"RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE FUTURE"

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Summary: Religious education faces new challenges as the increasing plurality of cultures and religions leads to a plurality of worldviews. This pluralism is apparent in religious education and raises the question of the necessity of religious education in modern school. This lecture aims to show that religious education is necessary and will be necessary in the future. Religious literacy is considered essential for the societies’ future and religious education and formation are a basic requirement for religious literacy. Religious education and formation are also bound to the appropriate didactics. The didactical consequences for religious education in future should include correlative learning, that is, keeping an eye on the students’ life in all its diversity. Heterogeneity of worldviews and religions poses challenges for religious education, which should be perceived as an opportunity. Religious education must not neglect the cognitive and reflective examination of religious aspects; it is more than “information about religion”; it is a tool for the holistic approach of the world. In the light of global tensions, globalisation, pluralisation and individualisation, “religious literacy” is an extremely valuable skill that should be taught to students for anthropological reasons.

Key Words: religious education, religious literacy, pluralism

1. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IS FACED WITH NEW CHALLENGES

The increasing plurality of biographies, cultures and religions presents schools with new challenges. As growing plurality also leads to a plurality of world views and of religious organisations, processes of social pluralization are also reflected in a today’s denominational religious education:

• The proportion of non-Christian children and adolescents among the students is constantly growing.
• A large number of baptized children – in Germany, particularly Christians without a migratory background (Calmbach et al., 2016, pp. 339-358) – have no confessional identity, since they often grow up with little religious socialisation in the family and without any reference to the Church.
• The individual religiousness is no longer bound to clerical ways of expression. The way of believing differs very much within the religion as well as within the denomination (cf. Englert, 2018, pp. 146-155) i.e. the styles in which people are Catholic differ, both in content and in expression. The German religious education scholar, Rudolf Englert, even speaks of “parallel Christianities” (Englert, 2018, p. 150) that repel each other.
• Migration processes lead to children from other cultures and other denominations, e.g. of Orthodoxy, visiting the Catholic religious education. Furthermore, integration into the school system is often associated with language barriers.
As a result, a considerable number of people in Germany ask: What is the purpose of religious education in schools? Particularly, where is the value in religious education in divided groups for Catholics and Protestants? Wouldn't the subject 'ethics' for all be a better solution considering our pluralistic society? So the question arises: **Will religious education at school be necessary in future?**

Despite society's pluralization, it has been perceived in recent years, both on pedagogical and political levels, that a debate on religious issues is necessary. In the face of unfortunate realities as the rise of extremes, the denial or ignorance of climate-change issues, the deteriorating socio-political climate, etc., living together as a cohesive society is endangered. All of these issues make it all the more necessary to discuss ethical questions regarding values (cf. Lovat, 2019).

In this lecture, I would like to show that

- Religious education is necessary and will be necessary in the future, because "religious literacy" is essential for the societies' future, and
- Religious education and formation is a basic requirement for religious literacy.
- Religious education and formation in future is bound to appropriate didactics.

### 2. "RELIGIOUS LITERACY" IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE SOCIETIES' FUTURE

Even institutions that, for the most part, were rather reticent to religion now see the necessity of religious literacy. As an example I would like to refer to the "Recommendation on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education", which was passed by the Council of Europe in 2008. To quote Robert Jackson:

> "The EU Recommendation acknowledges diversity as a social fact, encourages 'local' and 'global' connections, an exploration of issues of religion and identity, and – importantly – the development of positive relations with parents and religious communities. The intention is to introduce young people to a variety of stances in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance, within the 'safe space' of the classroom. Competence for understanding religions and world views is emphasized, including offering relevant information, and the development of skills and attitudes to facilitate dialogue. The aims are to provide knowledge, to encourage reciprocity, sensitivity and empathy, and to combat prejudice. Students are encouraged to participate in dialogue, moderated by teachers with specialist knowledge and facilitation skills. The Recommendation notes the need for high-quality teacher training and resources, on-going research and evaluation, and sensitivity to current educational systems and practices in member states." (Jackson, 2019, p. 503)

So, it is acknowledged that religions are an accepted form of ideology or philosophy of life.

But it is exactly because of diversity and contradictions in religious beliefs and world views that being acquainted with each other's perspectives is a necessary step in ensuring religious literacy in future generations. More specifically, religious literacy
refers to being able to understand the "language" of religions and to have the ability to understand and act mindfully of others' religions.

The necessity of "Religious Literacy" is not only required for social reasons but also for life in general:

3. RELIGIOUS LITERACY IS NECESSARY BECAUSE RELIGION IS A SPECIFIC FORM OF WORLD ENCOUNTER

The educationalist Jürgen Baumert (2002) – who was responsible for PISA research in Germany – distinguishes four basic modes of the world we encounter.

- First, there are linguistic-musical tasks that are connected to the aesthetic-expressive design of the world (languages, literature, art, music).
- Next, there is the mathematical-scientific field, about the cognitive-instrumental modelling of the world.
- Third, there is the field of social science which deals with the normative-evaluative examination of economy and society (history, politics, law, economy).
- Lastly, there is a fourth field of activity that schools cannot do without. Here we are dealing with problems of constitutive rationality and thus with basic questions and interpretations of life: Who am I? Where are we going? Why do I live? This is the field of religion and philosophy.

Baumert emphasizes that the cognitive, aesthetic or normative approaches to the world cannot replace the religious-ethical approach. If this mode is absent, not only are bodies of knowledge lost, but so is a manner of encountering the world. Insofar as human education is involved in the school, the introduction to religion also belongs to the educational canon of public schools. In public schools, the discussion of basic knowledge about religions takes place explicitly through religious education. This educational function legitimizes this subject in public schools.

Theologically spoken the task of religious education is to keep the question of God alive so that people will still have faith in the future. The German bishops describe the goals: Religious education serves "to impart structured and life-important basic knowledge about the faith of the church, to familiarize oneself with forms of lived faith and to promote religious dialogue and the ability to judge" (Die deutschen Bischofe, 2005).

4. DIDACTICAL CONSEQUENCES FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN FUTURE

a) Correlative learning

One aim here is to connect the present with the past as well as the future, since the present can only be understood in light of the past and, moreover, the future is built upon the past and the present. Therefore, it is important to address traditions: the great traditions of church history, but also the small traditions of everyday life.

In the German-speaking science of religious education, the term "correlation didactics" (cf. Baudler, 2002), meaning to interpret human experience in light of and in correlation with Christian tradition was created in the 1970's. Religious education is characterised by an inductive approach. Within the subject of 'religion', this experience was then linked to the Christian tradition. The opposite is also possible: to start with
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the Christian tradition and link this with the subject’s experience.

The correlation between tradition and today's life is more difficult nowadays than it has previously been. In the past, everyone followed only one tradition. Today, many traditions have disappeared and traditions in general have become more diverse. Correlation necessitates keeping an eye on the student's life in all its diversity, i.e. to see the present heterogeneity found in today's society as a great opportunity for teachable moments when it comes to religious education.

b) Taking heterogeneity seriously – Perceiving heterogeneity as an opportunity

Heterogeneity does not merely arise from different religions or world views. Culture, gender, social background or disability are also dimensions that lead to heterogeneity (cf. Knauth, Jochimsen, 2017; Grümme, 2017). They, too, are not always given adequate consideration at school and in religious education. For example, it is interesting to note that the cultural diversity, which students and teachers from different countries can contribute to religious education, is only very rarely considered by teachers, for example in questions such as: In which country are which customs practised at Christmas or Easter?

Within this lecture I will not discuss heterogeneity in detail, but I will mainly focus on the challenges for religious education that arise out of the heterogeneity of world views and religions: Based on the current multi-religious situation, the question of whether RE should also be offered for other religious communities arises. In many areas, pilot schemes for Islamic RE are in operation and some German federal states (Bundesländer) started to offer “Islamic Religion” as an ordinary subject. Since 2010, teaching degree programmes for Islamic Religion were established at several German Universities. The objective is to teach Muslim children their religion by Muslim teachers in the German language.

The religious plurality and organizational school difficulties of a confessional religious education make an inter-religious education appear as a solution. However, it is unresolved as to how an inter-religious education would have to be arranged in order to be more than a cognitive imparting of knowledge about religion (“learning about religion”).

Ideally, inter-religious and inter-confessional RE can be associated with the concept of “learning from religion” (Kuld et al, 2009; Grimmit, 1987). The question regarding whether inter-religious or inter-confessional dialogue presupposes an accommodation in one’s own religion/denomination or promotes this (Leimgruber, 2012) is still being openly discussed.

What is crucial is that diversity is seen as an opportunity, even if this view has to be taught to children and teachers in the first place: another person has abilities that I don’t have and I have abilities that the other one does not have. We can complement and learn from each other.

c) Religious education – more than „information about religion”

The question remains how to find or deepen access to religion as a prospect of the world’s interpretation. This requires experience. Forms of worship, symbols, and personal prayers are not only an expression of a certain belief, but also a visible aspect of a faith. They "show" the content. Therefore, students can understand the system of a religion deeper if they know its forms of expression. Knowing this visible side of the
faith is necessary before students can reflect on these aspects. The more vivid a religion becomes, the more it is possible that students could empathize with the believer’s perspective.

The ethnologist Victor Turner (2002) came to the conclusion that an ethnological staging of social ceremonies of foreign cultures leads to a better understanding of not only foreign but also one’s own culture. In this sense "religion as a foreign religion" can also be shown in the context of a performative religious education. It is about a perspective transfer, which is also achievable for students who understand themselves as non-religious or non-Christian. They do not have to accept the religious perspective as their own!

Showing something with pedagogical intent needs performance and reflection: Religious education, in this sense, must not neglect the cognitive and reflective examination of religious aspects. If experiences are not reflected upon, a learning progress cannot be identified. In order to acquire a sense of orientation about a religion, the critical examination of the contents of the religious tradition is necessary. To enable students to actively exercise their right to freedom of religion, reflection is urgently needed, particularly in view of the plurality of religious options and the individualization of faith. But if religion is understood as a merely private matter, one runs the risk to blind oneself to rational justification, because everyone tries to find his or her own truth. Only a theoretical analysis and discussion will lead to a deepening of knowledge and make effective communication with others possible. Even from a psychological point of view of learning, there is a link between the interest in religion and its reflected absorption: “The more students succeed in cognitively deciphering tradition as connections, as patterns, as a shaped and formed order, the sooner they can adapt these traditions” (Englert, 2006, p. 14). (In my opinion it could also serve as a didactic foundation for catechesis in the parish. (Kaupp, 2017)).

Performance – learning through – such an approach is pedagogically compatible, as the results of teaching research proves that learning is all the more successful, given contextual and illustrative content. Particularly action-oriented teaching / learning concepts emphasize that learning cannot be achieved if they are merely cognitive (Rustemeyer, 2016, pp. 113f.).

“Showing religion” requires a relationship between the learner and the teacher: The teacher has to show himself as someone who is familiar with Christian content and forms of expression, without assuming that the learner will have the same point of view. The performance of religion, therefore, needs teachers that are “skilled at staging”. This requires that the teachers themselves can distance themselves from their own religious convictions: Showing someone something is different to doing something with someone. That is why I assign this approach between “learning from” and “learning in”. Christian actions of faith therefore have their place in pastoral care or catechesis. In particular, in the latter areas of activity, it needs people that ‘show’ religion as their own religious practice. Current empirical analyses show proof for the great significance of a positive relationship between the learner and the companions for the catechesis in the parish. (Könemann, Sajak & Simone, 2017; Forschungsgruppe Religion und Gesellschaft, 2015). Here, we will also have to consider the difference between showing and doing but we can assume that the people who come together in this environment want to seek and live faith together.
5. CONCLUSION

Religion cannot be propagated without education if the question of God and humans is to be answered rationally and responsibly. Considering that, a – cognitive – theological discussion is absolutely essential. But: A comprehensive education is also incomplete without religion. Especially in light of global tensions, globalisation, pluralisation and individualisation, "religious literacy" is an extremely valuable skill that should be taught to students for anthropological reasons.

Thus, religious education and formation are especially important when considering how to educate future generations. It seems to me that religious education in future is not only useful, but necessary! Following an actual slogan I would go for: religious education for future!

Literature


