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Education from a Protestant Perspective

A Collection of Documents
from the Evangelical Church
in Germany



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Introduction

The Church's stewardship of education has to be developed in two different perspectives:

- *As a stewardship for the human quality of education in the public education system shared with other stakeholders of education in society*
- *And as an undivided responsibility for the explanation and transmission of Christian faith and tradition across the generations.*¹

The collection of various texts, memoranda, and documents in this publication underscores the message of the resolution of the EKD Synod in Travemünde in 1990. It emphasises the broad perspective on education the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) takes, undertaking its own educational activities as well as taking responsibility for the public education system and its development. In its own areas it aims for a comprehensive approach to content and structure. This includes Church-affiliated educational institutions ranging from elementary education to schools of different types and levels up to family education programs, adult education and educational activities for elderly persons. For the Evangelical Church in Germany, its 22 territorial member Churches, and for Protestantism as a whole, education is of great importance. Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon, two of the prominent reformers, both gave

¹ Kirchenamt der EKD (Hg.) (1991): Lübeck-Travemünde 1990. Bericht über die siebte Tagung der siebten Synode der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland vom 4. Bis 9. November 1990, S. 856.

(Die Bildungsverantwortung der Kirche ist nach zwei Seiten hin zu entfalten:

- Als mit anderen gesellschaftlichen Verantwortungsträgern geteilte pädagogische Verantwortung für die menschliche Qualität von Erziehung und Bildung im öffentlichen Bildungssystem
- Und als ungeteilte Verantwortung der Erschließung und Weitergabe der christlichen Glaubensüberlieferung im Generationenzusammenhang.)

education high priority as a means to acquire life-encouraging knowledge and developing competencies to communicate and act in societal contexts. It is in this tradition that the EKD has become one of the main stakeholders in education in Germany. Stewardship in education includes its own educational activities, but also partnership with other stakeholders in education in society and with the state. The statements provide a balanced insight into both perspectives.

About the EKD

22 Lutheran, Reformed and United regional Churches (*Landeskirchen*) form the Evangelical Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland – EKD). Protestant Church structures in Germany are based on federal principles at all levels. Each local congregation is responsible for Christian life in its own area, while each regional Church has its own special characteristics and retains its independence. Without in any way diminishing this autonomy, the EKD carries out the joint tasks with which its members have entrusted it. The EKD has the following governing bodies, all organised and elected along democratic lines: the Synod, the Council and the Church Conference. They are responsible for fulfilling the EKD's tasks as laid down in the constitution of the EKD and therefore also deal with educational issues, as can be seen in this collection of texts.

The day-to-day business of the Council, the Synod and the Church Conference is conducted by the EKD Church Office. For certain areas which require constant guidance and support, such as environmental issues, sports, prison chaplaincy, television, films, unemployment etc., special commissioners are appointed by the Council. In order to draw up statements, memoranda, etc., the Council has set up advisory commissions and boards made up of experts from Church and public life (such as the Advisory Commissions for Public Responsibility, Social Order, Theology and Issues of Faith, Young People, and Education).

A specific profile of education

The range of texts in this volume confirms that there is a specific profile to the Church's stewardship in education. This is grounded in a basic understanding of education that takes into account the whole human being and not isolated aspects of his/her personality. Education from a Christian Protestant understanding encourages perspectives of a 'fulfilled life', and of responsibility for oneself and for the Other. It is oriented on criteria that serve the human being in his/her biography. Two fundamental principles of the specific profile of education are a "change of perspectives", that takes fuller and more serious account of the perspective of children and youths in Church education and a biographical approach to education. Education is seen as a basic human right and an important resource for a sustainable future.

There is an inner connection between education and the Church. Education is at the same time a motif and a consequence of faith. For the reformers like Martin Luther or John Calvin, education held a high priority in order to enable everyone to read the Bible. Faith, in a Protestant understanding, also does not lead the believer out of the world, but into the world and needs an active commitment within the community as well as to people of other or no faiths or non religious worldviews.

Many of the basic tenets of Christianity contain guiding principles for education. The God-given dignity of the human being cannot be satisfied with an education system where social background determines success in education. Also, the Biblical appreciation of children as a perspective for the future and a gift of God supports care for the younger generation as a central motif of education.

It is no surprise, in view of the philosophy of education that underlies its own activities, that the Evangelical Church in Germany also plays a responsible role in the public education system. This is based on a number of reasons including stewardship for the public education system, especially for religious education in public state schools,

but also an active role in other fields as a stakeholder in the public education system. Two of the main fields and concerns are:

- (1) *The cooperation between state and religious communities.* Although Germany is a secular state whose political system is not affiliated with any religious community, there are several levels of cooperation between state and the religious communities. A sophisticated legal system – known as ecclesiastical law – has developed to govern the relations of Church, other religious communities and the State. It is based primarily on the basic right of freedom of religion and on the freedom of religious associations to organise and administer their own affairs. This is done within the boundaries of the general laws applicable to all people and associations.

The basic right of religious freedom is an undisputed foundation for the relations between Church and State. It is seen primarily as an individual right to have religion and to have no religion. The guarantee of religious freedom includes also a corporate dimension.

Thus the Church and State are in principle separate. The current relationship between Church and State is defined by the principles of religious and ideological neutrality and equal treatment of all religious associations. This does not hinder elements of partnership and co-operation in the specific German model of Church-State relations. The status of the Churches and other religious communities as corporate bodies under public law is an important element in this relationship. In the German legal system, the institutional and organisational components of freedom of religion enjoy special legal protection in the guarantee of church autonomy. This right of autonomy provides the necessary correlate to the basic right of religious freedom and constitutes the key element of the relations between Church and State in practice.

- (2) *A broad spectrum of privately maintained educational facilities complementing the state education system.* The Churches also maintain a wide variety of educational institutions, including

nursery schools, elementary schools, different types of secondary schools as well as church colleges and organisations of adult education. Many church-based educational institutions are acknowledged in education law, especially its private general and vocational schools. It must be pointed out that in Germany educational policy is primarily the responsibility of the 16 *Länder*. In many cases the Churches have entered into agreements with the *Länder* on the basis of constitutional provisions which make it possible for them to offer their multifaceted educational program in close cooperation with state institutions. The federal political system is more or less comparable to the federal system of the EKD, though the boundaries of the territories differ.

Developments of the EKD and education

This collection of documents covers the period between 1994 and 2010. It aims to provide English readers with an overview of main activities and discussions in the field of education in this period. Some historical context is helpful to understand the background to the current texts. An important resolution was adopted at the EKD Synod in Berlin-Weißensee in 1958 in a statement on schools: “The Church is prepared for a free service in a free school.” The criterion of freedom in education was validated against any ideologically based paternalism, political totalitarianism and indoctrination. This statement has shaped the mental attitude towards the joint task of state and Church of providing religious education in public schools. This is based on a commitment against any religious indoctrination in school, and against any paternalism toward teachers or schools. These two guiding principles also continue to be central for Church policy concerning religious education. Another aspect is the twofold educational responsibility of the Church that increasingly rose to the forefront in the 1970s. Not only its own educational institutions and activities were important

for the perspective of the Church on educational policy, but also a stewardship for public education in collaboration with other stakeholders.

The perspective of guidance for life through education (Synod 1990 in Lübeck-Travemünde) remains valid today and continues to be a leading principle in policy and practice. One can say that the understanding of education that is manifested “on the Human scale” (2003)² began many years earlier (see quote above).

Another crucial text is the memorandum “Identity and Dialogue” (1994) dealing with religious education in a context of plurality. Religious education is a central area of cooperation between the Churches and the state. This is based on articles of the Basic Law concerning freedom of religion and conscience (article 4) and article 7 which guarantees religious education as an ordinary subject under the joint responsibility of the state and the Churches and religious communities. It is designed to put the principle of freedom of religion into practice in the classroom. The statement “Identity and Dialogue” also underlines that the educational activities of the Church are grounded in a theological-educational reasoning and complemented by an analysis of the societal dynamics and interplay of forces shaping education as a reference point for its own activities.

Another already mentioned important document provides Protestant perspectives on education in a knowledge and learning-based society “On the Human Scale. Protestant perspectives towards education in a knowledge- and learning society” (2003). It takes into account globalisation processes that also affect knowledge and learning and argues for a comprehensive understanding of lifelong learning that sets its priorities by placing the human being at the centre.

2 Kirchenamt der EKD (Hg.) (2003): Maße des Menschlichen. Evangelische Perspektiven zur Bildung in der Wissens- und Lerngesellschaft, [On the Human Scale. Protestant perspectives towards education in a knowledge- and learning society] Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, S. 90.

The perspective on education presented in this memorandum includes a careful analysis of the changing conditions of education and of new challenges that impact the situation of children, young people, and adults.

It also addresses the following questions and offers a response to them founded on Protestant principles: What means are promoted by society? What does a holistic understanding of education include? Why do we need to discuss values when it comes to educational practice? The document contains the following definition of education.

“Education (*Bildung*) is seen as interconnectedness of learning, knowledge, skills, sensitivity on values, attitudes and acting competence on the basis of meaningful concerns about life.” Against this background, a sustainable concept of education requires room for the unexpected, a synthesis of skills for a labour market governed by economic concerns and for personal development, intercultural and interreligious learning to cope with the challenges of globalisation and a feeling for ultimate transcendental issues.

Providing a critical perspective in education

The memorandum “On the Human Scale” exemplifies another important attribute of the EKD commitment to education. Based on these principles and understanding, the statement provides a critical perspective concerning Church- and state-based concepts and practice in education. It unfolds a critical perception of the popular term “lifelong learning” that plays a key role in national and European policies of education. Confirming the need for a quality-oriented education that faces the challenges of a global knowledge-based economy, the document points on excessive expectations often linked with this term. Education on a human scale should provide enough time and safe spaces to enable people to cope with rapid changes in their life and in society. The key issues are: a concept of education that provides a sustainable perspective, and a broad un-

derstanding of religious education that is aware of pluralism as a basic condition of education and life, focussing on the internal logic of religion and religious education.

The collection

Growing and sustained interest in international cooperation and dialogical exchange require that important statements also be made available in other languages. This can help not to eliminate, but to overcome language barriers. Language barriers are a central impediment to dialogue and understanding today. This collection of English texts is intended to serve as a productive tool for international contacts and exchange.

It can serve many of the more than 140 German-speaking Protestant congregations abroad associated with the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), especially those in English-speaking countries.

The Department for Ecumenical Relations and Ministries Abroad maintains and fosters church-to-church relations with many churches throughout the world building bridges between people and continents. As a part of the ecumenical movement the EKD is committed to the goal of Christian unity in the spirit of Jesus Christ. At the European level the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) have increasingly become aware of a Europeanisation of education that encourages more exchange and joint actions at the European level but also influences national activities in becoming more European or international.

This publication can also become valuable in European activities of exchange and research in education. The Comenius-Institute as a Protestant Centre for Research and Development in Education increasingly organises international comparative projects and actively collaborates with European and international organisations in the field of education and religious education. Special emphasis is given to collaboration with the Intereuropean Commission on Church

and School ICCS and the Coordinating Group for Religion and Education in Europe CoGREE, a joint network of five European organisations, and the Association for Teacher Education in Europe ATEE.

Issues that are covered in the collection include: Protestant kindergartens and schools, religious education (in primary school, in general, in upper secondary school), Islamic religious education, religion in primary school, a change of perspective toward the child and young adult in education, Protestant perspectives on education in a knowledge- and learning-based society, educational perspectives of socially handicapped students, Protestant adult education, confirmation work, church and education, church and youth, all-day-schools and educational justice.

The collection also includes the text “The Origin of the World, the Theory of Evolution, and Creation Faith in School” that is a decisive contribution to a discussion on science and religion that has been garnering greater interest in recent years.

Most of the texts were adopted by the EKD Council and developed by the Advisory Group for Education, with some resulting from discussion in the EKD Synod.

As editors of this collection, we hope that the book can be useful as a tool to more dialogue and greater understanding in European and international contexts.

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Identity and Dialogue

Place and Perspectives of Religious Education in a Plural Society

A Memorandum of the EKD Council
(1994)

Introduction

The EKD Council, whose term of office is six years, is made up of 15 lay people and clergy. 14 of the members are elected jointly by the Synod and the Church Conference; the President of the Synod is the 15th member ex officio. The Synod and the Church Conference select the Chairperson of the Council and his/her deputy jointly from amongst the council members.

The Council governs the EKD as regards all issues not expressly reserved for other organs. It is particularly responsible for ensuring co-operation between the church agencies and associations in all areas, for representing Protestant Christianity in the public sphere and commenting on issues of religious and social life. This is generally done either by making statements on current concerns at short notice or by having memoranda, studies, contributions to public debates and position papers drawn up. The following extracts are taken from a memorandum about religious education, published in 1994, that takes account of current issues and contexts that underlines the need of expressing the place and perspectives of religious education. Among others the issues of the confessional character of religious education and the relation between religious education and ethics have been debated at the time of the memorandum. The chapter headlines are documented as well as the preface, the introduction and the summary of the memorandum.

Keywords: Religious education, plurality, identity, ethics, concepts of teaching and learning

Content

(translated parts in *italics*)

Preface

Introduction

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 - 1.2 On the School Environment: School Education, School Development, School Reform
2. Intent and Task of Religious Education
 - 2.1 Intent and Task of Religious Education for Children, Youths, and Young Adults
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4. Teaching and Learning in Religious Education
5. Shape and Place of Religious Education
 - 5.1 Confessionality from a Protestant Perspective and the Cultural Interdependence of Identity and Dialogue
 - 5.2 Confessional Cooperation in the School
 - 5.3 Religious Education and Ethics in an Independent Subject Group

Summary

Preface

It is still mainly at school that young people are given the opportunities for their later lives and careers. That is why it faces demands to prepare its pupils for the economic realities of the future labour market. Nonetheless, the school must not allow itself to be limited to this economic function. As satisfying as the feeling of achievement is, human reality transcends economic competition. There is more to life than winning: pausing – thinking – questioning, loving – laughing – crying, fighting – reconciling – hoping. Schools must serve the development of the person as much as its marketable skills, provide a space to live and grow.

Many children and young people find it hard to navigate the intricacies of our plural society. Yet the challenges of the future more than ever need people who combine a firm rootedness in their own convictions with the ability to open themselves to others and understand their perspectives. Only then will we be able to assume responsibility – in our private environment as much as in global contexts – for working towards peace and justice, the protection of the ‘One World’ and of creation.

These tasks include an ethical dimension which militates for the continued inclusion of religious education in school curricula. It is in this subject that these issues and their relation to questions of life and faith that young people face are addressed. Its basis as a regular subject is solid on both educational and theological grounds.

The last public statements by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and its Council on the question of religious education are now about 20 years old. Their decisions at the time defined a clear position and opened future perspectives that still apply. Yet today’s urgent problems and circumstances have changed greatly, requiring us to rethink the positioning and purpose of religious education. At the heart of today’s public and often highly controversial debate are the question of confessional versus inclusive religious education and the relationship between it and the non-religious subject of ethics. The position of the EKD in this discussion is being awaited eagerly.

The Council has accepted the position paper the Advisory Group for Education, Children and Youth Work and a dedicated Working Group prepared on its behalf with approval and gratitude and decided to have it published. It is a fundamental statement that takes account of both regional specificities and the rights and responsibilities of the regional member Churches and state governments in matters of education. The consensus achieved outlines a framework within which future religious education can be developed in the context of regional realities. This framework and the underlying pedagogical analysis also offers further perspectives for the entire field of education.

Therefore, the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany is especially anxious for this memorandum to find broad attention among decision makers and stakeholders in state and Church, schools and parishes. It extends its gratitude to all who work for religious education in particular and education in general, and especially to teachers for their dedicated work.

To us Christians, the Bible is the most important of all books. One verse in it reads: "By my God I can leap over a wall" (Psalm 18,30) [18:29 in the New Revised Standard Version]. A brave word! I hope that many young people can experience the power of this life perspective in religious education.

Hanover, July 1994

Bishop Dr. Klaus Engelhardt
Chairperson of the EKD Council

* * *

Introduction

A new memorandum on religious education is in one part called for by the new agreement between Church and state on the reorganisation of the education system in the former GDR. In the course of this, the introduction of religious education according to Article 7,

Paragraph 3 of the Basic Law is a necessity. This opens a previously closed field of public education responsibility to the Churches there, giving rise to a fundamental reconsideration of the role of religious education in schools and its relation to their own educational efforts at parish level. By entering the public education system, they take the entirety of a young generation into view in which forty years of state opposition to, and limitation of Christian religious practice have led to a deep break in religious tradition. This is illustrated in the words of one youth: "I don't know any prayer. I just know you say Amen at the end."

Alongside this development, other questions and problems have surfaced in the only superficially stable setting of religious education in West Germany. At closer inspection, these are of a universal nature: the fundamental problem is that the Churches have since the age of Enlightenment changed their theology, preaching, and education to fit the context of modern society, yet that at the same time, modernity has entered a fundamental crisis. Institutions have lost their socially formative power and the individual is left to its own devices in the face of bewildering choices. Everyone is required to determine the meaning of life individually. At the same time, numerous religious and ideological explanations are proffered in a plural society, rendering the task yet more difficult.

This development poses a challenge to all religions, to Christianity as much as Judaism and Islam. It has given rise to two diametrically opposed, but mutually reinforcing reactions: on the one hand the fundamentalist religious resistance against pluralism and relativism, on the other, a modernist adaptation of religion to the circumstances. Religious communities are torn between these poles.

These controversies are aggravated by a growing concern for the future. This has taken root in many fields: concern over job losses which threaten to remove a fundamental element of validation and responsibility from life; growing economic inequality that manifests in the global north-south divide and puts the economic future of all humans in question; and finally, in a still broader perspective,

the dispiriting sight of the already widely irreversible ecological damage done to our environment, threatening our biological survival.

These problem complexes – faced by the state and Church within their own societies, by modernity in general, and by humanity on a global scale – constitute a radical departure from the realities of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the time of the EKD's last statements on religious education. At that time, the Church's position on religious education faced criticism levelled against institutions and established authority on the one hand and the challenges of school and curriculum reform on the other. Today, it faces a more fundamental crisis of orientation in a plural, contradictory world faced with growing fear of the future just as it embraces its unity.

These developments affect the school as a whole as much as they do religious education. Regarding the school, approaches towards an ethical education have been developed and explored since the mid-1970s. Soon afterwards, a debate on a 'new fundamental education' began that addresses two facets of the concept:

The social, 'universal' aspect embraces the things that concern us all. Beyond subject-specific academic knowledge, the school must strive to lead the young generation towards the tasks of the future by focusing on actual concerns beyond the boundaries of individual subjects. Thus, the children and young people are prepared for their role as future adults and responsible citizens. This requires them to broaden their horizons in social perception and develop their sense of responsibility and ability to communicate. At issue is communication in an expanding society, human relationships, civic solidarity, and tolerance and reconciliation between nations, cultures and religions.

Children and young people today face a plethora of difficulties and problems while being at their most sensitive and vulnerable. This requires a greater focus on the other, individual aspect of education, the development of the person. Schooling is life experience, and thus school education is increasingly understood as supporting young people in developing their own identities. Whether this process can

be successful greatly depends on the success of the school at creating an environment of trust.

Christian religious education addresses both these aspects. It is uniquely dedicated to teaching pupils of the universal love of God towards all creation. The twin commandments of love of God and of our neighbour, expressed with greater strength in loving even our enemies, are the foundations of Christian ethics. It thus has immeasurable potential for the willingness and ability for dialogue at the heart of a universal human education. In terms of individual education, other expectations are held for religious education. Pupils above all hope for their religious education teachers to be people who they can “turn to with personal problems.”

As early as 1971, the EKD clearly stated that the confessional religious education mandated in the Basic Law must be understood in the light of the freedom of religion enshrined in Article 4 of the same document. It must serve to “secure the individual’s exercise of this basic right,” preparing the individual child and youth to freely and independently make informed religious decisions. Religious education is not an instrument of ensuring continuity of confessional affiliation or a generous gesture by the state towards the Churches in recognition of long-standing tradition. Its legal foundations require it to justify itself in the same fashion as all other school subjects, on the basis of the educational mission of the school. This mission must above all be defined in pedagogical terms.

Thus, the memorandum begins by addressing the pedagogical situation of the young generation and its schools. In its often challenging statements, it continues a tradition of earlier publications by the EKD. At the same time, however, the circumstances outlined earlier also make necessary a new theological positioning. The question what a specifically Protestant religious education can contribute must ultimately be answered in theological terms.

Summary

Identity and Dialogue

People in our shrinking 'one world' need the fertile interplay of established traditional identities and the ability to enter into dialogue. We are living in a plural and often contradictory world. Worldwide, fears of both individual and collective national, ethnic, cultural and religious identity are on the rise. If our extant plurality is made subject to a simplistic standardisation that destroys individual national, cultural and religious traditions, this problem is only set to increase. At the same time, an introspective closure is not the answer and must be avoided at all levels. Rather, we must develop the abilities and strategies to deal with complex structures and plural heterogeneity throughout society. Only those who do not feel threatened in their own identity can open themselves to others and embrace their responsibilities in their own immediate environment, in the global context, the protection of our 'one world' and our stewardship of creation.

Especially Western European countries are at risk of forgetting the pivotal role Christianity has played in their formation and which it, despite ongoing secularisation, continues to play. An emphasis on the biblical Christian tradition which informs every aspect of our historical existence in Germany is absolutely necessary. Ignorance and indifference are serious obstacles to dialogue in an increasingly multicultural and multireligious society.

Children, youths and young adults

Children, youths and young adults today grow up in a world where the most varied and contradictory beliefs, world views, religions and political convictions coexist. This fact is carried into the innermost family circle from a tender age onwards through the omnipresent media. Faced with this, the majority of young people today agree that the meaning of life is something that each individual must find

his or her own answer to. They rarely understand that the challenge of this answer can become an unbearable burden to them. Freedom of choice is always ambivalent; deracinated individuals become vulnerable to new dependencies. A formal freedom of choice can conceal the wide sway of influences that truly control it in a market-dominated society. Many young people have illusions about the degree of their independence. Their ability to distinguish what is 'right' or 'wrong' needs to be strengthened. Otherwise, doubts of their own self-worth are at risk of growing out of control and may seek release in destructive outlets.

School

Beyond the transmission of factual knowledge, the school is a place of individual education and character formation. It serves the development of the whole person. This task requires each individual school to foster a culture of trust in mutual relations, to become a living space for its students and staff.

Alongside individual development, the school serves important tasks of socialisation. It is tasked with familiarising young people with the formative aspects of their own culture and history – a particularly important task in the new *Länder* following unification. Also, it must foster the peaceful coexistence of people from all countries, religions and cultures. Already in elementary school, the first steps can be taken to enable children to meet each other in an atmosphere of openness and friendship and to learn to deal with what appears strange from their perspective. Not least, the dangers faced by our modern society and the individual responsibility for a continued existence of humanity on earth in peace and justice challenge the education system. The young generation needs to be enabled to realistically analyse facts, ethically judge situations, to contribute to consensus development and, where necessary, to alter its own habits in the process.

Religious Education

The current academic discourse in Germany almost completely ignores the religious dimension of the school. The concept of ‘inter-cultural learning’ defines culture to the almost complete exclusion of religion. This has obvious problems given that the educational tasks of the school all include religious dimensions. That is why a regular subject dedicated to Religious Education (RE) is indispensable. Its pedagogical justification derives from the fact that religion both culturally and individually is a key question of life. A Christian RE particularly can contribute to understanding, as this faith bears witness to the universal love of God for all his creatures. The twin commandments of love of God and of fellow man, indeed, of love for one’s enemies, have shaped Christian ethics. Without a religious education, many adolescents, bereft of any encounter with religion, would remain ignorant and inarticulate in matters of faith. Religion contains and answers the question of God and the central questions that surround it: What is the secret of the beginning of all existence? What comes in the end, after death? Why is life full of suffering from its beginning to its end? What does faith in God mean? Is God real or a fiction? And how does the church help, whose theology proclaims its knowledge of God?

Students

Surveys show that, despite ongoing secularisation and frequent distance to the Church, many school students in both East and West Germany continue to ask these questions. From early childhood on, they develop their own, often very individual feelings, concepts and images of God. These must be part of any religious education. Only when the students and their own experiences and approaches, feelings and desires, their wishes and doubts are heard and addressed, can they feel that religious education exists to help them. This subject like few others focuses on issues of the whole person. We see ourselves in the religious experiences of others. Following the reli-

gious life and development of children, youths and young adults – and all too often the question of its disappearance – gives RE an opportunity to lead other subjects in sensitive, biographically integrated teaching and learning.

Teachers of Religious Education

Teachers can have great importance in the life of their students. They can seek dialogue and confrontation with them and gain orientation in fields of life far removed from the immediate subject taught. That means that students have every right to ask RE teachers about their own individual religious position and faith. Often, they are the first individuals the students meet as representatives of Christianity. Avoidance can quickly be interpreted as weakness of faith while a position, once stated, is subject to criticism. Young adults often seek confrontation with a consistent position they face. Their own convictions do not develop in a vacuum of indifference, but in encounters with specific beliefs and faiths in others. This requires the teachers to be comfortable in addressing their own religious convictions and heritage and to express it in a way that does not limit their students, but encourages them to discover their own approaches to faith. Teachers of religious education thus not only face high academic and professional challenges, but also great demands of their personality. Teacher training and education must more strongly stress this aspect of their role. Not least, they need encouragement and support in their environment and especially from the Church.

The Church

The Church shares responsibility for the future of the young generation. It participates in the development of society and of the education system, contributing contents, criteria and perspectives in its role as a stakeholder in public education. However, it can only credibly do so if it also reflects its own pedagogical responsibility and creates designs and not least staffs and funds its own communi-

ties as a place of learning. Religious education in school would be misunderstood and overtaxed as a tool of catechetics and confirmand instruction, of socialisation as Church members or contribution to Church community work. Nonetheless, it presents a great opportunity for the Church. In the context of the school, it challenges the ability of the Christian faith to express itself, engage in dialogue, and learn from its neighbours.

Despite all differences, school and church as places of learning are interdependent. A complementary positioning of religious education in school and religious instruction in church is particularly important in the former East German *Länder*. Religious education requires places of living, practiced faith and visible Christian tradition. In their work with children, youths, and young adults, the Church communities in their turn need connections to the school, where young people spend most of their days and face the fundamental questions of individual and community life, including their religious aspects. Where all-day schooling is being offered, Church congregations, like other organisations, are also called upon to offer youth work in cooperation with the school.

Just as the school profits at the pedagogical and personal level from the fact that teachers commit themselves to education and to the deepening and reform of school instruction as confessing Christians, the Church congregations should discover the pedagogical and communicative competencies of teachers to rejuvenate ossified forms of community work.

The state

According to Article 4 of the German Basic Law, freedom of religion and conscience is a fundamental pillar of the democratic state. This law also requires the state to design its institutions in order to allow this freedom to be practiced and developed.

From the perspective of Article 4 of the Basic Law, religious education, as mandated in its Article 7.3, secures the exercise of this fundamental right by each individual. Children, youths and young

adults are enabled to define their own religious orientation (EKD 1971). Religious education is neither an instrument of Church influence nor a generous gift on the part of the state. Rather, the state itself has an interest in seeing the young generation engage with, question, and reaffirm its fundamental values and their cultural, ideological and religious heritage. Religious education has a particular role in this process. To fill it, it needs not only a firm legal basis, but a broad social consensus supporting it. Surveys show that this exists; in August 1992, 60% of voting-age respondents to a Wickert poll supported the introduction of religious education. The latest membership survey of the EKD shows that two thirds of church members and a surprising one third of religiously unaffiliated respondents class their experiences with religious education and its role in their lives as positive.

According to Article 7.3 of the Basic Law, religious education is a regular school subject to be provided in accordance with the tenets of the religious communities concerned. This defines the definition and provision of religious education as a state task, supervised by the education authorities and taught in state schools; all educational authorities must offer it as a regular subject. At the same time, the churches and religious communities share in the responsibility for religious education in their contribution to the contents and goals of the subject according to their tenets. In this, the educational aims of the state school take precedence and the structures of the school in question must be taken into account. These legal provisions have proven themselves successful.

An opening of religious education for the participation of students of other confessions or an inter-confessional cooperation is possible if the religious community in question declares this to be in accordance with its tenets. That does not place religious education under the arbitrary control of the churches. Rather, it represents a shared responsibility for the interpretative development of the constitution in continuation of the intention of Article 7.3, applied to a changing situation. The need for this has never been greater.

Confessionality

Where the fundamental conditions and questions of human existence are discussed honestly, personal beliefs and confessions of necessity enter the debate. They reflect the plurality of Christian thought and belief. Yet wherever different beliefs meet, mutual respect needs to be fostered and the expression of one's own beliefs encouraged.

In view of this tension between identity and dialogue, the appropriate form of a confessional religious education must be sought in 'confessional cooperative religious education'. This format neither seeks to meld what is separate nor does it create division where interdependence prevails. The Evangelical Church supports the current Protestant-Catholic cooperation and regards further developing its structure and content as an urgent necessity. This approach is theologically grounded in the Protestant understanding of confessionality.

The cooperative format of religious education includes accessibility to students – all are accepted whose parents so desire or who, on reaching the legal age of independent choice, themselves decide to participate. Students need not be affiliated with the Protestant confession to be admitted. This openness, however, must be protected from administrative abuse.

Clearer steps towards cooperativeness also concern the curricular contents and teachers. An important task of RE must be to address both differences and commonalities in the give and take of open debate, in both differentiated and cooperative classes, in separate and joint groups in an interdisciplinary and ecumenical fashion. Particularly special-needs education and vocational schools no longer offer any separate religious education. The same increasingly applies in other schools as well. In order to ensure a clear legal framework in this situation, agreements both between the Churches and between Church and state are direly needed to institute flexible solutions. Legal provisions, staffing, funding and institutional organisation must be adequate to the pedagogical and theological needs of the situation.

Regional and local situations continue to be of great importance. Confessional identity and ecumenical spirit take very different forms regionally. Disregarding this fact would condemn any reform to pure abstraction. Similarly, the respective positions of majority and minority play a role. It is especially important to protect the rights of regional religious minorities – both parents and children. Under conditions of inequality, cooperation can take very questionable shapes, and the much-invoked education towards tolerance and acceptance takes on particular significance in religious education in these cases. Failure here threatens the credibility of both Church and school as partners in equal dialogue.

Ethics

In view of the educational mission of the school and especially the growing uncertainty in ethical matters on the part of many young people, it is indispensable that all students be given a competent introduction to questions of ethics. That is why the choice not to participate in religious education must not simply excuse the student from instruction in its general aims and development goals. Educating ethical citizens must also be in the interest of the state, which legally guarantees the right not to participate in religious education. Divergent world views, convictions and lifestyles can only be made to converge in a liberal democracy if the young generation actively engages with them. Therefore, most *Länder* mandate a substitute subject (usually designated 'Ethics') for students who do not take part in religious education or for whose religion or confession RE is not being offered. A separate, independent subject dedicated to ethical education is pedagogically desirable as such, but its relation vis-a-vis religious education must be clarified in order to avoid possible future tensions.

As the legal provisions link ethics and religious education, a poorly funded or staffed ethical education subject would be detrimental to the public image of religious education as well. In view of its academic foundations, a normative clarification of its position is re-

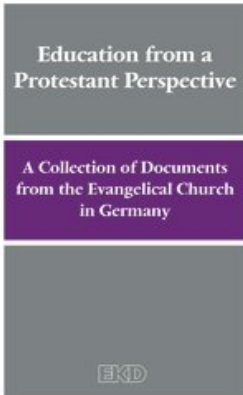
quired especially as it touches upon religious and ideological issues. The training of its teachers needs to meet the same standards as that for religious education or other regular school subjects. Only when these preconditions are met can the two subjects meet eye to eye as equal partners in dialogue. Neither one must be placed at an administrative, theoretical or financial disadvantage to the other. The state is obliged to ensure an adequate provision of the subjects independently and in their own right in all of its schools through the appropriate administrative channels.

Religious education and ethics both have their own distinct profiles. Their respective independence and separate identities must be particularly stressed in view of the broad overlap in many areas they share. Ethics education is oriented along the lines (and within the bounds) of philosophical reason while the inalienable foundations of religious education lie in the historical tradition and current expression of the Christian faith. Such is the fundamental, abiding and productive difference between the two.

School Subject Group

Schools in Germany offer Protestant and Catholic religious education along with ethic or philosophy and, more rarely, though within the same legal framework, Orthodox, Jewish or Islamic RE. The educational mission of the school requires these subjects not to merely coexist unconnected. They all share the task of developing and fostering the willingness and ability of the young generation to enter into dialogue and can therefore justifiably and productively be regarded as a subject group. The state is responsible for their organisation and curricular content, in the case of religious education in cooperation with the religious communities, in ethics and/or philosophy solely. As legal provisions in the various *Länder* organised the subjects as a required either-or choice, they could also be regarded as a mandatory elective. That they should be regarded as such is supported by the following:

The importance of the subjects as a formally constituted group



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