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# THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN EUROPE

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# I KNOWLEDGE ABOUT RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE IN SECULAR SOCIETIES: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN EUROPE

Kristina Stoeckl

European societies are secularized societies.<sup>1</sup> Despite the academic debate on “the return of religion” and the – warranted or unwarranted – impression that we have more religion in public debates than twenty or thirty years ago, sociological data on religiosity in Europe tell us: secularization “has won”.<sup>2</sup> Olivier Roy has recently summed up the effects of the predominance of the secular framework on the place of religion in the European publics: religions either (1)

- 1 “Secularization” is commonly understood to cover three distinct phenomena: (1) The functional differentiation of the spheres of human activity: politics, economics, science, culture and art, private life. In a secularized society, these spheres come to be seen as separate and there no longer exists one guiding idea or ideology which gives orientation to all these different spheres of human activity. (2) The privatization of religion: as a consequence of the functional differentiation of social life, religion is pushed out of the public and into the private sphere. Religion becomes a matter of private devotion. (3) The decline of religious belief in modern societies: modern societies, sociologists believed for a long time, register lowering degrees of religiosity, which means people turn less and less religious. (Casanova 2001). It is this last feature of secularization which is called into question by recent debates about the return of religion (Davie 1999), with obvious repercussions on the correct understanding of (2) the public or private role of religion (Casanova 1994; Calhoun et al. 2011).
- 2 Roy, Olivier. “Why religion matters more than ever in a secular Western society.” *ReligioWest Paper* (September 2015). This phrase signifies that no religion today can operate outside of the framework which secularization has set (see footnote 1). It is not meant to imply that religion is doomed to wither away.

withdraw into the private sphere of individual devotion or “ghettoized” communities; or they (2) acknowledge the divorce between secular society and religious consciousness and claim a special “exempted” status in society; or (3) they reformulate the religious norms in a way that is acceptable by secular rationality.<sup>3</sup> The field of religious education in public schools is a good place to observe how all three of these approaches work out in practice.

## THREE APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

When we at ReligioWest decided to organize a workshop and publication on *The future of religious education in Europe*<sup>4</sup>, we set ourselves the ambitious goal to cover, in the context of a small meeting, the entire conceptual range of approaches to religious education in public schools. This meant inviting theologians and professionals of religious teaching alongside defenders of a religiously impartial approach to the teaching of religion in schools, and to ask each of them to explain their reasons for defending their respective models. The papers gathered in this publication cover the conceptual debate on the subject, ranging from a confessional approach (Matthias Scharer, Joachim Willems) to a sociological approach (Wanda Alberts<sup>5</sup>), with an inclusive model as the middle-position (Robert Jackson, Valeria Fabretti). The different models diverge on how they define, in the context of public schooling for children aged

- 3 Ibid.
- 4 The workshop took place on October 28, 2014 at the European University Institute in Florence.
- 5 We could not include an original paper by Wanda Alberts here, but the position she defended is referred to by all four authors. I therefore refer the interested reader to the article “The academic study of religions and integrative religious education in Europe” (*British Journal of Religious Education*, 32:2 (2010), 275-290) and her book *Integrative Religious Education in Europe: A Study-of-religions Approach* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

6 to 14 years, what religious education is aimed at: is that what should be conveyed *knowledge about religion* or instead *religious knowledge*? Should pupils become cognitively equipped to recognize and discuss religious diversity, or should they first become literate in one, presumably “their own” religious tradition?

The *confessional religious education approach* holds that children benefit from single-faith-teaching inasmuch as they are addressed as religious subjects, irrespective of whether they regularly participate in religious practices, are socialized into a religious culture, or even reject religion. Both Scharer and Willems in this volume describe this model as “learning not only about, but also from and through (in) religion” and they argue that confessional religious education enables pupils to formulate an authentic personal religious or non-religious stance as precondition for religious tolerance and civility. “An informed atheist is a valid outcome of our religious education”, was one statement by Scharer during the workshop.

The *study-of-religions approach*, on the contrary, holds that “religion” should be taught in the school curriculum just as any other subject with the aim to equip children with knowledge about religions, cults and non-religious worldviews that coexist in the contemporary world. In the confessional approach, the teacher is a theologian and religious person who can act as testimony for the religion he or she is talking about, in the study-of-religion approach the teacher acts as an impartial referent who transmits knowledge but no personal judgments or attitudes.

The *inclusive approach* occupies a middle-position inasmuch as it also starts from a subject called “the study of religions and non-religious worldviews”, but favours the idea that such education includes opportunities for the responsible teacher to invite representatives of faith into the classroom in order

to speak about their religion.<sup>6</sup> The main difference between the study-of-religion approach and the inclusive approach lies in the way in which the two envision the operationalization of teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews in the European context in the short- and mid-term future. Jackson, who has worked out the inclusive approach, admits in his policy-recommendations for the implementation of intercultural education<sup>7</sup> that religious education in public schooling could, for realistic, practical purposes, take close account of national, regional or local contexts in the short- and mid-term future, whereas the study-of-religion approach advocates a conscious break with past legacies and the implementation of an impartial and universally applicable curriculum.

All three approaches claim to have the same aim: to enable pupils to competently recognize and discuss issues of religious pluralism in contemporary societies, to acquire knowledge about the religious situation of the society they live in and to understand the basics of the religious culture that has shaped their environment.

The three positions sharply diverge, however, on the didactical assumptions with which they approach religious education: the confessional approach assumes that the best way to become competent in the field of religion is to have a sound background in one religious tradition, here the Christian Catholic or Protestant tradition; or at least to engage with one religious tradition by conjecture. Pedagogues of confessional religious education do not assume that pupils are actually religious themselves, but they do assume that it is possible, on the basis of family history, personal choice or general culture, to take the decision which confessional religious course is the most adept for the child. The model assumes a residual

6 During such visits, however, religious representatives are not supposed to speak out on behalf their religion or give religious testimony.

7 Jackson 2014.

confessional society and implies a context-specific implementation or operationalization.

Advocates of the study-of-religion approach break with this assumption, they start from the idea of a thoroughly secularized<sup>8</sup> and highly pluralistic society and from the presupposition that the public school must not make any assumptions about the religious belonging of pupils. This approach is strictly against the separation of pupils on the grounds of confession during class-hours. Also the inclusive approach is against separation of pupils in different courses that are offered in parallel, but it is more flexible with regard to letting the religious background of students transpire during the teaching about religions.

This table summarizes the features of three approaches and the differences between them:

<b>Confessional religious approach</b>	<b>Inclusive approach</b>	<b>Study-of-religion-approach</b>
Teacher: theologian, religious person of declared confession	Teacher: impartial pedagogue and “moderator” for student-to-student dialogue and exchange with visitors	Teacher: impartial pedagogue
Course: pupils are divided into different single-faith or ethics courses upon individual choice (of the student or parents)	Course: pupils remain together in one course	Course: pupils remain together in one course
School: school organizes religious lessons for different confessions as regular part of the curriculum	School: teaching about religion and non-religious worldviews is regular part of the curriculum taught by one teacher	School: teaching about religion and non-religious worldviews is regular part of the curriculum taught by one teacher
Content: learning about/in/from religion and knowledge about other religions, no catechesis	Content: knowledge about religious facts and non-religious worldviews plus opportunities for facilitated dialogue between students	Content: knowledge about religious facts and non-religious worldviews
Operationalization: contextual	Operationalization: contextual	Operationalization: universal

<sup>8</sup> “Secularized“ here in the sense of decline of religious belief. See footnote 1.

## THE PLACE OF TEACHING OF RELIGION IN EUROPEAN SECULAR SOCIETY

In a Europe where, as Roy has poignantly expressed, “secularization has won”, religions either (1) withdraw into the private sphere of individual devotion or “ghettoized” communities; or they (2) acknowledge the divorce between secular society and religious consciousness and claim a special “exempted” status in society; or (3) they reformulate the religious norms in a way that is acceptable by secular rationality. The field of religious education in public schools demonstrates that religions in Europe have, in fact, pursued all three of these strategies.

The two theologians and pedagogues of confessional religious education we invited for this workshop (Scharer, Willems) lay out how the Catholic and Protestant Christian Churches in Europe have followed approach (3). The Würzburg-Synod of the Catholic Church and the declarations of the Comenius-Institute of the German Protestant Churches are examples for how religious teaching can be reformulated and reorganized in a way that it becomes acceptable to secular rationality, in particular with regard to freedom of conscience. Both authors explain in their contributions to this volume how the teaching of religion in public schools is fundamentally different from the model of catechesis and how this effort of innovation has become the basis, in particular in Austria and Germany, for a model of multiple faith-based teaching that is unparalleled in most other European countries.

But what happens when confessional religious education is pushed out of public schooling, as advocated by critics of single-faith teaching? Two roads remain open for faith-based education: the first is the retreat into private education, i.e. catechesis or, for example, Quran-schooling or other comparable forms of confessional religious teaching, beyond the control of the state and organized in complete independence by faith-

communities themselves. This is the scenario (1) described by Roy and we can easily see how it could signify a regress with regard to the reformist approach in (3). Furthermore, in the present atmosphere of public hysteria about Islamic radicalization, this option is generally rejected by European policy makers, who want to retain control over the way in which religion is taught to young people. The second (2) scenario is to grant religions an “exempted” status, which in practice means the public funding (and control) of religious schools or the co-operation in the context of an impartial course on religions and non-religious worldviews with faith-communities (the integrative model, in this publication explained by Jackson and also by Fabretti, who calls it a “postsecular model”).

## THREE CONCLUSIONS ON THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN EUROPE

**1. The advocates of confessional religious education inside public schools in Europe today are fighting a rearguard-action.** After decades of efforts to make confessional religious teaching fit secular rationalities and leave behind the model of catechesis, the Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches are faced with a situation in which their good-faith theological pedagogical models are barely acceptable to the general secular public and risk becoming too costly in societies with proliferating religious pluralism. At the same time, however, we learn from the Austrian and German examples in this volume that pluralistic models of confessional religious education are continually evolving. They incorporate newcomer religions and provide grounds for cross-confessional synergies, for example in teachers’ training. **Confessional religious education is a reality in many European countries and likely to remain an important factor in the teaching of and about religions in Europe. The inclusive-model of teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews takes this into due account.**

**2. The public debate about religious education in Europe today has shifted from religious to predominantly political reasoning.** Most European countries have in place systems of teaching religions and/or ethics. The assumption behind the “ethics” alternative to religious education was that religious education is about teaching of the good life, and that a lack of teaching of religion requires a substitute that would equally enable students to confront fundamental life-questions. From today’s perspective it is clear that the focus of the debate is different: public debates about the teaching of religions today hinge upon the need to educate young citizens to intercultural competence in a pluri-faith-secular-society. The public debate has thus shifted from a predominantly religious to a political reasoning: public intellectuals like Regis Debray have deplored that **knowledge about religions in secularized European society is declining with possibly serious effects both for democracy (the reciprocal understanding of religious and secular citizens is at stake) as well as culture (the historical cultural memory, often tied to a specific religious tradition, risks to be no longer correctly deciphered and interpreted).**

**3. The third and final conclusion we take away from this workshop and publication is that “knowledge about religions and religious knowledge” will remain an embattled field in European school-policies with three models of religious education competing with each other.** For us at ReligioWest, who set out to study how pluralization impacts the public role and self-understanding of religions in Europe, the findings confirm that no religion today can operate outside the secular frame, but that this does precisely not imply the disappearance of religion but its multivariate permanence.

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## II INCLUSIVE STUDY OF RELIGIONS AND OTHER WORLDVIEWS IN PUBLICLY-FUNDED SCHOOLS IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES

Robert Jackson

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines some issues in incorporating the study of religions, or the study of religions together with non-religious worldviews, into the curricula of publicly-funded schools in democratic states. The issues are discussed in general, but particular attention is given to examples from England and from work conducted within the Council of Europe, including a Recommendation from the Committee of Ministers dealing with this topic<sup>1</sup> and a text designed to assist policymakers and practitioners in interpreting and applying ideas from the Recommendation<sup>2</sup>.

### RELIGION AND EDUCATION IN WESTERN DEMOCRACIES: KEY DRIVERS OF CHANGE

The processes of secularisation, pluralisation and globalisation have stimulated debate about the place of religion in publicly funded schools leading to some policy developments and changes in the education systems of some European countries. In England, where religious education is a distinct subject on the school timetable, these changes began to have an impact on practice, theory and

- 1 Council of Europe, “Recommendation CM/Rec (2008)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education” (2008).
- 2 Robert Jackson, *Signposts: Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews in intercultural education* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2014a).

policy in the late 1960s, resulting in changes to legislation in 1988.

A further influence for change results from the debate about the place of religion in the public sphere of democracies, much of it coming after the events of 9/11 in the USA<sup>3</sup>. For example, the shift in Council of Europe policy, which resulted in new work on the study of religion in public education from 2002, was related to that debate<sup>4</sup>.

In England, the process of secularization was reflected in the changing attitudes of young people in schools, with empirical research conducted in the 1960s suggesting that traditional Biblical education was felt by many older secondary school students to be irrelevant to their personal questions and concerns<sup>5</sup> or to include an unwarranted form of religious teaching which lacked breadth and opportunities for critical analysis and discussion<sup>6</sup>.

Pluralization through migration, especially since the 1960s, led many educators to shift the focus of religious studies in fully state-funded schools from a form of single faith religious teaching (in England, a form of non-denominational Christianity taught primarily through Biblical studies) to a ‘non-confessional’, inclusive, multi-faith approach, including learning *about* the religions of relatively newly-established minorities such as Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims as well as Christianity and Judaism.

- 3 Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere” (*European Journal of Philosophy* 14, 1, 2006), 1–25.
- 4 Council of Europe, *The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2004); “Intercultural education” (Council of Europe 2008); *Signposts* (Jackson 2014a); John Keast, ed., *Religious diversity and intercultural education: A reference book for schools* (Council of Europe Publishing: Strasbourg, 2007).
- 5 Harold Loukes, *New Ground in Christian Education* (London: SCM Press, 1965).
- 6 Edwin Cox, *Sixth form religion: a study of the beliefs and of the attitudes to religion, religious instruction, and morals, of a sample of grammar school sixth form pupils* (London: SCM Press, 1967).

Theory and methodology from the phenomenology of religion, offering an impartial and objective approach to the study of religions which acknowledged increasing secularity and plurality, was influential from the early 1970s. A key source was the global perspective of Professor Ninian Smart<sup>7</sup> and the project on religious education that he led at the University of Lancaster<sup>8</sup>. However, any direct influence of theory and specific methodology (whether Smart's or anyone else's) on practice in schools is difficult to assess; the relationship between theory, and its associated methodology, to policy and to general practice in schools is complex and not easy to determine<sup>9</sup>. More 'bottom up' developments, reflecting secularization and pluralization as experienced by students and teachers in school, also played an important part in precipitating change in schools<sup>10</sup>. With regard to fully state-funded schools (as distinct from schools with a religious character receiving state funding), the changes during the 1960s and 1970s were recognized in law in the 1988 Education Reform Act<sup>11</sup>.

## REPRESENTING PLURALITY: 'MULTICULTURAL' AND 'INTERCULTURAL'

There is insufficient space here to discuss in detail the emergence of inclusive and pluralistic religious education in relation to the ongoing debate about 'multiculturalism'. Some religious education theory has worked with sophisticated formulations of multiculturalist theory, drawing on empirical research dealing with the interplay of 'dominant' and 'demotic' discourses<sup>12</sup>. 'Dominant discourse' assumes the existence of distinct and separate cultures living side-by-side, while 'demotic discourse' recognizes the reality and significance of cultural fusion, the formation of new culture, inter-generational differences, and the emergence of new fundamentalisms<sup>13</sup>. However, the rejection of multiculturalism through its identification only with 'dominant' discourse has been common among European politicians, including British Prime Minister David Cameron<sup>14</sup>. Such a one-sided representation has resulted in derogatory uses of the term 'multicultural' and its avoidance in some official documents, such as the final report of the UK Commission on Integration and Cohesion<sup>15</sup>. The Council of Europe prefers to use the term 'intercultural', with its suggestion of cultural interaction and dialogue<sup>16</sup>, and regards

- .....
- 7 Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (London: Collins, 1969).
  - 8 Schools Council, *Religious Education in secondary schools* (London: Evans Methuen, 1971).
  - 9 Oddrun M.H. Bråten, *Towards a methodology for comparative studies in religious education: A study of England and Norway*. (Münster: Waxmann, 2013).
  - 10 W. Owen Cole, *Religion in the Multifaith School*, 1st edn. (Yorkshire Committee for Community Relations, 1972).
  - 11 Adam Dinham and Robert Jackson, "Religion, Welfare and Education." In *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, eds. L. Woodhead and R. Catto (London: Routledge, 2012), 272-294; Brian Gates and Robert Jackson, "Religion and education in England." In *Religious education at schools in Europe, Part 2: Western Europe*, eds. Martin Rothgangel, Robert Jackson and Martin Jäggle (Göttingen: Vienna University Press/V&R unipress, 2014) 65-98.

- .....
- 12 Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic and Religious Identities* (London: Routledge, 1999).
  - 13 Robert Jackson, *Rethinking religious education and plurality: Issues in diversity and pedagogy* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004).
  - 14 David Cameron, "Munich speech on 5 February 2011 on radicalisation and Islamic extremism" (*New Statesman*); replied to in Robert Jackson, "Cameron, 'multiculturalism' and education about religions and beliefs" (2011)
  - 15 Commission on Integration and Cohesion, *Our Shared Future*, Final Report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (London, 2007), 13.
  - 16 Martyn Barrett, ed., *Interculturalism and Multiculturalism: Similarities and Differences* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2013).

inclusive education about religions and non-religious convictions as a subset of intercultural education<sup>17</sup>. Some writers use the term ‘diversity’, rather than multiculturalism. For example, in his work on ‘super-diversity’ Steven Vertovec analyses the complexity and changing character of cultural and religious diversity in the light of global, regional and local factors and their relationship over time<sup>18</sup>. This, of course, includes the emergence of radicalized Islam in various European contexts.

## THE SCOPE OF THE SUBJECT

With regard to pluralization, there is an additional argument that an inclusive school subject should cover non-religious philosophies as well as religions. This view has been taken by the Council of Europe in its Ministerial Recommendation of 2008<sup>19</sup>, and by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe in its *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*<sup>20</sup>. In both cases, the argument for extending the range of ‘inclusive religious education’ relates to the human rights principle of freedom of religion and belief (‘belief’ encompassing non-religious convictions). We will return to this discussion below but, for the moment, will concentrate on studies of religion(s) in schools.

## NAMES FOR STUDYING RELIGION IN SCHOOLS

As we have seen in relation to the term ‘multicultural’, discussions about the place of studies of religion in publicly-funded schools are often hampered by the ambiguity of various terms<sup>21</sup>. Thus, for example, ‘religious education’ can be used to describe forms of *initiation into* what we might call ‘*religious understanding*’, through learning and religious practice. Sometimes, the terms ‘religious instruction’ and ‘religious nurture’ are used for these processes. However, ‘religious education’ often refers to the promotion of an inclusive, general public understanding of religion or religions – what we might term ‘*understanding religion*’. Terms such as ‘inclusive religious education’<sup>22</sup> or ‘integrative religious education’<sup>23</sup> are used in this way. The American Academy of Religion uses the term ‘religion education’ (as distinct from ‘religious education’) to refer to an inclusive education about religions<sup>24</sup>.

The increasingly-used term ‘religious literacy’ is also used in different ways. Many writers use it to connote a general understanding of religious language and practice, open to everyone, which can result from learning about religions<sup>25</sup>. However, some use the term religious literacy to imply the development of an *insider’s* use of religious language<sup>26</sup>.

17 Council of Europe, “Intercultural Education”; Jackson, *Signposts*.

18 Steven Vertovec, *The Emergence of Super-Diversity in Britain*, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, Working Paper No. 25 (University of Oxford, 2006)

19 Jackson, *Signposts*, 67-75.

20 OSCE, *The Toledo Guiding Principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools* (Warsaw: Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2007).

21 Jackson, *Signposts*, 27-31.

22 Robert Jackson, “Addressing Religious Extremism: A Positive Approach for Policy Makers and Practitioners.” In *Religion and conflict: responding to the challenges*, ed. T. Thorp and D. Cere (London: Tony Blair Faith Foundation, 2014b), 70-77.

23 Wanda Alberts, *Integrative Religious Education in Europe: A Study-of-religions Approach* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

24 American Academy of Religion, *Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States* (American Academy of Religion, 2010)

25 *Ibid.*; Diane Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

26 Marius Felderhof, “Secular humanism.” In *Debates in religious education*, ed. L.P. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2012).

## UNDERSTANDING RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING

Some proponents of ‘understanding religion’, often drawing on methodologies from the science of religions, see the fundamental aim of the subject purely in terms of providing accurate information about religions; any discussion of personal responses or views by students is regarded as outside the remit of the subject<sup>27</sup>.

Others see it as involving the acquisition of accurate information, together with the provision of opportunities for students to articulate their own views, including personal responses to their learning. For example, in the interpretive approach to religious education<sup>28</sup>, students learn about religions (through learning information and discussing issues concerned with how religions are portrayed in various contexts [*representation*], and studying how religious language is used and religious actions are performed by practitioners [*interpretation*]). They are also given opportunities, in the context of the ‘civil’ classroom and in an age-appropriate manner, to express what they think is positive about the material they have studied, to articulate criticisms of the beliefs and values they have encountered, and to make contributions to the review of study methods [*reflexivity*].

27 Alberts, “Integrative Religious Education”; Tim Jensen, “RS Based RE in Public Schools: a Must for the Secular State,” *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 55 2/3 (2008), 123-150.

28 Robert Jackson, *Religious education: an interpretive approach* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997); Jackson, *Rethinking religious education and plurality: Issues in diversity and pedagogy* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004); Jackson, “Understanding religious diversity in a plural world: the interpretive approach.” In *International handbook of the religious, moral and spiritual dimensions of education*, ed. M. de Souza et al. (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer Academic Publishers, 2006), 399-414; Jackson, “Understanding the religions and worldviews of others.” Alliance of Civilizations Forum. Istanbul, Turkey, 6 April 2009 (2009a); Jackson, “Studying religions: the interpretive approach in brief” (2009b).

In some European education systems, such a hermeneutical and discursive approach would be viewed positively, while in others, only an approach concerned with the provision of information would be considered appropriate within publicly-funded schools. Some writers look for ways of adapting the interpretive approach to education systems which do not permit the articulation of personal views by students. For example, Bruce Grelle does this, in the case of the United States, by turning the idea of reflexivity from the expression of personal views of class members into a more distanced consideration of issues relating to democratic citizenship<sup>29</sup>.

Some writers would argue that *any* approach aiming purely to develop an understanding of religion(s) is incompatible with all approaches intending to nurture young people into religious understanding. At one end of the spectrum, some critics argue that genuine religious education *must* include some element of initiation into religious life<sup>30</sup>. At the opposite end of the spectrum, others are concerned that *any* nurturing role for religious education militates against an objective understanding of religions<sup>31</sup>.

29 Bruce Grelle, “Defining and Promoting the Study of Religion in British and American Schools.” In *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions of Education*, ed. M. de Souza et al. (Dordrecht: the Netherlands, Springer Academic Publishers, 2006), 461-474.

30 Liam Gearon, *Masterclass in Religious Education: Transforming Teaching and Learning* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); replied to in Robert Jackson, “Misrepresenting Religious Education’s Past and Present in Looking Forward: Gearon Using Kuhn’s Concepts of Paradigm, Paradigm Shift and Incommensurability,” *Journal of Beliefs and Values: Studies in Religion & Education* 36:1, (2015), 64-78. See also Robert Jackson, “The Politicisation and Securitisation of Religious Education? A Rejoinder,” *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 63: 3, (2015), 345-366.

31 Jensen, “RS Based RE.”

However, it can be argued that some approaches to developing an understanding of religion are compatible with certain (outward-looking) approaches aiming to develop religious understanding<sup>32</sup>. Proponents of this view maintain that the individual's religious understanding can, in principle, contribute experience that facilitates an understanding of the religious position of others, just as an understanding of religious plurality can inform one's own religious understanding. Indeed, many educators who are involved in educating for religious understanding within their faith communities regard it as important that learners have opportunities to develop a cognisance of religious diversity<sup>33</sup>. Furthermore, dialogue between students experiencing each form of education can contribute to the goals of both approaches<sup>34</sup>.

#### UNDERSTANDING RELIGION(S): INTRINSIC AND INSTRUMENTAL AIMS

The discussion here will concentrate on approaches that aim *to develop an understanding of religion(s)* – including the language, experience and values of religious people. The view is taken that national policies should include educational activity that promotes it, for a range of reasons, both intrinsic to the nature of education and instrumental to the benefit of individuals and society.

The 'intrinsic' aim concerns the nature of human experience. If education is about understanding the full breadth of human experience, then 'understanding religion' must be included. In an international context where skills for

32 Jackson, "Religious Extremism."

33 Gareth Byrne and Patricia Kieran, eds., *Toward Mutual Ground: Pluralism, Religious Education and Diversity in Irish Schools* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2013).

34 Ursula McKenna, Julia Ipgrave and Robert Jackson, *Inter Faith Dialogue by Email in Primary Schools: An Evaluation of the Building E-Bridges Project* (Münster: Waxmann, 2008).

employability and industrial competitiveness – and, increasingly, concerns about security – can dominate educational policy, this view acts as a counterweight, pressing for the inclusion of studies of religious and related ethical issues, and reflection on these, as intrinsic to education.

There are also important instrumental aims for studying religions. Instrumental arguments tend to emphasize either the *personal* development of students or their *social* development, or a combination of the two (as in Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education – PSHE – in England, which complements religious education and other curriculum subjects). As noted above, arguments emphasizing the *personal* development of students often emphasize the potential contribution of the study of religions to students' moral development, or stress the importance of students engaging reflexively with religious material in developing their own views on religion and values<sup>35</sup>. Study of, and reflection on, different religions can help students to clarify their own personal religious position or framework of values or appreciate the relationship between another's position relative to their own. Ongoing reflection is a 'conversational' process in which students, whatever their family or cultural background, interpret and reinterpret their own views in the light of their studies.

There are also important *social* reasons for studying a variety of religions and beliefs. These can relate to a recognition of the principle of freedom of religion or belief, and increasing tolerance of (and sometimes respect for) others' views and ways of life within society. Consideration of the *limits* of freedom of human action and speech are part of the process of dialogue. Participation in the relevant debates links the social world and the individual, and is potentially a means to effective

35 Jackson, "Religious Education"; "Understanding"; "Studying religions".

inter-religious and inter-cultural communication within plural democracies.

Arguments emphasizing the social development of students (for example, through contributing to citizenship education) range from promoting good community relations<sup>36</sup> and intercultural understanding<sup>37</sup>, to increasing awareness of the human rights principle of freedom of religion or belief and increasing tolerance of diversity<sup>38</sup>, to promoting social or community cohesion<sup>39</sup> and, in recent times, countering religious extremism<sup>40</sup>.

With regard to linking the personal and the social, research with 14-16 year olds in eight European countries – the REDCo Project – showed support from young people for education about religious diversity. The research demonstrates that studies of religious diversity are not erosive of students' own commitments, but can help to develop a culture of 'living together'. The majority of 14-16 year old young people surveyed wanted opportunities to learn about and from one another's religious perspectives in the 'safe space' of the classroom, with teachers providing knowledge and understanding while also facilitating dialogue effectively<sup>41</sup>. Thus, studies of religions can contribute to

36 Cole, "Multifaith School".

37 Council of Europe, "Intercultural education".

38 OSCE, *Toledo Guiding Principles*.

39 DCSF, *Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion* (London: UK Government, Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) 2007).

40 Joyce Miller, "Religious extremism, religious education and the interpretive approach." In *Religion in Education: Innovation in International Research*, eds. J. Miller et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 121-133.

41 Ina Ter Avest et al., eds., *Dialogue and Conflict on Religion. Studies of Classroom Interaction on European Countries* (Waxmann: Münster, 2009); Robert Jackson, ed., *Religion, Education, Dialogue and Conflict: Perspectives on Religious Education Research* (London: Routledge, 2012); Thorsten Knauth et al., eds, *Encountering Religious Pluralism in School and Society. A Qualitative Study of Teenage Perspectives in Europe* (Waxmann: Münster, 2008); Pille Valk et al., eds., *Teenagers' perspectives on the role of religion in their lives, schools and societies: A European quantitative study* (Waxmann: Münster, 2009).

broader fields such as intercultural education and education for democratic citizenship. The European REDCo research shows young people who want an opportunity to learn and talk about religion in schools. They see the classroom (not family or peer group) as the only likely potential 'safe space' for this to happen, and they appreciate skillful teachers who can *both* provide accurate information and manage discussions which include significant differences in viewpoint. There is no assumption, as one critic has suggested, that 'all religions are equally true'<sup>42</sup>, but there is a commitment to exploring the democratic and human rights principle of freedom of religion or belief within society.

One recent example of this kind of discursive and interpretive approach is from a teacher of religious education in the UK, a few days after the terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015.

Year 8 (age 12-13) spent one hour a week last term (from September to December 2014) studying Islam. We spent about three weeks examining the Islamic concept of *jihad*; both greater and lesser *jihad*. This work built up to an extended piece of writing that examined the Islamist terrorism and violence of ISIS and contrasted it with the criteria and teachings of lesser *jihad* in Islam. We also learned about the Islamic views on the depiction of Allah and the prophets of Islam in art. This led us to discussion and reflection on the diverse reactions to the Danish cartoon controversy (involving *Jyllands-Posten*).

42 Gearon, "Masterclass."

The students discussed and completed work about the different reactions to the cartoons, the right to (and any limits to) freedom of speech, the right to freedom of belief, and what Islam might be said to teach about appropriate responses to provocation or offence felt.

These issues were revisited in a discussion lesson that took place days after the terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015, including the one on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*. The students had a firm grasp of the many issues involved in these attacks and the reaction from the public, the media, and religious groups. Their earlier learning had clearly prepared them to respond to these events in very considered and reasoned ways<sup>43</sup>.

One criticism of approaches to inclusive religious education such as this, related to the social development of students, including increasing tolerance within society, is that they have a *single, political* aim, and thereby distort the religions they claim to represent<sup>44</sup>. This criticism is unsustainable, since inclusive religious education, as described above, has a *variety* of aims, both intrinsic and instrumental, with instrumental aims relating to both personal and social development. Moreover, it is hard to see how any discussion of religion in society can avoid questions of politics at various levels. If religion is part of human social experience, then it clearly has a political dimension.

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43 Daniel Hugill, personal communication, 15 January 2015.

44 Gearon, “Masterclass”, replied to in Jackson, “Misrepresenting” and Jackson “Politicisation”.

## RELIGIONS AND ‘NON-RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEWS’?

So far, the discussion has concentrated on studies of religions. However, some proponents of ‘inclusive religious education’ have extended the range of the subject to include a study of non-religious worldviews. For example, the Council of Europe’s Ministerial Recommendation concerns ‘the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education’<sup>45</sup>. Here, a form of inclusive education is recommended for all students, regardless of background, developing their understanding of a variety of religious *and* non-religious life stances or worldviews. This education is intended to complement any nurture within a particular religious tradition or philosophy, and aims to deepen students’ understanding of different life stances present in late modern societies, and to encourage dialogue and exchange between those from different backgrounds. It relates religions and ‘non-religious convictions’ to intercultural education, not to reduce religion to culture, but to give public recognition to the presence of different and deeply held commitments within our societies. Thus, it reflects the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 18 on ‘freedom of thought, conscience and religion’.

In 2011, the Council of Europe and the European Wergeland Centre (a European Resource Centre for human rights and intercultural education, related to the Council of Europe and sponsored by the Norwegian Government) set up a joint committee of international experts to produce a text aiming to enable policymakers and practitioners across Europe to work constructively with the Council of Europe Recommendation in enabling the development of policy, training and practice with regard to teaching about religions and non-religious convictions. This text, entitled *Signposts – Policy and Practice for Teaching*

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45 Council of Europe, “Intercultural education”.

*about Religions and Non-religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education*, was published by the Council of Europe in late 2014<sup>46</sup>. Its content is informed by responses to a questionnaire sent to the education ministries of all 47 member states, plus consultations by the author with policymakers, teacher trainers, teachers and trainee teachers in a number of European countries. The book includes discussions of issues concerned with: the terminology associated with teaching about religions and beliefs; competence and didactics for understanding religions; the classroom as a safe space; the representation of religions in the media; human rights issues; linking schools to wider communities and organizations; and dealing with non-religious convictions and worldviews in addition to religions. With regard to this last issue, a distinction is made between *organized* worldviews, such as religions and secular humanism, and *personal* worldviews of individuals. Research shows the latter often to be eclectic and unconventional. Personal worldviews might mirror particular religions or humanism, but are often more eclectic<sup>47</sup>. Some would argue that the school should provide opportunities for the exploration of personal as well as organized worldviews.

A broadly similar, inclusive and human rights-based approach is taken by the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* published by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe<sup>48</sup>. This text, which advocates the study of non-religious life stances alongside religions in publicly-funded schools, has been influential on a number of projects and initiatives. These include the Education about Religions and Beliefs website which forms part of the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations programme<sup>49</sup>.

46 Jackson, *Signposts*.

47 *Ibid.*, 67-75.

48 OSCE, *Toledo Guiding Principles*

49 United Nations Alliance of Civilisations programme, <http://erb.unaoc.org/>

## UNDERPINNING VALUES AND PERSONAL AUTONOMY

Apart from the clarification of aims, content and didactics, there are various issues relating to inclusive religious education or education about religions and other worldviews. One is the values base of the approach, and another concerns different views about personal autonomy.

With regard to values, the intention of the approach is to help young people to understand religious and worldview diversity and, as we have seen, there are various educational aims associated with this. However, the context for learning is that of education within the democratic state. Thus, the values underpinning the idea of democracy are important, as are values associated with open academic study. With regard to democratic values, both the Council of Europe work in this field and that of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE, refer to the various human rights codes as a values foundation for teaching about religions and non-religious convictions in publicly-funded schools. In particular, clauses relating to freedom of religion or belief and to respect for human dignity are referred to in relation to education about religions and non-religious convictions. Critics of a human rights values base for inclusive religious education ask why a particular set of values, which are associated with the European Enlightenment, should have this authority. The short answer is that they encapsulate the key principles of democracy. However, this does not mean that they are beyond question or discussion.

Interestingly, 'bottom up' approaches to the study of religious and non-religious diversity encountered through research, are often associated with the values of academic scholarship and those of community within schools. These broadly reflect human rights values. Research on classroom interaction as part of the REDCO project shows young people wanting to learn from one another about religious and worldview

diversity, but also desiring moderation and constraint in order to guarantee a safe space for self-expression, for listening to the testimony of others, and for dialogue. Again, these values are consistent with human rights codes, and with an interesting attempt by the InterAction Council to link human rights to responsibilities<sup>50</sup>. This matter is relevant to wider issues of human rights within society; for example, the right to freedom of expression being tempered by sensitivity to the deeply held convictions of others.

Nevertheless, there can be tensions between certain human rights values and those associated with particular cultural or religious traditions. These must be acknowledged and explored in inclusive education about religions and non-religious convictions if such studies are to make a genuine contribution to *intercultural* education.

One issue relates to the idea of personal autonomy. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights regard adults as autonomous individuals. However, some rights concerning children's education in or about religion and belief are delegated to parents until children reach a level of maturity at which they themselves can make decisions autonomously<sup>51</sup>.

Moreover, there are different, and sometimes conflicting, views about autonomy related to various religious stances and to different non-religious perspectives. Some religious traditions emphasize duties rather than rights specifically. For example, within Hindu tradition, certain duties fall to particular persons by virtue of their specific role within the family (for instance, the eldest son); the idea of personal autonomy is thus limited. Moreover, collective identity, rather than that of the individual may sometimes be emphasized, as in the concept of *izzat* (family honor) in north Indian/Pakistani culture and

religion. In some religious traditions, very young children are regarded as part of that tradition by virtue of birth, or experience of an initiation ceremony. These points about personal autonomy are relevant to policy decisions on whether the state should support forms of faith-based education financially, and to classroom discussions of individual rights and responsibilities in relation to adherence to a particular religious position<sup>52</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The debate about inclusive studies of religions, or religions together with non-religious convictions, within public education in democratic states is not straightforward. The simple distinction between faith-based approaches aiming to develop 'religious understanding', and liberal education approaches aiming to develop an understanding of religions, or religions and non-religious convictions, is complicated by the fact that there are some different assumptions and solutions associated with different variants of both types.

With regard to inclusive education about religions and non-religious worldviews, both policymaking and practice require clarity in taking positions within the debate and in identifying approaches workable within particular national, regional or local contexts. 'National' factors, such as the histories of religion and state, and of education, are relevant to settling issues of policy in particular countries, together with wider European and global factors. It is hoped that the topics covered in the Council of Europe's publication *Signposts*<sup>53</sup> will be of assistance to educators and politicians, and that ideas will be generated, through discussion at national and local level, for developments in policy and practice and for research related to these in and across different European states.

50 InterAction Council, *A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities* (1997).

51 OSCE, *Toledo Guiding Principles*, 34-36.

52 See Jackson, *Signposts*, 47-57 and 77-86 for discussion of issues related to the classroom as safe space and to human rights.

53 *Ibid.*

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### III RETHINKING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SOCIOLOGICALLY: A CONTRIBUTION TO THE EUROPEAN DEBATE AND COMPARISON.

Valeria Fabretti

Religious Education (RE) in public schools constitutes a crucial part of the European and nation-state's religion policies. On the whole, as the contributions collected in this volume confirm, the European scenario cannot be easily interpreted. If it is true that RE is part of an overall process of renovation of state policies on religion, the results differ (sometimes greatly) from country to country. In this sense, the existence of *one* European vision of RE is questionable. Furthermore, even national models are not given once and for all. Their inner dynamism derives both from - sometimes conflicting - changes in jurisdictions and social context.

Arguably, the features of RE in Europe cannot be fully disclosed by referring to categories such as "confessional/non confessional", or "learning in"/"learning about"/"learning from" religions, and so on. If it is true that these categories and the attempts to refine them - e.g. the distinction between 'integrative RE', 'separative RE' and the 'learning dimension'<sup>1</sup> - remain useful in orientating the debate on the acquisition of knowledge on religious traditions, it is also evident that their 'thickness' is limited, since their societal meanings often remain unclear.

1 W. Alberts, *Integrative Religious Education in Europe. A Study-of-Religions-Approach*. (Berlin: WdeG, 2007).

Even when discussed against the backdrop of the different historical-juridical frames of countries, the social representations (and the social conditions that influence them) about the role of religion and religious communities beyond national or local models remain poorly explored<sup>2</sup>. Moving from pedagogy or theology, in which those categories mostly arose, to social science, RE becomes a case study for exploring the exact status of religion and religious groups in modern societies.

In this broader frame this paper attempts to reconsider critically the "learning about religion" formula as a starting-point for a European model of religious education. One question appears pivotal here: can outsider perspectives and impartial approaches be sufficient in RE or are insider perspectives needed to promote a deep, vital and multidimensional understanding of religions? What is particularly questionable, in the author's view, is the idea of an 'objective' transmission of merely cultural contents which constitutes a way to address religious traditions *from the outside* rather than *from the inside*<sup>3</sup>. This paper would suggest that to take this question seriously, pedagogical and strictly educational assumptions do not provide sufficient answers. Broader frameworks for RE should be found, taking into account *visions about the religious and the secular and their relation in society*.

2 A. Jödicke, "Introduction," in *Religious Education Politics, the State, and Society*, ed. A. Jödicke (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2013b), 7-22.

3 P. Schreiner, "Religious Education in Europe. Situation and Developments" (paper delivered at Institute of Education, University of London. London, 2009).

The following pages are inspired by a sociological perspective in debating RE. This lens leads the author to consider a particularly crucial point: the relationship between school and religious actors as it takes shape within the *institutional field*, a sort of ‘middle ground’ between the macro features of a nation-state system (legal regulation, government, policies) and the micro processes happening in the classroom (teaching contents and methods, face to face interactions). This paper attempts to sketch how the topic can be addressed by ‘setting the scene’ on this intermediate and dynamic level – institutions as context of actions – focusing on a ‘culturalist’ perspective. The paper will then integrate this sociological *institutional and actor-centered approach*<sup>4</sup> referring to the notion of *postsecular* as an analytical tool useful in understanding the relationships of secular-religious actors and mutual orientation within the institutional field of school in pluralized societies. Finally, some considerations are offered about this manner of framing the RE discourse in comparative terms.

### RE IN THE SCHOOL’S ACTUAL GOVERNANCE: AN INSTITUTIONAL AND ACTOR-CENTERED APPROACH

Sociological institutionalism and actor-centered approaches in sociology have revealed themselves to be fruitful, not only for research on schools<sup>5</sup> but also for the analysis of religious diversity governance as a whole<sup>6</sup>. A review of the larger set

4 Jödicke, “Introduction,” 7-22.

5 *Ibid.*, 7-22.

6 V. Bader, “The Governance of Religious Diversity: Theory, Research, and Practice,” in *International Migration and G. Peters & J. Pierre the Governance of Religious Diversity*, ed. P. Bramadat and M. Koenig (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 43-72.

of theories and approaches relevant in this context<sup>7</sup> obviously exceeds the goal of this contribution. Instead, three main legacies are recalled from that articulated tradition of study particularly precious to our aims.

First, institutions are not so much formal structures with technical requirements of organizational tasks as, rather, moral collectivities acquiring and sharing values, establishing ties, ‘sanctifying’ rules, setting up rituals, symbols and ideologies, and developing autonomous forms of power: the *institutionalization* process<sup>8</sup>. Secondly, there is a substantial duality involving institutions and individuals: on the one hand, institutions with their moral models/cognitive schemes and governance regimes provide the frame of meaning for individuals’ actions and the rules in which they relate to each other; on the other hand, institutions are equally the outcome of particular constellations of actors and their interactions<sup>9</sup>. Thirdly, according to a constructivist approach<sup>10</sup>: institutions reproduce or change their own features and logics not merely in force of exogenous constraints<sup>11</sup>; new social meanings are adapted, modified or even refused by actors starting from the knowledge already shared in institutional traditions, which are in turn the result of the interactions, practices, experiences of actors.

7 Jean-Claude Thoenig. “Institutional theories and public institutions: Traditions and appropriateness,” in *Handbook of Public Administration*, ed. Peters Guy and Jon Pierre (Sage, 2003), 22.

8 P.Selznick, *Leadership in Administration: a Sociological Interpretation* (Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson, 1957).

9 G. Jackson, “Actors and Institutions,” in *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Institutional Analysis*, ed. G. Morgan et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 63-86.

10 S. Gherardi, S. and A. Lippi, *Tradurre le riforme in pratica. Le strategie della traslazione*. (Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 2000).

11 J.G. March and J.P Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York, Free Press 1989).

Coming back to the governance of religious differences in the light of these theoretical considerations, it becomes crucial to distinguish the principles underlying (religious) education policies and the – more or less ‘overlapping’ – cultures orienting institutional behavior and the practices of actors.

The – mainly cognitive and cultural – distance between local (and potentially discretionary) practices and the country’s predominant legal model or ideological policy model reflects indeed the complexity of *actual governance*, in contrast to the legal regulation of religious diversity<sup>12</sup>.

As for the case of RE, it means that the different solutions – e.g. education *about* religions and *from* religions – should be analyzed in the context of the actual governance in which they take place and of the social representations (re)produced and spread by the actors involved.

Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of the topic requires a focus on political ideologies and state-actors’ social representations linked to the inclusion/exclusion of religious communities from the creation of curricula and teaching, according to certain visions of the place and role of religion within a given society and its public institutions. At the same time, consideration must be given to the interpretation of school policies by religious communities, their own concepts and internal perspectives about religious education and their interest/position in relation to state schools (contribution to, participation in, separation from, or even opposition to), as well as their internal and external activities<sup>13</sup>.

12 V. Bader, “The Governance of Religious Diversity: Theory, Research, and Practice,” in *International Migration and the Governance of Religious Diversity*, ed. P. Bramadat and M. Koenig (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 47

13 Jödicke, “Introduction”, 7-22.

## FROM SEPARATION TO INTERPENETRATION: A POSTSECULAR LOGIC FOR ACTORS’ RELATIONSHIPS AROUND RE

As I briefly pointed out above, the *logics* – as symbolic frames shared within institutions or pressing them ‘from the outside’ – are the primary objects of attention in order to understand school governance of religious diversity and RE. This paper suggests to consider two opposing logics, the logic of secularization and separation, and that of the postsecular and interpenetration. It is more and more evident that the idea of a strict separation of religion from the state – after a long history of ‘embeddedness’ – has shown its inadequacy in decoding processes central to our present day *multiple modernities*<sup>14</sup> and therefore fails to offer conclusive answers about religion and schooling in pluralized societies<sup>15</sup>. From the perspective of separation, the place of RE in state schools is problematic, a residual component constantly in need of legitimization<sup>16</sup>.

An alternative and more useful frame for interpreting RE in secular schools is offered by the notion of the *postsecular*<sup>17</sup>. In post-secular logic, RE represents not an ambiguous element in an incomplete process of secularization but rather a

14 M. Rosati and K. Stoeckl, *Multiple Modernities and Postsecular Societies* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

15 G. Skeie, “Plurality and Pluralism in Religious Education,” in *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions in Education*, ed. M. De Souza et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008).

16 Jödicke, “Introduction”, 14

17 J. Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); K. Knott, *The Location of Religion. A Spatial Analysis* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2005); J. Habermas, “On the Relations Between the Secular Liberal state and Religion,” in *Political Theologies. Public Religions in a Post-secular World* (251-260), ed. H. de Vries and L.E. Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006); A. Molendijk et al., ed., *Exploring the postsecular: the religious, the political and the urban*. (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

proper component of the educational provision of plural societies in which secular and religious actors, worldviews and practices are not neatly separated alternatives, but intertwined.

The notion of the postsecular does not properly recall an idea of de-secularization of societies, but rather a sort of re-sacralization of the public sphere. Within a certain interpretation of the concept<sup>18</sup>, *pluralization*, the *de-privatization* of religions and the *coexistence* of secular and religious worldviews, actors and practices in social and institutional spaces are the main sociological features of a postsecular society. Moreover, the postsecular idea refers to a specific supposed 'reaction' to these sociological conditions by society, that is *reflexivity*, an increased *consciousness* about the possibility of dialectic and not merely oppositional relationships between the 'religious' and 'secular' and orientation towards mutual exchange. As is well known, these are elements mainly implied in the Habermas normative notion of *complementary learning*<sup>19</sup>.

The notion of postsecular allows for a novel perspective on the question this paper set out to address: which logics and institutional cultures are linked to the different formula and in particular to the inclusion/exclusion of the contribution of religious communities to RE in secular schools? Pluralization and coexistence are conditions that generate 'interpenetrations'<sup>20</sup> which in turn potentially lead to new configurations of both secular and religious viewpoints and practices.

## BEYOND JUST TEACHING: RE WITHIN (POSTSECULAR) SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

Following the logic of interpenetrations as alternative to strict separation between the secular and the religious, RE potentially offers exactly the kind of shared practices and experiences of collaboration which can generate new awareness in actors, and in institutions, new cultures and logics. Within this perspective, it seems to me that it is necessary to think of RE as not only a matter of classroom teaching but also a proper element of the broader school governance<sup>21</sup>. What makes the difference regarding teaching in this paper's view, is the direct participation of religious communities - with their own vocabulary, claims of truth and traditions - in the regular education *about* and *from* religions, through non-confessional, collaborative approaches. On the one hand, schools would be called upon to recognize the contribution of religious groups to education, allowing them to represent their own traditions in their own vocabulary; namely, not only in strictly cultural terms but also expressing claims of truth and the implications of daily collective and individual behaviors. On the other, religious communities would take part in the 'fair play' of democracy, for example, excluding forms of proselytism as required by the secular lexicon of public schools. Besides, despite this potential of religious language, it is crucial to question the set of meanings they produce and the effects of contributing to a shared public sphere and fostering solidarity between communities and identities or, rather, in drawing borders and creating in individuals a sense of exclusion from collective belonging<sup>22</sup>.

18 M. Rosati and K. Stoeckl, "Introduction," in *Multiple Modernities and Postsecular Societies*, ed. M. Rosati and K. Stoeckl (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 1-16.

19 Habermas, "Relations," 258.

20 N. Göle, *Interpénétrations. L'Islam et l'Europe* (Paris: Galaade Éditions, 2005).

21 V. Fabretti, "Learning from Religions. Post-secular schools and the challenge of pluralism," *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 5(2), (2013)

22 A. Seligman (ed.), *Religious Education and the Challenge of Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Furthermore, still following postsecular logic, the increase in awareness and reflexivity implied by learning *about* and particularly learning *from* religions can be brought out from the classroom and extended to institutional culture and behavior through the inclusion of religious communities in the broader school governance.

To make this point clear, recall the already largely accredited idea of school governance inspired by “democratic” and “net” patterns<sup>23</sup>. In such approaches, shared governance allows for the creation of institutional spaces based on mutual contribution between actors of different kinds. We can thus imagine an articulated system which varies from case to case, also depending on the social and cultural composition of students where different religious communities – but also, potentially, students themselves and their families – are called upon in schools to share decision-making, administration and teachings. Obviously, such a perspective also requires considering schools and institutions in general as potentially ‘contested arenas’ where social categorizations of religions, and the unequal distribution of power between groups, may select the actors entitled to join the dialogue.

Even if highly heterogeneous, the European scenario is not completely devoid of examples for RE of this kind. In the UK, Czech Republic, Portugal and the Belgian Flemish Community we already find solutions that include representations of civil society and religious communities in school governance<sup>24</sup>. In the UK, the systematic and institutionalized activity of the Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACRE) in the determination of the RE syllabus,

23 M. Apple and J.A. Beane, *Democratic Schools, Second Edition: Lessons in Powerful Education* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; 2007); R. Serpieri, *Senza Leadership. Un discorso democratico per la scuola* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2008).

24 Eurydice, *Eurybase. The information Database on Education System in Europe* (Bruxelles: Eurydice, 2009)

daily worship and other practices and projects concerning religion in state schools is particularly interesting<sup>25</sup>. As for the case of Italy, although there is a long road still to be followed in this direction, there is a growing vitality at local level and there exist examples of religious education close to the idea of RE suggested here<sup>26</sup>.

## CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A CONTEXT-SENSITIVE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RE ACROSS EUROPE

Despite a recent increase in research on RE in the western European context<sup>27</sup> and beyond<sup>28</sup>, there is still a lack of comparative analysis<sup>29</sup>. However, comparing solutions regarding RE as a social phenomenon across the European scenario is quite problematic. In order to avoid premature generalizations, it is better to compare specific cases through questions and frameworks. This article has suggested that the postsecular and interpenetration framework could be a useful angle for comparative analysis.

Being a sociological category with heuristic value, postsecular features cannot be addressed in abstract terms. They must be related to contexts, to which they can be more or less ‘sympathetic’, and translated in examples<sup>30</sup>. This brief portrayal

25 Jackson in this volume.

26 V. Fabretti, *A scuola di pluralismo. Identità e differenze nella sfera pubblica scolastica* (Roma: Aracne, 2011).

27 R. Jackson et al., *Religion and Education in Europe. Developments, Contexts and Debates*. (Münster: Waxmann, 2007); K. Engebretson et al., *International Handbook of Inter-Religious Education*. (Dordrecht/London/ NY: Springer, 2010).

28 A. Seligman (ed.), *Religious Education and the Challenge of Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

29 A. Jödicke (ed.), *Religious Education Politics, the State, and Society*. (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2013).

30 M. Rosati and K. Stoeckl, “Introduction”, 1-16; M. Rosati, *The Making of a Postsecular Society. A Durkheimian Approach to Memory, Pluralism and Religion in Turkey* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

of RE as part of a 'postsecular school governance' is such a way of exemplifying the postsecular logic. The postsecular can help precisely in the understanding of cultural dynamics through which society comes to think of itself differently, starting at local level; it highlights the role of social actors in creating new accommodations of shared spaces and practice. At the same time, as mentioned above, this point should bring about a consideration of inequalities amongst groups in acceding to the public sphere and the potentially struggling dimension of pluralism. It can be assumed that feeding the 'political imagination' of governments with knowledge about the range of solutions designed within contexts means enhancing the reflective potentiality of the public sphere and in turn facilitating the creation of a 'virtuous cycle' of innovating RE in Europe.

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# IV RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THE STUDENT'S FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION – SOME LESSONS AND QUESTIONS FROM GERMANY

Joachim Willems

## 1 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN GERMANY – THE CURRENT SITUATION

### 1.1 What does it mean to call religious education in Germany a 'confessional' subject?

Religious education (RE) in Germany, at least in theory, is taught as 'Protestant RE' or 'Catholic RE' (and in some German federal states, there is also Islamic RE, Jewish RE, Greek Orthodox RE, Syriac Orthodox RE, Alevi RE or others). Nevertheless, it would be too undifferentiated to say that RE in Germany is a *confessional* subject. Robert Jackson notices that the

“term 'confessional' is used with at least two different senses. The first refers to systems of education in which the sponsoring organisation ... is a religious body. The second refers to the nature of religious education itself. In this sense, the defining feature of confessional RE is its assumption that the goal of the subject is to nurture faith and that the contents of RE, and the development of curricula and teaching materials, are mainly the responsibility of religious communities as distinct from the state”<sup>1</sup>.

1 Robert Jackson, “Introduction to Section Two: Religious Education and Debates about Plurality and Culture,” in *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions of Education*, ed. Marian de Souza et al. (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer Academic Publishers, 2006), 296.

In contrast to confessional RE, Silvio Ferrari defines non-confessional RE as

“organised and controlled by the state which is charged with the training, selection and remuneration of instructors, the definition of curricula and the approval of materials (possibly, as is the case in the United Kingdom, in consultation with the religious communities). In these countries, educators do not require a certification by the religious communities. ... The non-confessional character of the courses does not preclude particular emphasis being placed on Christianity ...”<sup>2</sup>.

According to these definitions, RE in Germany consists of both confessional and non-confessional traits: RE is state-funded, state authorities and cooperating religious organizations must both approve the curricula and teaching materials, and they both have the right to organize and to control the RE to a certain degree; state and church (or the particular religious organization) cooperate as well in the training and selection of teachers. On the one hand, teachers require a certification issued by their religious organization. On the other, churches, RE teachers and RE scholars in Germany would not agree with Robert Jackson's definition of the goal of confessional RE “to nurture faith” but rather prefer the key goals of non-confessional RE courses “to promote knowledge and understanding of different religious traditions for all pupils in the common school, together with some reflection by pupils on what they have learned”<sup>3</sup>.

2 Jean-Paul Willaime, “Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe,” in *Religion and Education in Europe. Developments, Contexts and Debates*, ed. Robert Jackson et al. (Münster/New York/München/Berlin: Waxmann, 2007), 62.

3 Jackson, “Religious Education and Debates,” 295-6.

The German example shows some problems of the differentiation between ‘confessional’ and ‘non-confessional’ RE. Therefore, this paper chooses not to reject this differentiation, but to elaborate on it. Then, the crucial question is from which perspectives religion is presented (religious insider perspectives or outsider perceptions on religion), and how these are interconnected with institutional settings. A religious insider perspective is one of adherents to a specific religion as far as they religiously interpret the world. ‘World’ is meant in a wide sense, including human (inter)actions, texts, thoughts, images, artefacts; the self and others; past, present, and future. An outsider perspective on religion views religious matters from a non-religious standpoint.

For example, describing the beginning of the universe as ‘Creation’ shows a religious insider perspective. But if an Old Testament scholar examines the first chapters of the Bible with historical-critical methods, the non-religious perspective is taken – even if the scholar believes in a creator and works in a department of theology. This example illustrates that not only non-believers refrain from taking religious insider perspectives, but in many situations believers do so as well. Hence, in so-called confessional and non-confessional courses, both outsider and insider perspectives can and must be taken. In confessional courses students can learn to read holy scriptures within a historical (outsider) perspective while in non-confessional ones they share their insider perceptions and can learn from those presented in teaching material, which is typical for the (so-called non-confessional) interpretive approach by Robert Jackson<sup>4</sup>.

What are, then, the differences between confessional and non-confessional RE courses? In short, there are different focal points in confessional and non-confessional RE courses: Confessional courses offer the possibility to learn in detail about and from one specific religion and to attain in-depth knowledge. In the ideal scenario, the teachers have studied this specific religion both in theory (at a university department of theology) and in life (as adherents of this faith) and the lessons are related to the experiences of students with the same religious tradition. In contrast to some opponents of confessional RE, I would emphasize that a confessional RE is an effective means against religious indoctrination: because of the structure of different RE courses existing side by side in one school, students learn that there are different religious worldviews and perspectives. Even if the contents of RE are presented in a narrow confessional, not self-reflexive way, students understand that there are other convictions and interpretations outside the RE classroom<sup>5</sup>. In non-confessional courses, by contrast, students can probably learn more about various religions but perhaps at a more superficial level due to the limitations of resource time.

4 Robert Jackson, “The interpretive approach,” in *Religious diversity and intercultural education: a reference book for schools*, ed. John Keast (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2007), 81.

5 Joachim Willems, “Indoktrination aus evangelisch-religionspädagogischer Sicht,” in *Indoktrination und Erziehung – Aspekte der Rückseite der Pädagogik*, ed. Schluß, Henning (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2007), 88.

## 1.2 RE in Germany and the German constitution, the 'Basic Law'

The legal background in Germany defines RE as a 'res mixta', a 'common matter' for which both state and religious communities assume responsibility. According to article 7 of the German Basic Law (Constitution, *Grundgesetz*), "The entire school system shall be under the supervision of the state" (7.1). This includes also RE courses in schools.

(RE is in fact the only school subject mentioned in the Basic Law). To protect fundamental rights "[P]arents and guardians shall have the right to decide whether children shall receive religious instruction" (7.2) and teachers "may not be obliged against their will to give religious instruction" (7.3)<sup>6</sup>. Although students and teachers have the right to not participate in RE classes, RE "shall form part of the regular curriculum in state schools". In addition, RE "shall be given in accordance with the tenets of the religious community concerned" (7.3).

The idea of article 7 is that it is not the state's task to define religious tenets and convictions. However, it is the state which approves RE and creates a framework for the school subject that can then be filled by the religious communities<sup>7</sup>. These religious communities are expected to define more authentically the contents of RE than a neutral state-institution could. In return, they are obligated to act in agreement with the rules of the school system in a democratic state.

6 A more adequate translation here is "religious education" instead of "religious instruction", but the paper quotes the English translation of the Basic Law on the internet site of the German parliament, the *Bundestag* ([http://www.bundestag.de/blueprint/servlet/blob/284870/ce0d03414872b427e57fccb703634dcd/basic\\_law-data.pdf](http://www.bundestag.de/blueprint/servlet/blob/284870/ce0d03414872b427e57fccb703634dcd/basic_law-data.pdf)), 17.

7 EKD, *Identität und Verständigung: Standort und Perspektiven des Religionsunterrichts in der Pluralität. Eine Denkschrift der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994), 40.

Legal scholars point out that the existence of the public school system is justified insofar as the schools enable students to live as citizens of the democratic state and realize their fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of religion. Horst Dreier uses the term "spaces for the realization of freedom" (*Räume für ... Freiheitsverwirklichung*) to define the task of public schools<sup>8</sup>.

## 1.3 Confessionality of RE – The interpretation of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD 1994)

The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) has been interpreting article 7.3 of the Basic Law in the context of article 4 (freedom of faith and conscience, freedom to profess a religious or philosophical creed, undisturbed practice of religion) since its first comment on this issue in 1971. Hence, it is the main task of confessional RE to qualify students to exercise the basic rights guaranteed in article 4. For this purpose, it is necessary that the students learn to "orientate themselves in view to religious matters freely and autonomously"<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, it is not only possible but even intended that a student might decide, as a consequence of Protestant RE lessons, to participate actively in the life of an evangelical congregation, in the same way that another student might come to a reasonable decision against membership of the Evangelical Church or, further, sharpen an Atheist viewpoint. Certainly, the RE lessons would be successful only if the students took these decisions based on good reasons.

8 Horst Dreier, *Grundgesetz-Kommentar*. vol. 1: Artikel 1-19 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), 543.

9 EKD, *Identität und Verständigung*, 11; confirmed in EKD, *Religiöse Orientierung gewinnen. Evangelischer Religionsunterricht als Beitrag zu einer pluralitätsfähigen Schule: Eine Denkschrift des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD)* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2014), 39.

The EKD points out that RE would be “misinterpreted and overcharged if its aim is defined as instruction in regard to baptism and Communion, if it aims at socialising students into parish life and church service, and to motivate them to participate actively in both”<sup>10</sup>. Michael Meyer-Blanck explains this approach historically: due to “a long tradition of interaction between the state and the religious communities in Germany” and “the close connection between religion and education”, RE would not be

“considered a part of the Church put inside school but as an ecclesial contribution to public education. School and community, as places of learning, are – according to the understanding of the Protestant and the Catholic Church – each to be taken seriously according to their own concept. Since 1960, Religious Education has been justified mainly by a pedagogical approach, including the understanding of schooling in general education. With the term education (*Bildung*), one tries to describe what religion can mean not only for the religious denominations (Churches), but also for the responsible individual, and in that, for society at large. According to this, Christian religion with its description of the human as an individual who is immediate to God intensifies the education for autonomy with a specific earnestness”<sup>11</sup>.

10 EKD, *Identität und Verständigung*, 45.

11 Michael Meyer-Blanck, “Forms of Religious Education in the federal states (*Länder*) of the Federal Republic of Germany,” in *Basics of Religious Education*, ed. Martin Rothgangel et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2014), 146.

The EKD statement defines RE as an open space for testing what Christian faith can contribute to the discourses of a plural society<sup>12</sup>. In this sense, Protestant RE is open for students from different religious and worldview backgrounds. These students are invited to come into contact with Christian faith, traditions, and theology and to learn about and from them without being missionized<sup>13</sup>.

Nevertheless, the EKD makes a case for a Protestant RE distinguished from Roman-Catholic, Islamic RE or Ethics but in cooperation with these neighboring subjects<sup>14</sup>. The EKD points out, that it is impossible to deal with the fundamental questions of human existence in an ‘objective’ way. Individual convictions and particular denominational perspectives would always be involved<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, students should have the opportunity to come into contact with the denominational shape of religion with which they are familiar and they should be educated by representatives of their specific religion or denomination. These representatives could introduce the students authentically and appropriately to religious issues and knowledge about faith, but not immediately into faith itself. According to the EKD, this opportunity of authentic encounter with a specific religion or denomination justifies a separation of the student body. At the same time, the EKD argues for an ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation to allow encounters with other doctrines and beliefs<sup>16</sup>.

12 “Der Religionsunterricht erprobt unter den unterrichtlichen Voraussetzungen der Schule als ein Angebot an alle die Sprach-, Toleranz- und Dialogfähigkeit christlichen Glaubens in der Gesellschaft,” EKD, *Identität und Verständigung*, 45.

13 EKD, *Identität und Verständigung*, 63+66; cf. EKD, *Religiöse Orientierung gewinnen*, 98.

14 EKD, *Identität und Verständigung*, 73-81.

15 Ibid., 54.

16 EKD, *Religiöse Orientierung gewinnen*, 98-101.

Summing up these EKD statements, the confessional outline of Protestant RE is constituted by a specific perspective on RE topics and the confession of the teacher (not necessarily the confession of students).

#### 1.4 Religious competences

In last few years, the syllabuses for all school subjects in Germany focus on educational standards and the competences obtained by students. This shift from a so-called input regulation to a so-called output regulation has made it necessary to elaborate on how religious competences could be described and which ones should be exercised in RE lessons. The most influential model for religious proficiency in the field of Protestant RE was published in 2006 by a group of experts coordinated by the Comenius Institute, the pedagogical institute of the EKD<sup>17</sup>. This model combines five dimensions of the interpretation of religion with four manifestations ('Gegenstandsbereiche'). The five dimensions of the interpretation of religion are:

1. Perception: Students should be able to take notice of religious phenomena and describe them.
2. Cognition: Students should be able to interpret religious phenomena.
3. Performance: Students should be able to act in respect of religion.
4. Interaction: Students should be able to communicate about religion and to evaluate religious statements.
5. Participation: Students should be able to take decisions, to participate or not participate

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<sup>17</sup> Comenius-Institut, *Grundlegende Kompetenzen religiöser Bildung: Zur Entwicklung des evangelischen Religionsunterrichts durch Bildungsstandards für den Abschluss der Sekundarstufe I*. ed. Dietlind Fischer and Volker Elsenbast. (Münster: Comenius-Institut, 2006), 19-20.

in religious situations in an adequate and well-grounded way.

These situations are not only meant to be related to Christianity, but to four manifestations of religion<sup>18</sup>.

- a) The individual's own religion, which means the individual convictions and the religious and value orientation of the student;
- b) the religion or denomination to which the specific RE refers (for example, Protestantism in the case of Protestant RE);
- c) other religions and worldviews;
- d) religion in society and culture.

Within this framework, the group of experts defines twelve religious competences: In view of the individual's religion, students shall (1) learn in RE lessons to reflect on and communicate about their religious or worldview convictions, (2 and 3) to correlate experiences with religious interpretations. The competences related to Protestant Christianity include (4) knowledge about theology and the history of Protestant Christianity, (5) the ability to discern and interpret fundamental forms of religious language (myths, parables, symbols, prayer and others), (6) the ability to describe and practice experimentally religious holidays, celebrations, rituals, religiously-motivated welfare work. The competences related to other religions and worldviews include (7) the ability to make a well-grounded statement about other religious convictions; (8) communicate and cooperate with adherents of other denominations and religions in a respectful way; (9) articulate religious doubts, criticism and indifference towards religion, and review the validity of the correspondent arguments; and (10) the ability to apply criteria for the evaluation of different forms

.....  
<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 18.

of religion<sup>19</sup>. And in view of religion in society and culture, students shall (11) learn to perceive and explain the religious background of traditions and structures in society, (12) perceive religious elements and motives in culture (literature, art, music, films, sport, commercials), and reflect on the societal relevance of religious ideas and theological concepts like brotherly love, justice, human dignity.

## 2 THE FUTURE OF RE – SOME COMMENTS FROM A GERMAN ‘CONFESSIONAL’ PERSPECTIVE

In her introduction to this collection, Kristina Stoeckl refers to the social context of RE. She describes this context with the term ‘pluri-faith-secular pluralism’ and points out: “On the whole, educators have responded to this development with the creation of non-religious curricula: ethics, non-religious humanism, or the study of world religions”.

### 2.1 Experiences with non-confessional curricula in Germany

Also in Germany new curricula have been created in the last two decades. The most prominent new subject is LER in the Eastern German federal state of Brandenburg. LER is an abbreviation that could be translated as ‘Life questions – ethics – knowledge about religions’ (*Lebensgestaltung – Ethik – Religionskunde*). In the early 1990s, during the time of educational reforms after the decline of the GDR, this subject was intended to give students the opportunity to freely reflect on fundamental life questions with reference to various religious and worldview contexts, to discuss value orientations and learn tolerant ways of communication and interaction. Initially, the subject should be taught in cooperation with

19 Ibid., 19.

religious communities, and attendance should be compulsory for all students without the possibility to opt out. After severe disagreements between the churches and the Brandenburg government, the churches decided to cease cooperation and claimed for the implementation of RE according to article 7 of the Basic Law. In 2002, LER supporters and their opponents came to a compromise mediated by the Federal Constitutional Court: LER remains a regular and compulsory subject, but confessional RE is taught in Brandenburg as an elective (opt-in) subject, and those who attend RE classes have the right to opt out from LER.

For our context – RE and ‘pluri-faith-secular pluralism’ – it is remarkable that the evaluations of LER in the early years highlighted a lack of ‘R’ in LER: the subject would be occupied first of all with ‘L’, life questions, but hardly with religion<sup>20</sup>. Similarly, the subject of ‘Ethics’ in Berlin was initially established as a compulsory subject for all students in 2006 to promote inter-religious learning and tolerance. Confessional RE and the secular ‘*Humanistische Lebenskunde*’, concerned with life questions from an atheist or agnostic perspective, are only optional subjects outside the curriculum under the exclusive responsibility of the religious or worldview communities. But in the syllabus for ‘Ethics’ the proportion of religious topics is marginal. If religion is mentioned at all, it is predominantly as a historic fact but not as a currently relevant phenomenon. The syllabus does not stipulate obligatory teaching units about Christianity, Islam, or other religions<sup>21</sup>. Besides, two third of the ethics lessons are taught by

20 Eva-Maria Kennigott, “Das Fach Lebensgestaltung-Ethik-Religionskunde? Ein ehrgeiziges Projekt,” in *Werte in Religion und Ethik. Modelle des interdisziplinären Werteunterrichts in Deutschland und der Schweiz*, ed. Marie-Luise Raters. (Dresden: Thelem, 2011).

21 See the critical review of the syllabus in Joachim Willems, “Interreligiöses Lernen im Berliner Religions-, Weltanschauungs- und Ethikunterricht,” *Theo-Web. Zeitschrift für Religionspädagogik* 11 (2012): 73-74, <http://www.theo-web.de/zeitschrift/ausgabe-2012-02/08.pdf>.

teachers without any training in the subject (not even limited training)<sup>22</sup>. The situation in Bremen is similar: there, the third German federal state where the state does not cooperate with religious communities in school, more than 90 per cent of RE teachers are neither university-educated nor have they undertaken advanced trainings in subject didactics<sup>23</sup>.

These numbers are an indication of the problem that occurs if the state alone is responsible for the religious education of the young generation: compared to subjects like mathematics, natural sciences, German or English, RE is regarded as a second-rank or even fifth-rank subject. In my view, this is a strong argument for a legally-established cooperation between state and church (or other religious communities). I am not confident that the state is really interested in religiously-educated and competent children and adolescents. At the same time, it could also be a fault to be overconfident with regard to the churches and religious communities since some of their representatives aim for a catechetical instruction in school, rather than an RE that is oriented on the religious freedom of the learner. Therefore, the German model of state-church-cooperation is to be appreciated because it implies a system of 'checks and balances'.

## 2.2 Reactions within Protestant RE and RE studies to the 'pluri-faith-secular pluralism'

Not only "the creation of non-religious curricula: ethics, non-religious humanism, or the study of world religions" can be interpreted as a reaction to 'pluri-faith-secular pluralism'. Since at least the 1960s, Protestant RE teachers and scholars have re-thought RE against the background of secularization, religious pluralization and individualization.

In 1966, for example, Hans-Bernhard Kaufmann published a short, but in the following years, very influential text to answer the question: "Does the Bible necessarily take centre stage in RE?"<sup>24</sup> The text was a reaction to the growing number of students opting out of RE classes at the time. Kaufmann criticized the fact that theology and church, and also RE, would be primarily engaged in dealing with questions derived from the tradition, but not with (then) current challenges. He declared that RE should start with the questions and problems of students. In a situation without a Christian consensus in society, not even within the RE classes, "the freedom to disagree has to be not only allowed, but this freedom must be regarded as a precondition for understanding"<sup>25</sup>. He argued that the function of the Bible and the Christian tradition for RE would not be to immediately dictate answers to actual questions and instructions on how to act. The Bible and Christian tradition should rather serve as "material for possible interpretations of the own existence and the world in the light of the future

22 Florentine Anders, "Der Ethik-Unterricht an Berliner Schulen ist gefährdet," *Berliner Morgenpost*, July 07, 2013, <http://www.morgenpost.de/berlin-aktuell/article117796785/Der-Ethik-Unterricht-an-Berliner-Schulen-ist-gefaehrdet.html>.

23 Jürgen Lott and Anita Schröder-Klein, "Religion unterrichten in Bremen," *Theo-Web. Zeitschrift für Religionspädagogik* 7 (2006):72, <http://www.theo-web.de/zeitschrift/ausgabe-2007-01/7.pdf>.

24 This is the English translation of the article's German title. Hans Bernhard Kaufmann, "Muß die Bibel im Mittelpunkt des Religionsunterrichts stehen?" (1966), in *Religionspädagogik. Texte zur evangelischen Erziehungs- und Bildungsverantwortung seit der Reformation*, ed. Karl-Ernst Nipkow and Friedrich Schweitzer, Friedrich, vol. 2/2. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1994).

25 Hans Bernhard Kaufmann, "Bibel im Mittelpunkt", 184.

for which we bear responsibility”<sup>26</sup>. Nevertheless, RE should not lose its confessional, Protestant character. According to Kaufmann, Protestantism implies the appreciation for individual freedom. Therefore, even RE lessons (or perhaps: especially those RE lessons) that are skeptical towards the church would be a veritable *Protestant* RE.

To not give a false impression of Kaufmann’s approach, it is important to emphasize that this conception for RE still aims at fostering an open and positive attitude towards Christian faith. Kaufmann wrote that it would be necessary to interpret theological thoughts against the background of students’ questions and interests, because only in this way “the questions concerning God might become *their [the students’] own* questions and become related to *their own* experiences”<sup>27</sup>.

The ‘Performative Religionsdidaktik’ is a more recent reaction to secularization or to what is sometimes called a ‘break in the tradition’ (*Traditionsbruch*). This approach has been elaborated in the last ten or fifteen years. Its starting point is the conviction that it is not possible to only talk *about* religion, because to talk adequately about religion implies to know how religion is practiced. “You cannot *inform* about Christian religion if you do not *demonstrate* in the same time, what this Christian religion looks like”<sup>28</sup>. Hence, in a secularized context it would be necessary to “first *exhibit* religion and to explore the specific culture of symbolic communication, that is observable while religion is practised (in ihren *Vollzügen*)”<sup>29</sup>.

26 Ibid., 182.

27 Ibid., 185.

28 Bernhard Dressler, “Darstellung und Mitteilung. Religionsdidaktik nach dem Traditionsabbruch,” in *Schauplatz Religion. Grundzüge einer Performativen Religionspädagogik*, ed. Thomas Klie and Silke Leonhard. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), 157.

29 Ibid.

The idea is that it is impossible to understand what religion means when focused on doctrine and theological thought alone. The essence of religion can be discovered in religious narratives, liturgies, prayers, and blessings<sup>30</sup>.

Therefore, it is the teacher’s task to ‘exhibit’ religion. According to this approach, it is the point of confessional RE that “the specific religion, that is taught by a teacher, is related to the religion, that the teacher lives”<sup>31</sup>. Nevertheless, neither taught religion nor lived religion are identical. The teacher must keep a certain professional distance to their own religion<sup>32</sup>.

Then, the student’s role is that of ethnographer in the field, a participant observer. On the one hand, the student shall not participate immediately in the exhibited religion because then the RE lessons would turn into religious practice and that would not be adequate for teaching and learning in school. On the other, participation to a certain degree is necessary to comprehend religious communication in contrast to other language-games.

These two examples can be understood as reactions to secularization processes. Similarly, the challenge of inter-religious learning has become more and more relevant in both Protestant and Roman-Catholic RE since the 1960s. At the present time there is broad agreement about inter-religious learning in the German ‘confessional’ RE studies:

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Silke Leonhard and Thomas Klie, “Performative Religionspädagogik. Religion leiblich und räumlich in Szene setzen,” in *Schauplatz Religion. Grundzüge einer Performativen Religionspädagogik*, ed. Thomas Klie and Silke Leonhard. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), 14-15.

- Other denominations and religions must be presented by teachers of confessional RE in a non-biased way, so that the adherents of these denominations or religions can agree with this representation.
- Inter-religious learning includes hermeneutic competences, the ability and willingness for a change of perspective – both cognitively and emotionally.
- Inter-religious learning should not only focus on knowledge, but also on attitudes: tolerance, respect, peacefully living together in a religiously plural world, the willingness to learn from each other are educational objectives.
- Therefore, in inter-religious learning, the student also reflects on his or her own religious or non-religious worldview in order to express his or her own belief and convictions in inter-religious dialogue<sup>33</sup>.

.....  
 33 Joachim Willems, *Interreligiöse Kompetenz. Theoretische Grundlagen – Konzeptualisierungen – Unterrichtsmethoden*. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2011), 104, 114, 168-169.

### 2.3 Common Standards for both confessional and non-confessional RE in a situation of 'pluri-faith-secular pluralism' – Learning 'about', and also learning 'from' and even 'in' religion?

1. If RE is interpreted in the normative context of article 4 of the Basic Law (freedom of religion), then RE is not and must not be a privilege of churches or religious institutions. It is a fundamental right of every individual student: RE must be legitimated by indicating how students learn to better understand themselves and the world they live in, so that they obtain new perspectives for exercising their basic right to freedom of religion and conscience. Therefore, RE should focus on religious and inter-religious competences: proficiency in participation and hermeneutics.

2. In a situation of 'pluri-faith-secular pluralism' and the disconnect between religion and culture, there is probably even a growing importance for religious and inter-religious competences for both the individual and democratic society. At the present time, individuals have much easier access to all kinds of religious ideas, but in many cases hardly learn how to interpret and evaluate these ideas. Some argue that it would not be the duty of public schools to support the religious development of students. Even if this argument were correct (and in my view, it is not so if it is the student's right to be religiously-educated), then the school would have to guarantee religious education for a peaceful co-existence. Recent research has demonstrated that a lack of religious education is responsible for a lot of discrimination against Muslim students in Berlin.<sup>34</sup>

.....  
 34 Willems, Joachim, „Keine Bedrohung, sondern Wahrnehmung eines Grundrechts – Muslimische Gebete in der Schule,“ *Theo-Web. Zeitschrift für Religionspädagogik* 14 (2015): 16-38. Willems, Joachim, „Dann merke ich auch hier, ich bin der Moslem'. Interreligiöse Kompetenz und Differenz, Diversität, Dialogizität.“ In: *Differenz – Diversität – Dialogizität. Religion in pluralen Kontexten*. ed. Stefan Alkier, Michael Schneider, Christian Wiese (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016, forthcoming).

3. Regardless of the question as to whether RE is taught as a confessional or non-confessional subject, teachers have the duty to introduce different perspectives on religion and within religion into the differentiation of these beliefs, and into their relation with one another. This is indispensable and gives students the opportunity to freely orientate themselves with regard to religion. If both religious and non-religious students are expected to understand the internal structure and rationality of religious propositions, then the reconstruction and ‘thick description’<sup>35</sup> of the religious perspectives of different denominations and religions must be part of both non-confessional and confessional RE. But which perspectives should be represented? As in other subjects, this question must be answered didactically, pedagogically, and with reference to religious studies and/or theology. (Here, it would certainly be necessary to particularize criteria for the selection of perspectives and to reflect on the question of power and representation in discourses.)

4. Like other subjects in school, RE not only aims on the accumulation of knowledge about facts. Rather, students come into contact with topics and contents to develop themselves further. Development with regard to religion also means reflecting on the individual’s own religious affiliations, convictions, values, and interpretations of the world. Therefore, in both confessional and non-confessional lessons, students should have the opportunity to learn from (and not only about) other religious or non-religious worldviews. Certainly, it is not the duty of public schooling to incorporate students into a specific denomination or religion by learning ‘in’ religion. But even if the school is rather indifferent with regard to the religious decisions of students, teaching units can and should give the students the opportunity to learn ‘from’ their own or another religious tradition and to become more educated ‘in’ their religion.

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35 Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description. Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*, ed. Clifford Geertz. (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

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# V “LEARNING RELIGION” IN THE PRESENCE OF THE OTHER: PROVOCATION AND GIFT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

Matthias Scharer

The purpose of this paper is to set out to readers unfamiliar with Catholic religious pedagogics the concept of “*Learning Religion*” in the Presence of the Other as one particular approach to teaching religion. This paper reflects on the question if and how “learning religion” as developed by the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council and especially in the Würzburg Synod can be considered as a model for religious education in Europe today.

We live in a pluralistic and globalized society in which the religious monocultures that persisted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century throughout Europe have given way to a world of varied religious convictions and worldviews<sup>2</sup>. As we can see all over the world the plurality of these can lead to conflicts, sometimes violent conflicts, but also to a better understanding between people. One of the most important aims of religious education in a pluralistic society would seem to be encouraging students to treat others with respect, tolerance and sympathy in order to avoid conflicts that degenerate into violence. What kind of (religious) education could be conducive to such a peaceful encounter?

1 This paper is based on: Matthias Scharer, “Learning (in/through) Religion” in der Gegenwart der/des Anderen: Unfall und Ernstfall öffentlicher Bildung. Österreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum 22 (2014): 93-102.

2 For a discussion of world views, religions, religious conviction and well-founded differentiations see Otto Muck, *Grundlagen des Sprechens vom Wirken Gottes im Leben von Menschen*, in: R. Siebenrock/Ch. J. Amor (ed.) (Freiburg: Herder, 2014), 105-131.

## 1. THE ROLE OF THE SECOND VATICANUM AND THE WÜRZBURG SYNOD FOR A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Second Vatican Council (1962 - 1965) brought about a number of new principles regulating the Catholic Church’s approach to cultural and religious pluralism. Only some of these can be recalled here:

- The central significance of conscience: The council calls it the most concealed center and inner sanctum of the individual, where s/he is at one with God, whose voice can be heard from within<sup>3</sup>.
- The emphasis on the right of every individual to freedom of religion<sup>4</sup>. In this context, children’s rights are particularly important as children are most vulnerable when exposed to religious abuse when religion is turned into an ideology.
- Recognition of many paths to salvation in different religions and their specific value/esteem<sup>5</sup>.

This means neither an

- inclusivism, as indiscriminate absorption of other religions and cultural attitudes into one’s own;
- nor exclusivism, as a dogmatic isolation of one’s own truth claim;
- nor undifferentiating pluralism claiming, that we are all the same/all one and believe essentially the same thing.

3 See *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et spes* 16 (Die Pastorale Konstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute “Gaudium et spes”, Art. 16, in: Concilium Vaticanum 2 1962-1965, Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Kleines Konzilskompendium* (Freiburg: Herder 2008).

4 *Ibid.* Declaration of religious freedom *Dignitatis humanae*.

5 *Ibid.* Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions *Nostra aetate*.

What does this mean for the teaching of religion in public education, specifically in schools? One consequence was that the Würzburg Synod<sup>1</sup> introduced a distinction between religious education in public schools and catechesis in Christian communities or parishes. With this separation the Church responded to the fact that religious education today must take into account the experience of the faithful in culturally and religiously pluralistic societies as well as the reality of those who call themselves atheists/unbelievers.

## 2. OSCILLATIONS: LEARNING ABOUT/ FROM/IN RELIGION

The apparently neat distinction between “religious education” and “catechesis” defined by the Würzburg Synod conceals a complication which the teaching of religion cannot avoid confronting. This complication is best caught by a terminological distinction suggested by Grimmit<sup>2</sup> and now adopted by numerous European professionals in the field:

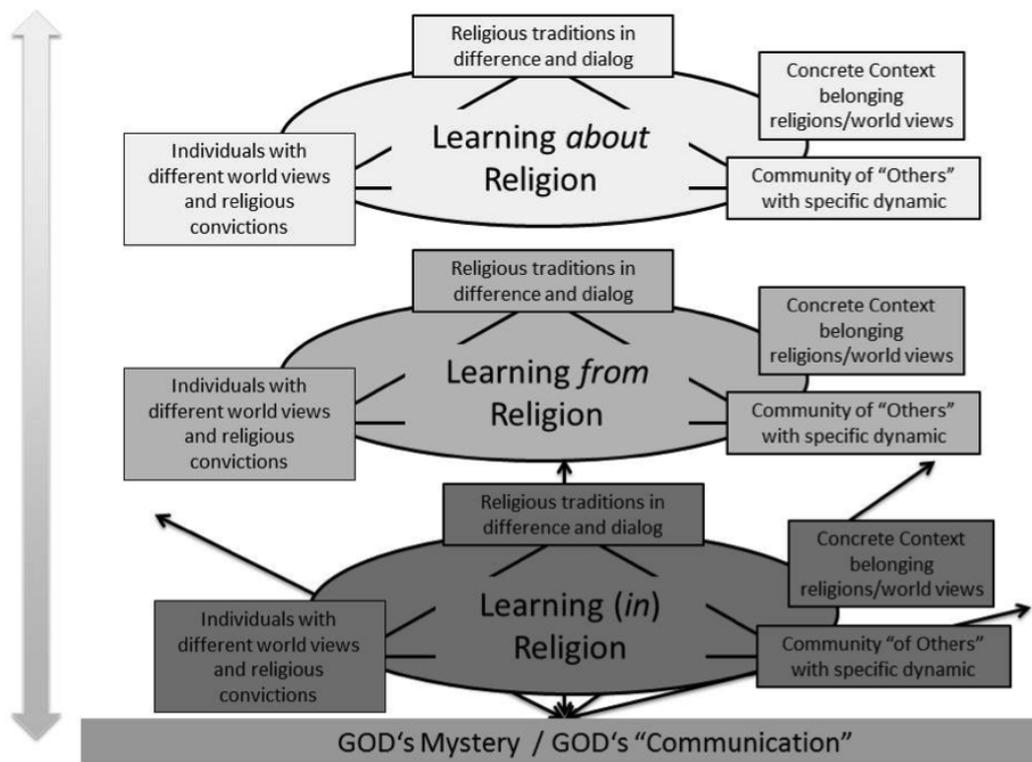
- Learning *about* religion
- Learning *from* religion
- Learning religion or learning *in/through* religion, a term also used by the Dortmund religious educationalist, Bern Roebben<sup>3</sup>, belongs exclusively to the internal sphere of religions, i.e. Christian congregations, mosques and synagogues.

Religious education would, according to this scheme, belong to the first category of “learning about religion”, and catechesis would belong to the second and third, “learning from and in/through religion”. However, praxis shows that it is not always easy to draw these distinctions. In contrast to this three-fold division, I therefore suggest some gradual transitions. Learning *about/from/in* religion is oscillating as shown in this figure.

1 See Ludwig Bertsch ed., *Beschlüsse der Vollversammlung. Gemeinsame Synode der Bistümer in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder 1978); Matthias Scharer, Der Synodenbeschluss zum Religionsunterricht in der Schule: Heute gelesen und im Blick auf Morgen weiter geschrieben. *Österreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum* 17 (2009), 30 – 38.

2 See Michael Grimmit, ‘When is “commitment” a problem in religious education?’ *British Journal of education studies* 29/1 (1981), 42-53.

3 Bert Roebben, *Religionspädagogik der Hoffnung: Grundlinien Religiöser Bildung in der Spätmoderne* (Berlin: Lit, 2001).



A necessary precondition for switching between learning *about*, *of and in/through* religions is that “learning religion” is to be found in immediate experience, in the conduct of religious life, and is liberated from its mono-religious or even catechetically-confined view. This expansion is to be encouraged by coming into contact with the Other.

### 3. THE “HOLY GROUND”

From the perspective of “learning religion”, the public educational space is challenged to integrate ideas about “learning in/from religion” into the teaching of religion, instead of reducing religious education to a mere teaching about religious facts. Catholic religious education has developed concepts that attempt to integrate all three of these aspects in the context of a public, non-catechetical religious education. In “Learning (*in*) Religion”, understood as religious learning in the presence of the Other, competence in the selective authentic treatment of one’s own religious convictions and

those of the Other is encouraged. Neither can we expect a kind of religious “soul search” in each and every possible situation, resulting in the exposure of cultural orientation and religious conviction in public, nor are we concerned about hiding our own convictions even in their own symbolic ritual practices.

In this context, the metaphor found in the Old Testament of Moses’ confrontation with God in Exodus 3 seems applicable. It is the metaphor of the “holy ground” which can be transferred to the intimate religious sphere. If anything, we should tread the Holy Ground of the foreign other barefoot, that is with the greatest amount of respect and only with regard for the greatest possible freedom of the other. The other should certainly not be trampled on, as this would be tantamount to committing a religious transgression.

The ability to interact competently in a non-transgressive, non-injurious and non-abusive way when dealing with religion and cultural attitudes, whilst not ignoring the differences, belongs to

the most basic religious competences and should be shared by as many citizens as possible in an open society. It cannot be acquired by creating educational spaces that are as religiously- and confessionally-neutral as possible, but by providing individuals with the opportunity to practice an open, differentiated and, at the same time, respectfully sympathetic dialogue with the variety of convictions. Thus, selecting confession- and religion-free experts who know a lot about religions and cultural differences does not per se preclude the dangers of cultural and religious oppression and transgressions to which modern societies react in such a sensitive way. Individuals bound to confession and religion are generally better in communicating beyond the limits of their own religion as they are better able to understand the differences, limits, transgressions and abuse of religion based on their own experiences.

The first comprehensive investigation of the construction and determination of levels of religious competence in public education by Dietrich Brenner<sup>1</sup> confirms that inter-religious proficiency correlates positively with the extent of religious education received. The authors recommend that this being the case, the Protestant Church should not withdraw from religious education because this would have a counterproductive effect on inter-religious competence of relevance to society.

In order to ensure inter-religious contact competencies in public education, that is not restricted to the learning *of/about* religion, requires the presence of confessional and religious teachers and consultants for young people at public schools and other public educational institutions. These must focus not only on knowledge, but in particular meeting with people of different faiths and cultural backgrounds.

1 Dietrich Benner et al., eds., *Religiöse Kompetenz als Teil öffentlicher Bildung: Versuch einer empirisch, bildungstheoretisch und religionspädagogisch ausgewiesenen Konstruktion religiöser Dimensionen und Anspruchsni-veaus* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011), 138f.

## CONCLUSION

Where *Learning Religion in the presence of the Other* takes place, it is important not to expect clear cultural religious positions and arguments to demonstrate the superiority of the individual's own convictions in contrast to those of others. Instead, learning religion in the presence of the other can be a way of reflecting critically on the truth claims present in the most traditional strategies of churches and religions. With respect to the Catholic Church, this misunderstanding has repeatedly become evident in the context of catechesis and missiology, and is now in the process of being overcome.

Pope Francis has repeatedly encouraged this kind of learning in the presence of the Other. He has introduced a new tone to the Catholic Church in his apostolic text *Evangelii Gaudium*. Francis does not want a church "that is concerned with being the center and ends up engrossed in an accretion of fixed ideas and contestations"<sup>2</sup>. It is not simply in a claim of truth, driven by the desire to convince the cultural and religious Other, but in the service of others and the world that true power lies. Religious education in the public space can, therefore, be anything but diaconic, understood as a liberating service to humanity in all its facets. Learning Religion is not an additional strategy for the efficient spread of faith and religion, but a change of perspective on the world, life, and indeed on individual religious beliefs in general.

From a theological perspective, learning religion in the presence of the Other is the gift that can free students from the ideologizing and violent impositions of cultural attitudes and religions to which they are exposed in secular spheres of learning. Religious education is no longer solely about religious knowledge, the individual or inter-religious dialogue but also the common search for a truth to provide certainty, hope and orientation to life.

2 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 90.

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# THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN EUROPE

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