

RELATION BETWEEN RELIGION AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS: BASED ON A RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN CORBELIA (PR)

RELAÇÃO ENTRE RELIGIÃO E ESCOLA PÚBLICA: PESQUISA REALIZADA NOS COLÉGIOS ESTADUAIS DO MUNICÍPIO DE CORBÉLIA (PR)

LA RELACIÓN ENTRE RELIGIÓN Y ESCUELA PÚBLICA: UNA ENCUESTA EN LAS ESCUELAS PÚBLICAS DEL MUNICIPIO DE CORBÉLIA (PR)



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How to reference this article:

PEREIRA, I. M.; DERISSO, J. L. Relation between religion and public schools: based on a research conducted in public schools in Corbelia (PR). **Revista on line de Política e Gestão Educacional**, Araraquara, v. 28, n. 00, e023043, 2024. e-ISSN: 1519-9029. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22633/rpge.v28i00.19911>



| Submitted: 08/10/2024
| Revisions required: 09/11/2024
| Approved: 17/11/2024
| Published: 20/12/2024

Editor: Prof. Dr. Sebastião de Souza Lemes
Deputy Executive Editor: Prof. Dr. José Anderson Santos Cruz

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to analyze the presence of religion in public schools and the perception of teachers and school administrators regarding this phenomenon. It presents the historical definition of secularism and the assumptions that define the Brazilian State as secular. It shows the results of a field study that addresses the secular nature of the State in the school context and whose data were collected from teachers and managers of two public schools in the city of Corbélia, Paraná, through interviews with managers and a survey answered by teachers. The purpose of the research was to assess the understanding of those involved in secularism. Based on a theoretical framework that conceives secularism as the materialization of democratic principles, it analyses and concludes that the procedures adopted in the schools studied contradict the assumptions of an effectively secular State, even if those involved do not realize it.

KEYWORDS: Secularism. Religious Education. Public School. Religious Practices.

RESUMO: *O artigo objetiva analisar a presença da religião nas escolas públicas e a percepção de professores e gestores escolares sobre este fenômeno. Apresenta historicamente a definição de laicidade e os pressupostos que definem o Estado brasileiro como laico. Expõe resultados de uma pesquisa de campo que se reporta à laicidade do Estado no contexto escolar e cujos dados foram coletados com professores e gestores das duas escolas estaduais do município paranaense de Corbélia, por meio de entrevistas com gestores e questionário respondido por professores. O intuito da pesquisa foi o de aferir o entendimento que os envolvidos têm acerca da laicidade. A partir de um referencial teórico que concebe a laicidade como a materialização de princípios democráticos, analisa-se e conclui-se que os procedimentos adotados nas escolas pesquisadas contrariam os pressupostos de um Estado efetivamente laico, mesmo que os envolvidos não o percebam.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Laicidade. Ensino Religioso. Escola Pública. Práticas Religiosas.

RESUMEN: *El artículo pretende analizar la presencia de la religión en las escuelas públicas y la percepción de los profesores y gestores escolares sobre este fenómeno. Históricamente, presenta la definición de laicidad y los supuestos que definen al Estado brasileño como laico. Presenta los resultados de un estudio de campo sobre la laicidad del Estado en el contexto escolar, cuyos datos fueron recogidos de profesores y gestores de dos escuelas públicas del municipio de Corbélia, en Paraná, mediante entrevistas con los gestores y un cuestionario respondido por los profesores. El objetivo de la investigación fue medir la comprensión que los involucrados tienen del laicismo. A partir de un marco teórico que concibe el laicismo como la materialización de los principios democráticos, se analiza y concluye que los procedimientos adoptados en las escuelas investigadas son contrarios a los supuestos de un Estado efectivamente laico, aunque los involucrados no lo perciban así.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: Laicismo. Enseñanza religiosa. Escuelas públicas. Prácticas religiosas.

Introduction

Bearing in mind that there is an apparent lack of consensus on what secularism is, this article takes a theoretical and historical approach to its meaning, seeking to dispel the existing confusion about the term and sharing positions such as that of Ranquetat Jr. (2009, p. 5), for whom *laïcité* has two meanings that complement each other: "neutrality of the state in religious matters" and "impartiality of the state with respect to religions, which results in the need for the state to treat religions equally", and Derisso (2023, p. 143, our translation), who approaches the question of *laïcité* "from the perspective of democracy, that is, in the sense of the materialization of freedom of conscience, equal rights and the neutrality of the public space".

Conceptions of secularism that conflict with the one defended in this article include those that argue that manifestations of a particular religion should be welcomed in the public space, including by official means, on the grounds that they represent the majority of the population. It also consists of the idea that demonstrations presented as ecumenical (a debatable term) should be accepted as a demonstration that the state respects the right to religion, neglecting the right to "non-religion" and the right of religious people who don't share ecumenism, a proposition that the Catholic Church began to support in the 1960s³.

Based on the problem presented, the aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between religion and school, delimiting the two state schools in the municipality of Corbélia, in the west of the state of Paraná, as the field of study.

Thus, considering that the school's primary purpose is the socialization of knowledge, especially scientific, artistic, and philosophical knowledge, the article argues that public schools must guarantee teaching that is reflected in students' lives, both in the sense of helping in the process of human development of individuals and in the understanding of the world in which they live, so that they can adopt transformative attitudes based on the perspective of equality and fraternity. In this sense, the presence of religion in schools is discussed as a contradiction in relation to the school's primary purpose.

The institution of religious education in public schools is questioned based on the understanding that it has been, especially in Brazil, the main instrument for religion to enter the public arena. With regard to this institution, the aim is to understand the ways in which the subject of Religious Education is applied in the two schools surveyed and how it is perceived

^{3 3} Proposition that comes from 18th century Protestantism, but which gained prominence with the adhesion of the Roman Catholic Church in the context of the Second Vatican Council (1962 and 1965).

by the teachers in these schools.

In order to meet the proposed objectives, we opted for bibliographical research, which guarantees the contextualization and theoretical foundation of the research; documentary research, especially with regard to legislation; and field research, through interviews with managers and the application of a questionnaire to teachers at state schools in the municipality of Corbélia, in the west of Paraná.

As for the municipality of Corbélia, the 2022 Census recorded 17,171 inhabitants, 26% of whom live in rural areas, well above the national average of 14.3%. It is a small town whose economy is largely focused on farming, but it is located 30 kilometers from Cascavel, the fifth most populous city in the state of Paraná, whose economic importance is largely due to its industrial and commercial activities linked to agribusiness. A relevant fact about the city of Corbélia is the political inclination of its electorate, which, in the context of the polarization of the second round of the 2022 elections, registered 66.61% of the votes for the right-wing candidate, Jair Messias Bolsonaro (PL), against 33.39% for the left-wing candidate, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT). The relevance of this political inclination lies in the fact that Bolsonaro aligns himself with the so-called "customary agendas", which are more sensitive to the religious part of the population.

Secularism: history and concepts

The term "*laïcité*" derives from the classical Greek expression *laós*, which means "the people". Thus, it concerns the population, all the people, without exception. From this expression comes the term *laikós*, which in Latin gives rise to the word *laicus*, meaning that which is not clerical. Thus, the aim of secularism, according to its etymological and historical definition, is to structure a society in which, regardless of which social group has the dominant claim (religious, ethnic, philosophical, etc.), other groups are not compelled, especially through authoritarian means, to accept positions or worldviews with which they do not agree. In other words, secularism means that the public space welcomes all individuals without constraints stemming from religious prevalence, resulting in a free and inclusive society. However, for this objective to be fulfilled, the secular state must become assumedly neutral, without taking a position on any religious stances or postulates, ensuring the right to freedom, so that everyone has the autonomy to organize and assert themselves in the face of different identity affinities (Gomes; Lins Filho, 2011).

It is important to note that, occasionally, the literature confuses two terms: secularism and secularization. In this regard, Cunha (2017) clarifies that "[...] the process of secularization refers to culture and that of secularization, to the State" (Cunha, 2017, p. 15, our translation). Secularization is linked to the advance of history and its modernity, i.e., culture, medicine, philosophy, education, and other aspects that reflect modern social life, which are no longer guided by religious values but secular values. As a result, man and his conception of the world were no longer guided by a universe in which everything came from divine and magical forces, as was the case in primitive and conventional societies, and this situation was replaced by science and rationality (Ranquetat Jr., 2009). Secularism, on the other hand, is governed by established legal norms.

One of the sources of this confusion may be the lack of the term secularism in languages such as English. In this language, the word secularism takes on different meanings:

[...] The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, who wrote in English, had to distinguish between three meanings of the term secularization in order to avoid the frequent confusion of meaning. For him, the first sense is precisely what will be defined here as the secularity of the state; the second is the secularization of culture [...] that is, "the emptying of religion from autonomous social spheres"; the third sense is that of the conditions of faith, both in a society where belief in God was unquestionable (Europe before 1500) and in North Atlantic society (Europe, the United States and Canada in the 2000s), where faith is just one option among others, and not the easiest to embrace (Cunha, 2017, p. 17, our translation).

With regard to secularism, the State establishes its existence in relation to the religious field impartially, respecting all beliefs, practices, and denominations as long as they do not manifest themselves against public order. In other words, the secular State operates in such a way that political organizations are validated under a democratic vision, in which religion is not asked to establish associations of a state nature. Even issues of collective morality come to be deliberated in the political field, but religious and non-religious people can make suggestions about improvements for society (Cunha, 2017), without, of course, wanting to turn their taboos and sins into crimes, as these are private to the followers.

Laicity of the state: separation of religion and state in Brazil

The first Constitution of the Republic, that of 1891, is the clearest of the Constitutions with regard to the separation between the State and the Church, since subsequent ones have taken up the prospect of collaboration with religions. According to Zylbersztajn (2012, p. 20, our translation),

The federal constitution of 1891 outlined the separation between State and Church, which has guided all constitutional developments since then, as well as aspects of religious freedom. Alone in the republican constitutional evolution, it provided for the absolute exclusion of religion in public matters previously carried out by the Catholic Church and recognized the other existing confessions. It was the only democratic republican constitution that did not mention God in its preamble.

In addition to not mentioning God in its preamble, it removes the mention of the Holy Trinity that appeared in the Imperial Constitution of 1824. The preamble to the 1891 Constitution reads: "We, the representatives of the Brazilian people, assembled in Constituent Congress, to organize a free and democratic regime, establish, decree and promulgate the following" (Brasil, 1891, our translation); while the 1934 Congress reads:

We, the representatives of the Brazilian people, putting our trust in God, gathered in the National Constituent Assembly to organize a democratic regime that will ensure the unity, freedom, justice, and social and economic well-being of the nation, decree and promulgate the following.

The 1981 Constitution also established, in Art. 11, item 2, that "It is forbidden for the States, like the Union: [...] to establish, subsidize or hinder the exercise of religious cults" (Brasil, 1891, art. 11, § 2, our translation) and that "No cult or church shall enjoy official subsidy, nor shall it have relations of dependence or alliance with the Government of the Union or of the States" (Brasil, 1891, art. 72§7, our translation). These passages make explicit the separation between Church and State that had prevailed for almost four decades in Brazil.

The Constitutions after 1891 established some constitutional changes that represented setbacks for secularism. Except for the 1937 Constitution, they all invoked the name of God. Although the regime of separation between the State and Church was maintained, the 1934 Constitution opened up the possibility of cooperation between the State and the churches, which had previously been forbidden, by means of a subtle addition to the constitutional text, which we present underlined in the following quote:

Art. 17 - The Union, the States, the Federal District, and the Municipalities are prohibited from: II - establish, subsidizing, or hindering the exercise of religious cults; III - having a relationship of alliance or dependence with any cult, or church **without prejudice to reciprocal collaboration in favor of the collective interest** (Brasil, 1934, art. 17, emphasis added).

The 1934 Constitution represents, on a legal level, the first and most significant setbacks in relation to secularism in Brazil after the Proclamation of the Republic (1889). Three years before its promulgation, in 1931, the Catholic Church achieved three important victories as a result of agreements made with the Provisional Government of Getúlio Vargas: a decree instituting religious teaching as an optional subject in public schools; the holding, in the Federal District, of a procession with the image of Our Lady of Aparecida; and the inauguration of the Statue of Christ the Redeemer at the top of Corcovado, both events counting on the participation of the President of the Republic, ministers and diplomats, giving an official character to these Catholic manifestations (Derisso, 2006).

In the run-up to the Constituent Assembly elections, the Catholic camp organized an electoral front called the Catholic Electoral League (LEC):

- 1st - Promulgation of the Constitution in the name of God.
- 2º - Defense of the indissolubility of the marriage bond, with assistance for large families and recognition of the civil effects of religious marriage.
- 3º - Legal incorporation of religious education, optional in the programs of public, secondary, and regular schools of the Union, the State, and the municipalities.
- 4º - Regulation of optional religious assistance in the armed forces, prisons, hospitals, etc.
- 5 - Freedom of association, so that Catholic unions, legally organized, have the same guarantees as neutral unions.
- 6 - Recognition of the ecclesiastical service of spiritual assistance to the armed forces and civilian populations as equivalent to military service.
- 7 - Decreeing labor legislation inspired by the precepts of social justice and Christian principles.
- 8º - Defense of the rights and duties of the social order.
- 9 - Enactment of a law to guarantee social order against any subversive activities, respecting the requirements of legitimate political and civil liberties.
- 10 - Fighting any legislation that expressly or implicitly contradicts the fundamental principles of Catholic doctrine. (Moura; Almeida, 1997, p. 306, our translation).

In general terms, the LEC agenda was approved by the 1934 National Constituent Assembly. However, it is worth highlighting Religious Education which, since the new constitution

shall be optional and taught in accordance with the principles of the student's religious confession as expressed by the parents or guardians and shall be part of the timetable in public primary, secondary, vocational, and regular schools (Brasil, 1934, art. 153, our translation).

After the 1934 Constitution, the points won by the Catholic Electoral League (LEC) remained practically intact, with the exception of the indissolubility of marriage, since divorce was legalized in 1977. Some democratic advances against legal impositions with a religious bias have occurred in the area of civil law, such as the decriminalization of adultery in 2005 and the recognition of a woman's right to abortion in specific situations, based on decisions by the Federal Supreme Court (STF) based on the interpretation of the 1988 Constitution (Brasil, 1988).

From the end of the 1970s and, more notably, during the 1980s, the Brazilian Catholic Church, which had formally supported the 1964 military coup, began to adopt a less conservative stance and more focused on social and political issues. However, the pressure on the state to be guided by religious postulates continued, especially on issues such as abortion and the maintenance of religious education in public schools, a topic that will be analyzed below.

Religious Education in Public Schools since the 1996 LDB

During the process of drafting the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB) of 1996 (Brasil, 1996), the Catholic Church, through the National Confederation of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB), joined forces with other religious organizations to form a large lobby with the aim of expanding the role of religious education already guaranteed by the Constitution. This articulation materialized in creating the Permanent National Forum for Religious Education (FONAPER), which became the main organizational expression of this movement.

The simple designation of school space and the inclusion of religious education in the normal elementary school timetable were not enough; the aim was to expand the state's responsibility in relation to the subject, generating costs for the public coffers, which was forbidden by the 1961 LDB, but which was achieved with the new legislation.

The mobilization and effectiveness of the lobby articulated by FONAPER manifested itself in the interval between the approval of Law No. 9.394/96 and the enactment of Law No. 9.475/97. In the first, the text stated that:

Religious education, which is optional, is part of the normal timetable of public primary schools and is offered free of charge to the public purse, in accordance with the preferences expressed by the students or their guardians:

I - confessional, according to the religious choice of the student or their guardian, taught by religious teachers or counselors prepared and accredited by the respective churches or religious entities; or

II - interfaith, resulting from an agreement between the various religious bodies, which will be responsible for drawing up the respective program (Brasil, 1996, art. 33, items I-II, our translation).

In the second, the article on religious education is reworded and adopts the following wording:

Optional religious education is an integral part of the citizen's basic education and is a subject on the normal timetable of public primary schools, ensuring respect for Brazil's religious and cultural diversity and prohibiting any form of proselytism.

§ Paragraph 1 The education systems shall regulate the procedures for defining the content of religious education and shall establish the rules for the qualification and admission of teachers.

§ Paragraph 2 The education systems will hear civil organizations, made up of different religious denominations, to define the content of religious education (Brasil, 1997, art. 33 §1-2).

Some of the novelties that can be learned from this law are:

- The state now takes on the burden of hiring teachers for the subject of Religious Education, implying that all taxpayers indiscriminately pay for the maintenance of a subject demanded and taken on by a group that, incidentally, is driven by the need for religious belonging;
- The need for religious belonging on the part of a portion of the population is masked by a phraseology that strives to give religion a universal character and thus justify moving it from the realm of the private space to the public space. The maneuver lies in establishing that religious education "is an integral part of the basic education of the citizen", implying that people who have not received this type of "education" lack basic training for the exercise of citizenship;

- The other novelty is that the state is now involved in defining the content of the subject, after listening to a supposed representation of religious denominations. This puts it in the position of arbitrator of religious disputes that may occur in this context, compromising its neutral or impartial character and, consequently, violating the principle of secularism.

Moving from the national to the local level, we will analyze how Religious Education is implemented in the Paraná state network, since our focus will be on the state schools in the municipality of Corbélia, which are part of this network.

The Curriculum of the Paraná State Network (CREP) states that the state of Paraná adheres to the regulations imposed by the BNCC in the preparation of its Curriculum, based on the need for a specific document for the Paraná State Network, listing suggestions and guidelines that favor the teaching of content according to each regional reality of the state.

With regard to the curriculum component of Religious Education, the Curriculum defines specific competencies:

1. Know the structuring aspects of life's different religious and philosophical traditions/organizations based on scientific, philosophical, aesthetic, and ethical assumptions.
2. Understanding, valuing, and respecting religious manifestations and philosophies of life, their experiences, and knowledge, in different times, spaces, and territories.
3. Recognizing and caring for oneself, others, the community, and nature is an expression of the value of life.
4. Living with a diversity of beliefs, thoughts, convictions, ways of being and living.
5. Analyze the relationship between religious traditions and the fields of culture, politics, economics, health, science, technology, and the environment.
6. Debate, problematize and take a stand against discourses and practices of intolerance, discrimination and violence of a religious nature, in order to ensure human rights in the constant exercise of citizenship and a culture of peace (Paraná, 2019, p. 5, our translation).

The subject is optional, as established in the Constitution and in the national education guidelines and bases laws, and is adopted as part of the sixth and seventh-grade curriculum. This ensures that students are not disadvantaged in terms of their rights and learning objectives in these two years (Paraná, 2019), which is in line with the requirements of the BNCC.

It should be noted that the BNCC defined the general lines of a program for this subject, in the same way it did for the others, without considering that the subject is optional and that the LDB establishes that the contents should be defined within the scope of the education systems, according to Brazil (1997, art. 33 §2).

Results of the survey with teachers and managers of state schools in Corbélia (PR)

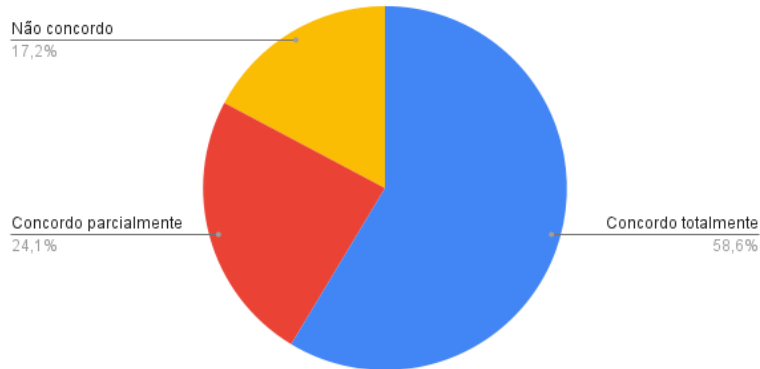
At this point, after presenting a historical and documentary context about secularism and religious education, we present the data collected by means of a questionnaire and interview made available through a *Google Forms* link sent to the teachers and managers of the state schools in Corbélia, Paraná. The city has two state schools, one with 55 teachers and the other with 47, some of whom work in both. We received a total of 29 responses.

The two research instruments, the interview, and questionnaire, were presented together with the "Informed Consent Form (ICF)", by which the participants authorized the use of their answers, guaranteeing, in the case of the questionnaire, due confidentiality in the presentation of the results.

We designed five multiple-choice questions for the questionnaire, allowing comments on each if the teacher answered and felt comfortable doing so. Below, we present the questions with the respective results in graphs, as well as the comments recorded by the individuals, which are presented in Charts.

Graph 1 - First question⁴

1. Você concorda que é um bom hábito fazer orações no início das aulas?



Source: Research data.

Chart 1 - Comments

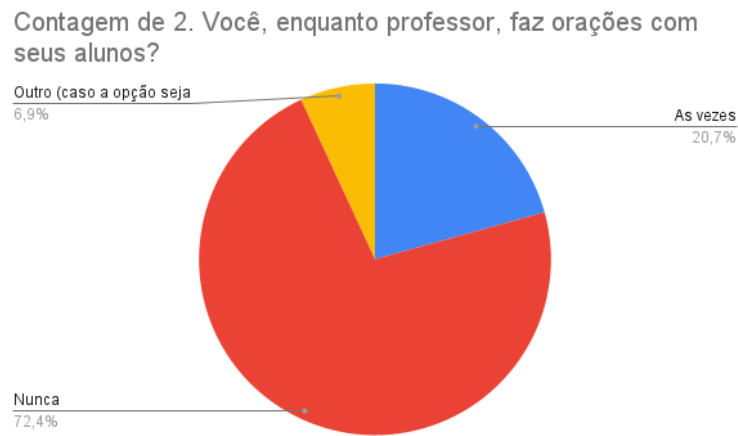
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| Because each religion has its principles, there may only be one universal prayer to be said in class. |
| It depends on the moment and the way of communicating with the students to identify what each one professes. |
| I agree because some students will only have that moment to thank God. |
| I partially agree because there are students from different religions. |
| I think that families are losing a lot of their values, and this is being reflected in society. |
| Prayer calms the students. |
| I believe we should pray without using memorized words, we should teach a greater good, respect, empathy and gratitude. |
| At the school where I work, the headteacher sometimes asks for a prayer for someone who is having difficulties. |
| Schools must be secular. |
| It is human nature to be religious. |

Source: Research data.

As can be seen in the Chart, only one comment states that the school is secular, which means that it is not a place for prayer. There is also a certain difficulty in realizing that collective prayer tends to be the result of imposition rather than free choice.

⁴ Translation of the colors: Yellow: I don't agree; Red: I partially agree; Blue: I totally agree.

Graph 2 - Second question⁵



Source: Research data.

Chart 2 - Comments on the second question

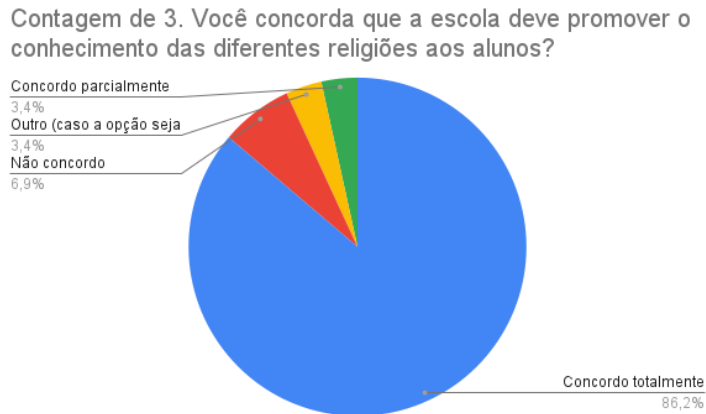
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| Not in that way, but whenever opportunities arise, I put the human question out there to be thought about. |
| Because there are different religions in the classroom, we can't allude to just one. |
| It can be a message or a reflection, which calms students down to start studying. |
| Because the state is secular, and it is not the school's custom to say prayers. |
| I never say prayers because I understand that the school is secular. |
| I'd like to do it, but I've never had the courage for fear of reprisals from my parents. |
| I don't pray because we've lost the habit. |
| I've never prayed, I know the school is secular. |
| I say prayers whenever I notice students getting agitated. |
| I respect what the law says. |

Source: Research data.

The above comments reveal a greater understanding of the issue of secularism, unlike the previous ones. This may be because the first question referred to a position, while the second referred to an individual practice, which could therefore be punished administratively.

⁵ Translation of the colors: Yellow: Other (if the option is “no”); Red: Never; Blue: Sometimes.

Graph 3 – Third question⁶



Source: Research data.

Chart 3 - Comments on the third question

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| Teaching at school should be based on respect and therefore taught at school. |
| I think that religious education should teach about the existence of different religions. This is the purpose of the curricular component. I believe that the name Religious Education should be changed because many teachers, parents, and students believe that it is teaching the Christian religion. |
| Absolutely. |
| It's important to avoid prejudice between them. |
| I believe that all religions are important, and that they all teach good, so it would be important to value all faiths. |
| Promoting knowledge about different religions helps students understand other ways of exercising their faith. |
| Yes, but without judgment, as soon as possible. |
| Yes, because we need to know about all religions. |
| I know that there are many students of different religions. So the study of religions should be school content. |

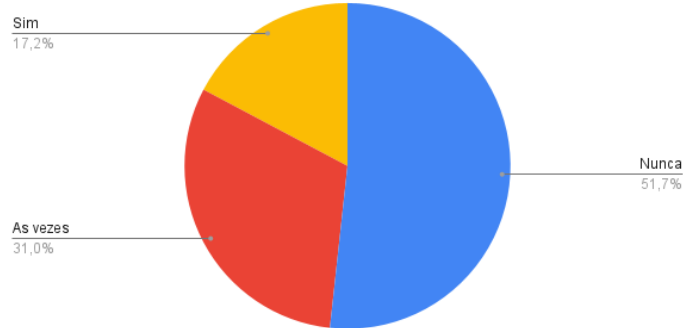
Source: Survey data.

The question does not directly address the issue of secularism; even so, the comments reveal that the vast majority understand the importance of knowing the differences. However, there is still a percentage of 13.8% of teachers who do not accept or are reluctant to allow children to learn about the religious diversity that exists in the world.

⁶ Translation of the colors: Yellow: Other (if the option is “no”); Red: I don't agree; Blue: I totally agree; Green: I partially agree.

Graph 4 – Fourth question⁷

Contagem de 4. Você usa expressões como “mentir é pecado”, “Deus esta vendo”, entre outras que remetam algum significado



Source: Research data.

Chart 4 - Comments on the fourth question

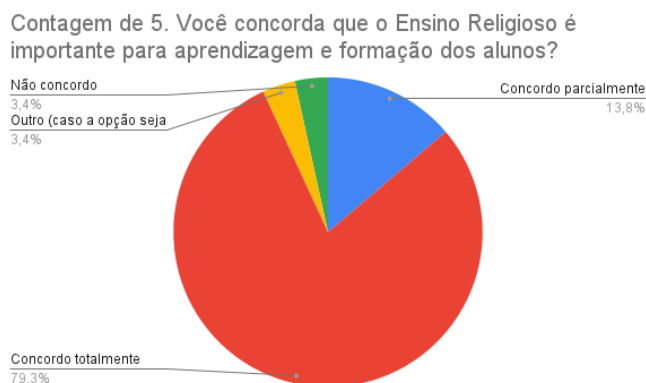
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| The school can do lessons like this, interrelating subjects to teach. |
| I never use expressions, although I am a Protestant Christian, I respect everyone's background and religious orientation. |
| I speak from force of habit. |
| I didn't use those terms, because it's typical of only one religion, and I believe in the importance of valuing all of them. |
| Using expressions is part of the culture we have acquired. |
| Never use God's name, always show the person's character and its consequences. |

Source: Research data.

Positions diverge on the question of whether or not it is right to pass on the precepts of a particular religion to public school children. However, there is a narrow majority that tends to recognize and respect the religious diversity of the students.

⁷ Translation of the colors: Yellow: Yes; Red: Sometimes; Blue: Never.

Graph 1 - Answers to the fifth question⁸



Source: Research data.

Chart 5 - Comments on the fifth question

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| Religious education should start at school and then go on to college, sanctioning any kind of religion. |
| Religious education is important as long as we work on its purpose, which is to understand life and death from various religious perspectives, tolerance, and respect. |
| I think it's necessary to rescue the values that have been lost. |
| I think it's very important, as it teaches cultural values. It's very important for students to know the culture of each religion in order to respect and value it. |
| Yes, I think it's very important to promote religious education in schools, as long as it's not focused on just one religion. |
| Religious education should discuss human behavior and consider how much humanity can improve. |

Source: Research data.

Regarding the position and comments on the fifth question, it is understood that the defense of Religious Education in public schools stems, to a large extent, from the fact that it is a subject that was instituted almost a century ago, whose defense arguments have been renewed in the parliamentary sphere and widely disseminated in education networks by the official media.

We highlight the answers given by the managers of the two schools surveyed in Charts 6 to 10 below.

Chart 6 - First question of the interview with managers of Corbelia (PR) state schools)

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| Question 1. As the head of a public school, what is your understanding of how the issue of secularism in schools should be dealt with? |
| Answer 1. I think it's essential to have secularism at school because that way, we avoid discord. |

⁸ Translation of the colors: Yellow: Other (if the option is 'no'); Red: I totally agree; Blue: I partially agree; Green: I don't agree.



Answer 2. No religion's creedal practices can be incited or "privileged". Church and state are separate institutions.

Source: Research data.

There is unanimous recognition of the importance of secularism in education, but it is important to know what is meant by secularism.

Chart 7 - Second question of the interview with managers

Question 2. Should the school encourage students to learn about and adopt a religious practice, or should it not take on this responsibility?

Answer 1. Yes, they do, since Religious Education is responsible for this premise. Adopting is not the school's responsibility.

Answer 2. You mustn't take on that responsibility.

Source: Research data.

In the answers to the second question, the position in favor of one aspect of the school's secularism is maintained, which is to reject the possibility of religious indoctrination within it.

Chart 8 - Third question of the interview with managers

Question 3. Do you believe that encouraging a certain religion within the school context can be a resource in the fight against violence and indiscipline?

Answer 1. I don't believe that encouraging students to join any religion can help. Because, from what we've seen, many students are already followers of some religion and that doesn't mean they don't have violent or unruly attitudes.

Answer 2. Christian/religious values are mostly based on an education geared towards peace and empathy, but it is not the school's duty to encourage this practice, even if there are benefits against violence.

Source: Research data.

As can be seen from the answers to the third question, the position in favor of refusing ideological indoctrination at school remains, but there is no agreement on the possible benefits of religious education

Chart 9 - Fourth question of the interview with managers

Question 3. How are the religious education classes formed at the school where you are head?

Answer 1. Religious Education is part of the 6th and 7th-grade curriculum, and the classes take part in it as if it were any other curricular component. Because there is no work focused on a specific religion, class time is not used to teach prayers, commandments, biblical texts, or anything like that. However, if a student, at the request of his or her guardian at the time of enrollment, does not wish to attend classes, he or she is excused.

Answer 2. Students are enrolled automatically, even though it is optional.

Source: Research data.

The criterion adopted by both managers, if it doesn't violate the optional nature of the Religious Education subject, by not starting from the expression of interest in making up the classes, ends up creating the possibility of embarrassment for parents and students who, by asking to be excused, will in practice be denying the importance of a subject that is presented as aimed at resolving conflicts within the school.

Chart 10 - The fifth question of the interview with managers

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|---|
| Question 5. How are the contents of the Religious Education subject defined, and what are the objectives? |
| Answer 1. SEED already defines the content of any curricular component in the state of Paraná, and it is up to the teacher to work on it in the classroom using different methodologies. The Religious Education content aims to present religions and address issues such as solidarity, respect, and empathy. |
| Answer 2. The school previously programs the contents, but the methodological approach is at the discretion of the teacher of the curricular component. The objectives are always focused on respect for religious diversity and knowledge of the different rites and religions that exist. |

Source: Research data.

The answers take the responsibility for the teaching objects away from the teachers and transfer it to SEED, the "maintainer", in the elaboration of a program which, despite the generalities stated (solidarity, respect, empathy), is known to be the subject of disputes.

Analysis of the data obtained in the survey

Regarding the research carried out in Corbelia's state schools, we note that it was possible to ascertain that there are misunderstandings among teachers about the concept of secularism and the meaning of the separation between religion and the state in Brazil, generating confusion that had already been aggravated by the setbacks from 1931/1934, which in turn produced contradictions in the text of the Brazilian constitutions. This phenomenon has been called "legal anomie" by Cunha (2017).

Based on the data obtained in the field research, we found that most of the teachers surveyed convey the strong religious influence they carry with them, to the extent that some answers make it clear that each person's faith background is reflected in their teaching activity, since few comments alluded to the need for the school to be secular.

It is worth noting that the teachers' intention is to share with their students certain values that they consider good and related to the behavior of supposedly good people, principles that generally refer, even if implicitly, to Christianity. Although the attitude of teachers often consists of wanting to make students reflect on their attitudes and behavior, it is essential to

note that, depending on how these reflections are stimulated, the result can lead to conclusions such as that problems are solved by admitting a particular belief, obviously that of the teacher, who is actually the one directing the reflection.

With regard to Religious Education, the majority agreed with the presence of this subject in the curriculum, arguing that it is necessary in order to learn about different religions and recover supposedly lost moral values, as well as to stimulate discussion about certain human behaviors to improve them, or even to develop tolerance and respect for different religious beliefs. The idea is that, for this to happen, instead of the existence of a subject loaded with symbolism, as is the case with Religious Education, it would be enough for its ethical objectives to be assumed in the programs of subjects such as History, in Primary School, and Philosophy or Sociology, in Secondary School.

The answers given by many of the teachers show a willingness to resolve problems of coexistence within schools and in society, which manifest themselves through violence and intolerance. The learning difficulties stimulated by bullying and aggression inside and outside the school justify the concerns of teachers and other actors involved in educational activity. However, opting for religious solutions to discuss problems produced by society itself opens up the possibility of highlighting differences that school institutions could and should remain immune to, so that this institution can fulfill its primary function of socializing historically produced knowledge, especially that produced in the sciences, philosophy and the arts. The knowledge that makes it possible to understand the world fosters the historical and critical sense necessary for citizens to position themselves in the face of humanity's problems and envision alternatives for overcoming these problems.

In the interview with the managers of the state schools in Corbélia (PR), both demonstrated some knowledge of the secular nature of the state and its importance in public education. However, when asked whether it is the school's duty to encourage students to learn about and adopt a religious practice, we saw controversy between the managers of each school. Despite emphasizing that it is not the school's duty to encourage students to adopt a religion, the manager corresponding to answer number 2 in Charts 6 to 10 points out that knowledge of religious practices is the responsibility of Religious Education to teach. The same manager also expressed the view that religion should be an ally in the fight against violence and indiscipline, emphasizing the importance of Christian values. The manager of answer number 1, on the other hand, emphasizes that most of the students already have a religion in their families, but that this doesn't stop them from being violent or undisciplined.

Despite the differences mentioned above, both managers indicate that enrollment for the Religious Education component takes place automatically and that dismissals only occur at the request of the person in charge. A procedure that, however much it is argued that the optional nature established in the Constitution is guaranteed, tends to generate difficulties, since parents are not always aware of this possibility, and simpler people tend to feel embarrassed about denying a practice assumed by their child's school.

The managers say they follow what is already defined by CREP regarding the content taught in religious education. However, the contradiction is evident in that Manager 1 emphasizes that Religious Education, in addition to presenting religions, works on themes such as solidarity, respect, and empathy, while Manager 2 points out that the methodology used for classes in the component in question is up to the teacher.

In view of these responses, we can see that religious influence is reproduced by both teachers and managers in the schools surveyed. The vast majority maintain that Religious Education is a necessary component of the schooling process and stress the importance of spreading Christian values through this subject; they also defend Christian ritual practices in everyday school life, such as the adoption of prayers, and the inculcation of the concept of sin in children, thus contradicting the constitutional precept of separation between religion and the state and constraining practitioners of religions that are not Christian, such as those of African origin, or people who profess no religion, whose percentage in Brazil is close to ten percent.

Final considerations

In view of the data from the research presented here, it can be concluded that there is indeed a lack of understanding about the meaning of secularism. This misunderstanding is fueled by a historical movement of deliberately spreading confusion about this concept.

Nowadays, resistance to secularism is manifested by sectors that try to turn religious dogma into the foundation of public institutions, notably by people on the far right of the political spectrum who rely on the religious sentiment of part of the population to gain votes and notoriety.

On the other hand, the process of secularization of society continues, as evidenced, for example, by the increase in the percentage of people who declare themselves atheists or indifferent, as well as the number of social movements that combat the models of regulation of social life traditionally based on religion and which necessarily reverberate in the field of education.

It is undeniable that the Christian religion prevails in Brazil and that often, even unconsciously, individuals mix their beliefs with prejudices, reproducing old forms of oppression that exist in our society. When the person in question is a teacher, however, these positions tend to be reproduced in schools. In this case, on a pedagogical level, the result will be the application of educational models that reject secularism and tend to encourage disrespect for differences of belief or non-belief, as well as for different conceptions of the world and ways of life, such as different forms of family constitution and homosexual relationships, etc., forms that are opposed to traditional models that are presented as based on religion.

The research presented in this article shows that the secularity of public schools is poorly understood, and that this misunderstanding is largely due to the control that established religions have over individual and collective consciences. The research was limited to the small universe of two state schools in a small agricultural town in the interior of a unit of the Federation, Paraná, whose electorate has been leaning towards parties and candidates who are affiliated with the most conservative and religious agendas propagated by the extreme right, the lack of understanding about secularism observed by the research may seem oversized. However, the feelings and positions expressed in the survey are representative of a portion of Brazilian teachers who, although uncertain whether they are a majority or a minority, are known to be considerable, especially given the political weight of the forces fighting secularism in Brazil.

This study on secularism and the relationship between religion and public schools did not aim to discredit the schools or the professionals involved in the research but to address the issue of secularism in Brazil historically and to understand the perception that education professionals have of the interference of religion in public schools and its implications for the secularism provided for in the Constitution.

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Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação.
Proofreading, formatting, normalization and translation.

