content of religious education is included. It is highlighted that everyone’s expectation from a person with religious mentality is to become aware of others, to think and behave in a special way [8]. If education and religion aim to turn the human into “person” (important individual), without these factors each person is turned into an individual. It has been reported that “Man as a person lost, scattered the ability of the combination, replaced the religiosity with the unbridled technique which has not the ability to compose, “marry” and is imposed as a linear progression.” [9]. This reason leads to the perception that we cannot talk about confrontation of cultures/ educations, but about a conflict of civilizations. The internalization of each national culture’s universal values means that every cultural identity contributes to the formulation of universal, collective consciousness. Therefore, culture is linked to religious education, since it refers to the mentality of each person, shaping consciousness and illuminating the unconscious.

Religious education in primary education, in terms of psychology and sociology, contributes to the development of the internal predispositions, those which exist in the “unconscious” and are inactive, since the educational awakening has not acted till that time.

Both teaching of one culture and multiculturalism can be perilous manifestations of civilization when relying on external elements of human nature or on prejudices and nationalistic tendencies. Racist mentality recommends cultural discount of a rigid and geographically limited nationalistic “we”. The nations’ cultural diversity with all its aspects constitutes a necessary component of the society, so that the personal and collective consciousness is formulated. Religious education, at least in primary education, should provide knowledge and education with faith in values. This is clarified as a mental growing of beliefs from childhood, shaping a truth that formulates ethics (ethos) and an attitude towards personal and interpersonal life. For instance, Christianity with anthropology and sociology deriving from love and forgiveness rescues each person from individuality, greed, utilitarianism and hypocritical communication.

Criticizing negatively the concept of civilization, thus the term of interculturalism can be used, enclosing: motivated political considerations, refugee movements because of the imperialist behavior, hypocritical communication expressed in the immigrants’ exploitation in the workplace. Utilitarian aspirations, superficial transactions of refugees / immigrants with the countries’ indigenous people, failures in their education, prevalence of prejudice and of other behaviors, which alter the authenticity of communication between people with different cultural identity, create a cultural deviation.

Intellectual education, sterile and formulaic memorization of school subjects, is not adequate to cover the idea and values of humanism. These negative truths of education mentioned above, require internalization so as healthy and universal relationships between persons -and not individuals- to be created. This criticism of interculturalism leads to the epistemological search and proposal of a new concept, which differentiates interculturalism from the burdensome aspects of globalization that have altered the kind, primordial motivations of different cultural entities. The new term, suggested as a

continuation of the separation between civilization and culture, is “diakoultourismos” (interculturalism), meaning an authentic communication between culturally different people.

### **3. INTERCULTURALISM AND “DIAKOULTOURALISMOS”**

In the same manner as the term “civilization” from the concept “culture” was separated, with the same criteria, the two terms that can be created are: interciviliation and interculturalism (“diakoultourismos”), respectively. The first word will mean the necessary practices and external policies, procedures and the satisfaction of refugees’ and immigrants’ priority needs. The second one is linked to the culture of common, diachronic, universal values and rights that all people are educated all over the world.

The term ‘interciviliation’ is insufficient to provide an authentic and sincere communication. That means that, it does not only satisfy a decent living of the foreigners in the receiving country without the appropriate respect of their identity, of their freedom and self-determination. Reciprocity of foreigners with native people of the receiving country is required, as for the respect of mutual values / virtues, acquired by each country’s civilization.

Consequently, the term “interculturalism” arises from the inner (spiritual) culture of all people and is opposed to the term “interciviliation” which includes visible and invisible, positive and negative intentions and actions of each civilization. In this way, the distinction between a superficial and a real (substantial) and universal communication, which is selfless and sincere, will come to surface. The concept of “diakoultourismos” (interculturalism) goes into an authentic communication that is not based on financial transactions or superficial considerations. This is a real communication and does not raise suspicions to serve interests that are subordinated to the arbitrariness of power and of vested interests.

Regarding primary education, faith and ethics on ideas, religious, humanitarian and social values, to cultural entities that are associated with existential questions of human being, formulate existential self-awareness and cultural awareness. Therefore, there is the necessity of placing an in-depth faith in childhood.

### **4. RELIGIOUS “DIAKOULTOURALISMOS”**

Interreligious ethics and religious “diakoultourismos” (interculturalism) requires cultural and religious diversity. Interreligious ethics, as a desired educational resource of multicultural society, is promoted and is the result of a dialectic (logical argument) which requires a certain cultural base and position, as a principle of cultural and religious dialogue. Religious “diakoultourismos” is the spiritual culture, which every religion recommends and offers to the students, so that they can communicate equipped with internal politeness and heart peace. Intercultural and interreligious emerges from the soul’s pedagogy with its individual cultural dissimilarities. From these cultural diversities, the selection of universal human values provides universal ethos (morality), coexistence, communication and solution to the universal problems. Thus, causes of disunity, hostility or marginalization are disappeared and universal, love, justice and peace are grown.

Consequently, intercultural or interreligious ethics requires: a) learning (knowledge) and education of each cultural and national area with specific elements that advocate its culture, b) schooling in pedagogical principles of each nation’s religion and in universal values arising from the religion, c) understanding of religious diversity, d) empathy and critical attitude towards the stereotypical attitudes and perceptions, in comparison to different religious considerations of life and d) the development of sincere, real and mutual communication [10], highlighting simultaneously the interreligious values.

### **5. “SYNCRETISM” (UNION OF DIVERSE CIVILIZATIONS) AND COMPARISON OF RELIGIOUS CULTURE**

Education and demonstration of many religions or beliefs from the first school years of primary education distracts the child from learning and understanding a specific truth and lifestyle. However, a religious culture with the rules and the vocation to viable experiences becomes universal because a) concerns the whole humanity existence and b) concerns the whole humanity provided that cultivates universal values. Accordingly to the above mentioned, religious culture is the “enzyme” to a civilization. It is outclassed that “The ‘religious education’, which confuses the moral-practical issues

of modern socio-political risks with the truth and denominations (dogma) of each religion, is proven 'anti-religious' both in the motives and in the results." [11].

It is important for us to highlight the term "syncretism", which is synthetic {"syn + Kris" (Cretan)} and means union of diverse civilizations. This meaning is dating back to the years of Plutarch (Greek philosopher). Plutarch mentions that while Cretans were conflicting and fighting with each other because of their parochial differences, in times of enemies' invasion, Cretans called a truce and unified their forces. However, "syncretism" (union of diverse civilizations), as a mainly religious stream, declares the combination or merging of several heterogeneous beliefs and traditions. This clarification is a characteristic of the Hellenistic period, when intrusion of eastern religions is observed in the Graeco-Roman "world" (culture) through their merge (fusion) or assimilation. "Syncretism" is the worst enemy of religions. In avulgarized fact, this means that "all religions are the same", while in the literary version this is explained through the statement that "all religions have the same structure" [12]. The most typical form of this phenomenon, called "religious syncretism" was the pictorial and verbal equalization of deities who have similar characteristics in two or more religious systems.

On the other hand, comparison of religious culture, coming from the term "comparison", refers to the comparison between different cultural entities. This term recommends correlation of prominent, cultural knowledge. It is a cognitive conception and comprehension of distinct, unique and individual objects at a subjective (personal experience) and objective level, which is based on observation and research elements of each religion. Comparison of religious culture can contribute to an objective investigation of religions and to the avoidance of the homogeneity and relativism, as well. The comparison between cultures and religions can be positive or negative, passionate or apathetic. That is, the comparison can operate both at subjective stage related to personal experiences with (emotional) feelings of arrogance and to an objective – scientific level. The civilized comparison of cultures or religions with cultural and educational criteria isolates and does not allow any possibility of conflict among the civilizations.

Apathy (impassivity) recommended the purpose of classical wisdom and education. When pedagogy/education of each religion reflects to humanism, through the existence of universal ideals that pedagogy ministers, then the term of pedagogy contributes –with its virtues- to a peaceful coexistence of diverse cultures and religions (culturally diverse people and of different religions). The impassive comparison of religious culture presupposes education, means data comparison between cultures and religions without intentions of superiority, arrogance and competition (antagonism) between them. In multicultural societies, cultural apathy (impassivity) is the result of political and religious education and training. Understanding the diversity of the other person requires in-depth education so that the mutual respect removes empathy, exploitation, fear and fanaticism, which divide the humanity and its cultures. The imperatives of a comparison of cultural or religious elements may indicate the universality of some human values and rights.

Cultivation and internalization of the virtues of love, tolerance to the people of culturally different backgrounds and religions, patience and forgiveness that each religion professes and promises, such as Christianity, constitute a healthy and objective environment of the comparison of religious culture. The positive and legitimate content if this term follows the investigation with differentiation and kind discretion toward knowledge of different cultural or religious elements. The comparison or religious culture is entire and compact when the research is implemented with equality and reciprocity by the investigator or the person who is culturally different.

Moreover, comparative religion is negative when the culturally diverse person utilizes the distinction and criticism in order to underestimate and exploit these diverse elements against the other, with feelings of conceit and superiority. The religion's particularity, as education (way of teaching) and lifestyle is a reference model so that the "strong" and "weak" points of diversity to be distinguished [13]. It is noted that "The comparative religion often presupposes, if not requires, the detachment from any familiar religious tradition and the interest in religious ideas and practices of others." [14].

Religions education provides knowledge without faith and internal education (knowledge) of the soul. One element of interreligious ethics is tolerance. However, this clue works as a didactic value of a culture or religion and requires connection with the culture's or religion's consistency. Lack of cultural identity and collective or religious consciousness implies disintegration to the unity of a

nation and its values. Each religion has its deviations from its substantial content due to many factors. Such factors are: individual interpretations of its sources, which create the heresies (religious doctrines), the selective and arbitrary behaviors of true believers (faithful people), the quality of its representatives and secularization [15].

## 6. INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Religious education is characterized by psychological approach and is an invaluable factor for the civilization and for the ethics, in an individual and social base. These specific religious principles, when they are followed, constitute a particular way of behaving and a social life attitude. Therefore, the unity of the person, which is a valuable element of psychosomatic health and an essential component of development, progress and life excellence, is achieved [16]. Beyond logic and cognition, religion, as well as cultural education, is directed to the will and to the emotions, so that the child acquires, through the experiences, the religious values which are universal.

Considering the fact that each religion focuses on the internal human mentality, can promote the concurrence and the communication, via fundamental principles of coexistence. The sanctity of the religion's role, which is justified through the education on the sanctity of the human- person, is not consistent with the polemic war and the civilizations' disagreement and conflict. Through the interreligious dialogue, respect to the mutual interreligious values for the respect of human life and the quality of universal communication, is likely to arise.

Students in the primary education acquire knowledge of the Christianity principles, and the dominant principle and virtue of love, which is the source of each blessing of human life. Besides, in Christianity, God is called as "love", too. In all religions, common points and principles can be identified, but also common attitude towards certain phenomena, such as death and life challenges and suffering (mental pain)[17]. However, interreligious ethics can develop philosophical questions of intercultural and diachronic importance and direction that constitute the quintessence and the proposal of Christianity for the establishment of an interreligious dialogue. These are derived from the theory and practice, the catholicity and the universality of Christian teaching. They are: love for everyone, mutual understanding, peace, cooperation, peoples' and nations' fraternization.

Examples of historical evidence of interreligious dialogue:

- There are spiritual bridges between Jews and Orthodox Christians and especially Greeks. From the infiltration of Hellenism and Judaism, during the Hellenistic period, to the political and cultural experiences, coming to the surface through the contact with the period of modernity and globalization, Jews and Greeks are moving on parallel directions, with comparable tragedies and exaltations (religious exhilaration).
- An ideal of interreligious dialogue between Christianity and Islam in the Mediterranean geopolitical area is Ioannis of Damascus (7<sup>th</sup> century), representative of the Greek patristic tradition. The inspiration of a speech of Islamo-Christian dialogue entitled "*Speech between Saracen and Christian*", is attributed to Ioannis of Damascus. This text could illustrate the basis and starting point of the dialogue between the two religions (interreligious dialogue) and exemplify the abandonment of any prejudice. In this dialogue, Muslim asks questions and Christian replies. Essentially, components of the dialogue between the two religions are the freedom of human being and the problem of evil.
- In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Gregorios Palamas, leading theologian of Orthodoxy, while Greece was under Ottoman occupation and military conflict, he communicates with Muslims peacefully and effectively.
- A contemporary instance of interreligious dialogue, in a practical form, constitutes the personality of the Albanian Archbishop named Anastasios, who in the hospital protection sections that he established, people regardless their religious beliefs are hospitalized.
- The assistance and nations' support is essential, in cases of natural disasters and human national disasters caused of religious diverse people.

Therefore, based on historical evidence, through the sources of each religion, utilizing the literature and cultural and communications means, teams and their leaders derive their material in order to:

- Realize ontological elements of human coexistence.
- Learn that life and other blessings of life concern all people, regardless their religious beliefs or identities of origin, ideology and political choice.
- Realize that values such as peace, justice, mutual understanding and love help the development of interpersonal blessings, concerning all people.
- Understand that the investigation of common/universal values, through interreligious ethics, contributes to the removal and dissociation of any cruel and inhuman idea, of any fanatic action or passion against each other.
- Recognize that the right of freedom and self-determination, of cultural specificity and diversity are basic axioms to the multicultural societies and to the creation and development of the intercultural awareness and communication.
- Contribute to the knowledge of the diverse culture of the “other” (the different person) that helps and indicates the importance helps the respect, the consultation and the discovery of common, unconscious and conscious calls.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS – SUGGESTIONS**

- An impartial investigation on universal (panhuman) rights and values, deriving from each religion in order to be utilized through each country’s education to the structure and editing of the curriculum, is considered essential.
- The respect of the specificity/uniqueness of each religious culture and the cultural and educational elements deriving from it, differentiating them for each age, in order to establish the personality of young people is crucial.
- Respect to the uniqueness of the history and of each country’s civilization that is connected with a historical religion and exists as a proposal of the European community, constitutes another approach.
- Examine and clarify the modern concepts, determining a postmodern critique on education: “multiculturalism”, “interculturalism”, “culture”, “diakoultouralismos”, which are related to the formulation of a psychological and pedagogical religious subject for education.
- Curriculum should have a pyramidal growth (advance), based both on each child’s development stages -as pedagogy recognizes- and on the spiritual background, as the patristic pedagogy regards.

That means, we should start from primary education, based on Orthodoxy and pedagogical principles, through interdisciplinary - intercultural implications, as they are mentioned in the texts and speech of the Gospels and of the Church Fathers, with identification and personalization of their content for all ages. In conclusion, when critical and abstract thinking is acquired, then the curriculum leads progressively in the Religion courses of secondary education.

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