

REFLECTIONS ON THEORIES OF (CATHOLIC) EDUCATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

I. INTRODUCTION: PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AS A FRAME OF REFERENCE FOR THEORIES AND THEOLOGIES OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Practical theology today considers itself to be scientific research of religious practice, with the aim to (empirically) describe this practice, to (hermeneutically) understand it and (critically and scientifically) give guidance to it. Therefore, the object of research is preferably defined as broadly as possible and it links various determinants and coordinates of the discipline with one another: religious practice(s), which can sometimes also encompass forms of conflict, and (ecclesial) faith traditions; theology and the social sciences and humanities; religion and culture; church and society; church and university¹.

Features of Practical theology related to the local church, culture and geography cannot be denied in the process. These different situations and contexts should primarily be respected and taken into account. Moreover, theology nowadays does not want to lock itself up within the church, but it wants to explore and reveal the public and societal dimension and meaning of faith². It wants to reflect on how the sources and resources of the Christian tradition could be brought forward into the increasingly secular and pluralistic areas of public life in order to advance better communication about religion within the broader society³. According to David Tracy, the specific emphasis of particularly *practical* theology relies on this societal aspect of theology⁴. A public practical theology should, in Jaco Dreyer's view, not only serve the interests of the Christian society, but humanity in its entirety. In the process, it should not just stick with observation of the lived religion, but it should first and foremost take the prophetic dimension of the Christian tradition seriously.

1. Cf. N. METTE, *Praktisch-theologische Erkundungen*, Münster, LIT, 1998, p. 3.

2. Cf. G.M. KLEEMANN, *Die Öffentlichkeitsrelevanz von Kirche und Theologie*, in K. GABRIEL – H.-J. HÖHN (eds.), *Religion heute – öffentlich und politisch: Provokationen, Kontroversen, Perspektiven*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2008, 177-194, p. 183.

3. Cf. E. GRAHAM, *Why Practical Theology Must Go Public*, in *Practical Theology* 1 (2008) 11-17.

4. Cf. D. TRACY, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, New York, Crossroad, 1981.

In order to fulfil this task, it has to deal with the methodological challenges which are posed to interdisciplinary studies⁵.

Against this background, our reflection on educational theories and the theologies inherent to them were formulated and should be understood from a Catholic Central and Eastern European perspective.

II. EDUCATION – CHURCH – SOCIETY

Within the framework of the church's responsibility for education, various theories and theologies of pedagogy and religious educational action by the church have been developed which address society as a whole and enter into dialogue with it. In the most recent decades, education has developed into an important topic, in political as well as in scientific discourse. Nowadays, European societies readily define themselves as knowledge societies in which lifelong learning is strived for. Behind this, economic interests are often lurking, which have to qualify the people for the challenges of the labour market. The modern concept of education is therefore also closely linked to applicable and usable knowledge and the expectation of social success through education⁶. Education is threatened by the danger of being to the advantage of those who can already be found in the best places in society and in this way increasing the injustice between population groups, countries and continents. In contrast to this, theology and the church pursue a concept of education which strives for the maturity of the entire personality and in this way serves the humanisation of people. Apart from competence in the subject field, several other competences are included, such as relationship skills, communication skills, interpretational skills, skills for making judgments and taking action, and apart from efficiency and usability, also leisure and being "purpose-free"⁷. Over against the voices

5. Cf. J. DREYER – R. GANZEVOORT – W. GRÄB – C. HERMANS – G. IMMINK – F. SCHWEITZER – B. WEYEL, *Workshop: Methodology. 11th IAPT Conference – Toronto, April 11-15, 2013* (13 April, 2013); also J.S. DREYER, *Public Theology and the Translation Imperative: A Ricoeurian Perspective*, in *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 12 (2010) no. 67/3, 98-106.

6. Cf. F.O. JULY – E. VOLKMANN, *Was heißt "Kirchliche Bildungsverantwortung"? Überlegungen zum Zusammenhang zwischen Bildungs- und Kirchenverständnis*, in V. ELSNBAST – F. SCHWEITZER – G. ZIENER (eds.), *Werte – Erziehung – Religion: Beiträge von Religion und Religionspädagogik zu Werteerziehung und werteorientierter Bildung*, Münster, Waxmann, 2008, 39-49, p. 39.

7. Cf. A. LEHNER-HARTMANN, *Religiöses Lernen: Subjektive Theorien von ReligionslehrerInnen* (Praktische Theologie heute, 133), Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2014, pp. 21-26.

which characterise faith and education as irreconcilable with each other, faith and education should be viewed as closely linked⁸. Faith aims at giving orientating guidelines for life. Faith needs education, in order to reach maturity in faith. The communication of the message of Christ, which wants to be acknowledged as the truth, needs the mediation of information and the disclosure of the implications of faith⁹. According to Norbert Mette, one can distinguish three dimensions of religious education. On an individual level, one can regard it as having “a life-accompanying and transformative” dimension, because the biography has a central significance in that the question of meaning comes up all the time and requires new answers, pushing towards a new understanding of the world and the self. On the level of society, religious education can be understood as a task in “critical solidarity” which is involved in a “dispute about understanding God” in the face of countless idols, and which aims at a coexistence in mutual appreciation. Especially the attention for victims becomes particularly important. In the field of religion and church, the contribution of education proves to be “ecumenical-conciliar”, in as far as the church and parishes are understood as communities of learning that constantly experience renewal through the message of the Gospel¹⁰.

Such a transformative understanding of (religious) education, which is also compatible with discourses in pedagogy (Pongratz, Meyer-Drawe, Kokemohr, among others¹¹), has indispensable critical potential. It helps

8. According to Konrad Paul Liessmann, for example, faith is not a matter of thought and in that sense he also refutes the idea of confessional religious education (cf. K.P. LIESSMANN, *Theorie der Unbildung: Die Irrtümer der Wissensgesellschaft*, Vienna, Zsolnay, 2006, pp. 64f). Walter Kasper, on the other hand, has more or less the opposite opinion. Faith, to him, is an invitation to thought. “Wer glaubt, der sieht nicht weniger, er sieht mehr, und er darf deshalb darauf vertrauen, dieses Mehr im Medium des Denkens verantworten zu können”. (“Whoever believes, does not see less, but sees more, and can therefore trust to account for this ‘more’ by means of thought”) (W. KASPER, *Zustimmung zum Denken: Von der Unerläßlichkeit der Metaphysik für die Sache der Theologie*, in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 4 [1989] 257-271, p. 269).

9. Cf. C. SCHWÖBEL, *Christlicher Glaube im Pluralismus: Studien zu einer Theologie der Kultur*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2003, pp. 287-290.

10. Cf. N. METTE, *Religiöse Bildung zwischen Subjekten und Strukturen*, in G. BITTER – R. ENGLERT – G. MILLER – K.E. NIPKOW (eds.), *Neues Handbuch religionspädagogischer Grundbegriffe*, Munich, Kösel, 2002, 31-35, pp. 34f.

11. Cf. R. KOKEMOHR, *Bildung als Welt- und Selbstentwurf im Anspruch des Fremden: Eine theoretisch-empirische Annäherung an eine Bildungsprozesstheorie*, in H.C. KOLLER – W. MAROTZKI – O. SANDERS (eds.), *Bildungsprozesse und Fremdheitserfahrung: Beiträge zu einer Theorie transformatorischer Bildungsprozesse*, Bielefeld, transcript, 2007, 13-68; K. MEYER-DRAWE, *Diskurse des Lernens*, München, Fink, 2008; L. PONGRATZ, *Sackgassen der Bildung: Pädagogik anders denken*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2010; M. GÖHLICH – C. WULF – J. ZIRFAS (eds.), *Pädagogische Theorien des Lernens*, Weinheim, Beltz, 2007.

to counteract fundamentalist stagnation within the church and is capable of pointing out those trends in society that only aim at usefulness. The various concepts of education should be brought into a (disputative) debate with one another¹².

When asking about the contribution that the church makes to society, it becomes clear that the church's presence can contribute to the humane development of society, specifically in the public education system. "Society needs lived and educated religion which can be communicated in society. It needs the resource of the meaning of religious language and tradition"¹³ as a contribution to the formation of values which are urgently needed in a world with diverse options for meaning and challenges. This, however, presupposes that church and theology primarily listen to the lives of human beings because the church needs the specific help of those who live in the world, and the plurality of their ways of thinking (GS 44). Education in this sense finds itself in a dual tension: resisting the trends towards isolation within the church as well as resisting societal trends towards the exclusion of religion from educational processes.

III. DIFFERENT PLACES AND THEIR THEORIES OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

During the 20th century, religious education as a scientific discipline has intensively focused its research on the addressees of religious education, their needs and conditions, as well as their processes of learning and communication. In doing so, it has entered into dialogue with the humanities and social sciences, especially the educational sciences. Religious learning is viewed as a lifelong process encompassing religious education and catechetical processes in all age groups. The twin concepts of "religious education and catechetics", preferred in Catholic circles,

12. Rudolf Englert calls for intervention in the arguments about the concept of education, not least also because of the fact that religious education will not be marginalised: "Wer den Bildungsbegriff kampflos den pragmatischen Reduktionisten aus den Wirtschaftsverbänden und Handwerkskammern überlässt, darf sich nicht wundern, wenn 'Religion' über kurz oder lang bildungspolitisch ganz und gar entbehrlich erscheint". ("Whoever leaves the concept of education without any struggle to the pragmatic reductionists from the trade associations and the chambers of crafts, should not be surprised if 'religion' sooner or later will seem superfluous from the point of view of educational politics") (R. ENGLERT, *Vorsicht Schlagseite! Was im Bildungsdiskurs der Religionspädagogik gegenwärtig zu kurz kommt*, in *Theologisch-Praktische Quartalschrift* 2 [2010] 123-131, p. 127).

13. JULY – VOLKMANN, *Was heißt "Kirchliche Bildungsverantwortung"?* (n. 6), p. 45.

are understood very differently in the different contexts of church and language, which can be seen from the shifting positions of subordination and superiority¹⁴. Religious education and catechetics investigate various phenomena and processes which are taking place in central areas of the church's work in and responsibility for education: in the church's parishes, in the educational institutions operated by the state as well as those operated by the church where the church participates in the religious instruction in schools, and beyond these in the educational discourse and practice in society.

1. *Faith Education in Christian Parishes*

The changed context in society, which does not constitute a homogeneous Christian or even less a Catholic environment in many places, also calls in a special way for theories and theologies of religious education within the parish and family. In the European democracies, one finds processes of secularisation which may differ extremely from country to country. In general, there is an increasing pluralisation of worldviews within societies in which the influence of traditional religions and religious communities increasingly becomes smaller while the interest in religious questions in the public sphere becomes more prominent. The latter happens on the one hand as a result of immigration processes which upgrades religion as a relevant factor in society, but also as a result of a new interest in spirituality and religion beyond traditional religious institutions. The attacks in Paris in January 2015 have clearly shown that religion is no purely private matter, but that it challenges European societies to a special degree. The debates on the question whether Islam or Muslims belong to the respective societies, or the call for religious education by the state in a secular country such as France, clearly illustrate this.

In countries with socialist-marxist histories, an atheisation driven and enforced by militant ideology and supported by scientific criticism of religion has left deep marks on the ideological and religious landscapes. A return to the traditional faith communities, which has been characterised by sociologists as "retraditionalisation"¹⁵, could be seen directly after the collapse of the communist dictatorships. In some circles of the population, one still can see a strictly confessional tendency towards traditional and

14. Cf. A.T. FILIPOVIĆ, *U službi zrelosti vjere i rasta osoba: Katehetska i religijsko-pedagoška promišljanja u suvremenom kontekstu*, Zagreb, Glas Koncila, 2011, pp. 27-29.

15. Cf. D. SEKULIĆ, *Vrijednosno-ideološke orijentacije kao predznak i posljedica društvenih promjena*, in *Politička misao* 48 (2011) 35-64, p. 44.

sometimes even pre-conciliar forms of Catholic Christianity. On the other hand, one can detect the same processes of secularisation and pluralisation as in Western countries. In the countries of Middle and Southern Europe, one finds a multi-coloured mosaic of ideology, religion and spirituality.

Against this background, the question arises how one can become a Christian and how initiation into Christianity can take place from the perspective of postmodern plurality. The crucial role of the Christian community as a subject steps into the foreground anew. The Christian community comes together in faith, celebrates and lives from faith and in this way provides the best environment for initiation into Christianity. The Christian community thereby encompasses primarily the local church (the diocese) under the leadership of the bishop as first person of responsibility towards the initiation into Christianity, then the parish and various additional groups that live out and celebrate their faith locally, as well as the small communities that take care of the catechumens before and after the catechumenate. The family as “house church” in which Christian life is practised and lived concretely and which supports the catechumens in faith through example and assistance has specific significance¹⁶.

In response to these societal changes, catechumenal models of becoming a Christian increasingly have gained in importance¹⁷. The catechumenate, which proceeds in phases, strives towards a holistic education of the person. The essential elements which are common to all approaches and models of catechumenate, are: acceptance of the catechumens, the kerygma or the first proclamation, the initiation catechesis, the guidance and the experience of communion, celebration of the sacraments of the Christian initiation, the mystagogy as introduction into the life of faith and the incorporation into the life of the Christian community. The structure of the catechumenate enables the soon-to-be Christian to progress from an initial affinity, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to ripened discretion in his/her faith within the community of the faithful¹⁸.

16. Cf. A. FOSSION, *Dieu désirable: Proposition de la foi et initiation*, Bruxelles, Lumen Vitae; Montreal, Novalis, 2010.

17. In the last few decades, the topic of new evangelisation as preferred task of pastoral work has surfaced especially in official ecclesiastical documents. The different emphases characterising this concept range from speaking of the proclamation of the Christian message with freedom and joy, with new fervour and spirit in changed contexts, to the investigation of the language of new evangelisation which appeals to people from contemporary cultures. Cf. Pontificio Consiglio per la promozione della Nuova evangelizzazione, *Enchiridion della Nuova evangelizzazione*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012; FRANCESCO, *Evangelii gaudium, Esortazione apostolica sull'annuncio del Vangelo nel mondo attuale*, Città del Vaticano, 2013.

18. Conférence européenne des catéchuménats, *Aux commencements de la foi: Pastorale catéchuménale en Europe aujourd'hui*, Paris, Mediaspaul, 1990.

Alongside the catechumenate for adults, which increasingly gains topicality and significance in the East as well as in the West, different models of catechumenates are designed and practised for children and youths in the individual local churches, as well as related ways of introducing into the Christian faith and parish those who, even though they were baptised, have not been able to gain existential access to faith. Since only an evangelised community can evangelise, it becomes clear that catechesis by the church nowadays can be seen as education given by the community which addresses the question of how it is possible to believe under the present circumstances and therefore also believe in the first proclamation of the Christian message, which leads to conversion and personal faith. As communication on faith in the Christian community, catechesis today is more intensively focused on the spiritual dimension (*fides qua creditur*) of growing in faith. In its various forms, it strengthens the community in its faith and supports the faithful in bringing their faith to the fore in everyday life. The different conditions and needs of people becoming Christians as well as those of the faithful require a plurality of practical models for initiation into Christianity and catechesis¹⁹.

The training and education of catechists as companions of faith for the catechumens and Christians in various situations of life nowadays have special significance in present-day Christian churches. The challenges that baptised persons pose to Christian parishes show that the initiation into Christianity needs a fundamental renewal of pastoral work, which more and more often takes place in the situations and regions of the Christian diaspora. Interconfessional meetings and cooperation, for example, in the preparation of confirmands and confirmation candidates can open up new perspectives.

2. *Christian Education in Families*

Nowadays, changes in the structure, role and life of families require some rethinking with relation to the support given to families for their task of Christian education. In spite of all their “shortcomings”, they are still among the most important facilitators nowadays in the processes for people to become Christians.

The family as a place of learning is particularly challenged in view of the societal conditions of plurality and individuality. On the one hand, religion is increasingly viewed as a private matter and therefore children prefer to put their questions in this private sphere. On the other hand, in

19. Cf. FILIPOVIĆ, *U službi zrelosti vjere i rasta osoba* (n. 14), pp. 57-58.

the church's socialisation, a specific role is assigned to the family, linked with expectations. Parents, however, increasingly feel overburdened by this – not only because of insufficient knowledge and experience, but also because of their inability to satisfy the demands set by themselves. They delegate their task to experts in schools and Christian communities. On the basis of the diversity and non-substitutability of the places of learning, this is, however, not possible. Apart from the explicit involvement with the religious questions of the children, the living places of families, with their structures of relationships and communication, have an important significance in developing a relationship with God and an image of God. This significance exists independently whether or not the parents see themselves as religious persons²⁰. Even though a linear transfer of faith cannot be forced, the lived rituals within the family have an important significance in the formation of religiosity and religious questions which can especially bring forth questions about God and a religious self-conception – and these rituals can range from small attentive gestures, to celebrating festivals, to participation in the preparation of the sacraments²¹. The role of the “experts” in Christian communities and schools is not to take away this task from the parents, but to encourage them in their task of reflecting on the questions of their children, even though these may be ever so fragmentary, and to support them to deal with their insecurity and to live with their religious authenticity. Especially because religious socialisation in the family focuses on everyday life experiences²², this specifically points to the necessity and autonomy of other places of learning. “The opportunities for Christian education in the family also explain the limitations. Predominantly non-intentional learning processes are initiated in the learning environment of the family. This entails that faith is not grasped conceptually. [...] Therefore the learning environment of the family needs to be supplemented”²³. Since these other places of learning exist, each with its own

20. Cf. M. SCHARER, *Das “geheiligte” Fragment: Annäherungen an eine Theologie der Familie*, in A. BIESINGER – H. BENDEL (eds.), *Gottesbeziehung in der Familie: Familienkatechetische Orientierungen von der Kindertaufe bis ins Jugendalter*, Ostfildern, Schwabenverlag, 2000, 115-136.

21. Cf. G. BÜTTNER – V.-J. DIETERICH, *Entwicklungspsychologie in der Religionspädagogik*, Göttingen, V&R, 2013, pp. 143-154.

22. Children should be seen as active participants in this. Cf. A. DILLEN, *Religious Participation of Children as Active Subjects: Toward a Hermeneutical-communicative Model of Religious Education in Families with Young Children*, in *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 12 (2007) 37-49.

23. M. DOMSGEN, *Familie und Religion: Grundlagen einer religionspädagogischen Theorie der Familie* (Arbeiten zur Praktischen Theologie, 26), Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004, p. 293.

particular features, the family as a place of learning can also be relieved from the burden of carrying out Christian socialisation, decision-making and religious practice all on its own.

3. *Religious Education in Schools*

Within the context of schools, religious education has specific significance in public schools. Through religious instruction in the school, faith enters into conversation with many fields of knowledge, which requires theological thinking and identifies the religious education as “locus theologicus”²⁴. Thus religious education is characterised as one of those loci “... in which one can learn theologically how religion, Christianity and faith are today under circumstances not only spelled out, but can also be lived, which is not totally alien (to the locus) but also *cannot* be identical (to it) – since non-identity, otherness, even asymmetry form the prerequisite for the possibility of Christian-religious experience”²⁵.

Changed conditions, however, also necessitate renewed reflection on the tasks of Catholic educational institutions.

a. *Religious Education in Schools*

At present, theories of religious education refer to reforms in educational and school systems which are implemented in different parts of the world and which were also prompted in Europe via the international economic and political competition and intensified by the processes of expanding the European Union. The striving for unification of the educational standards²⁶ all over Europe led to revision of syllabi and curricula. Economic and competence-based requirements as well as multicultural and multi-religious features in modern societies also challenge religious education. Many countries stipulate fundamental religious competencies as well as fields of competence which focus strongly on

24. Cf. More elaborately on the theory of loci theologici: M. KNAPP, *Das Wort Gottes, seine Überlieferung und Erkenntnis: Die Lehre von den loci theologici*, in N. MEITE – M. SELLMANN (eds.), *Religionsunterricht als Ort der Theologie* (Quaestiones disputatae, 247), Freiburg i. Br., Herder, 2012, 33-51.

25. M. TOMBERG, *Der Religionsunterricht ein locus theologicus? Zugleich Erwägungen zum Profil der Religionspädagogik*, in MEITE – SELLMANN (eds.), *Religionsunterricht als Ort der Theologie* (n. 24), 52-64.

26. Cf. The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning. Annex: Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework, *Official Journal of the European Union* L 394 EN (30.12.2006) pp. 10-18; http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_394/l_39420061230en_00100018.pdf (14.01.2015).

society. Religion has recently been acknowledged by the institutions of the EU as an essential element for better understanding and coexistence of people as well as in their function of supporting civil and intercultural education in schools²⁷.

The teaching of religion is predominantly confession-bound in Catholic areas, even though with different accents in the respective countries. In most countries of Central and Eastern Europe, religion is taught by all faith communities that are acknowledged by the state²⁸ and that meet the required prerequisites for teaching religion, such as the prescribed number of pupils, trained teachers according to the requirements of the state, and approved syllabi and textbooks. Conceptions of religious education are mainly based on the principle of correlation, in which faith and life, goals/content and pupils, church and world are drawn into a critical-productive dialogue. Correlation didactics as a part of the theory of religious education passed through several stages of development, induced by growing ideological pluralization of the society. It evolved from a model of monocorrelation that connects the experience of students and the tradition of Christian faith to a model of multicorrelation that includes other religious and ideological traditions. Religious education didactics passed from a deductive learning of the prekerygmatical and kerygmatical era to an inductive learning, oriented on questions and experiences of the students, to an abductive learning that tries to encourage students to question their biographies and to detect latent traces of religious tradition in them²⁹. New theoretical models, such as a hermeneutical-communicative one, aim to understand religious communication as a support to students in their search for meaning and in their receiving of it³⁰. It depends on preconditions, needs and possibilities of specific students, on competence of the teachers of religious education and on circumstances in concrete schools and school environment which correlational approach is preferred in a particular case.

27. Cf. Council of Europe, *Education and Religion*, Recommendation 1720/2005, Parliamentary Assembly debate on 4 October 2005; Council of Europe, *The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education*, 2005; *Recommandation du Comité des Ministres aux États membres sur la dimension des religions et des convictions non religieuses dans l'éducation interculturelle*, CM/Rec (2008) 12, adoptée par le Comité des Ministres, 10 déc 2008.

28. For example, in Austria this entails at present 16 denominations and religious communities acknowledged by the state; however, not all of them offer religious instruction in schools. In Croatia, agreements on religious education were reached between the government and 13 religious communities, but not all of them implement it in schools.

29. Cf. A. PROKOPF – H.-G. ZIEBERTZ, *Abduktive Korrelation – eine Neuorientierung für die Korrelationsdidaktik?*, in *Religionspädagogische Beiträge* 44 (2000) 19-50.

30. Cf. D. POLLEFEYT, *Reader: Course Didactics (A0950) Religious Education*, 2011-2012, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Faculteit Theologie en Religiewetenschappen, in <http://www.kuleuven.be/thomas/uploads/image/prvftp/A0950Reader.pdf> (27.02.2015).

As a result of more frequent relations between confessions and religions that require an interconfessional and interreligious learning, motivated also by organisational problems in German-speaking countries, keen attention has developed in the most recent decades for models of the confessional-cooperative teaching of religion. One finds this in several configurations: as unofficial confessional-cooperative collaboration, as official cooperation with a contract, as testing a model or as a project³¹. Moreover, the forms of cooperation in the particular models can also differ extensively; they range from cooperation between teachers with separate confessional groups, to alternating between strictly confessional and mixed groups, mixed groups of learners with exchanging teachers, to team teaching in mixed groups³². For example, a project which is being implemented and evaluated in Vienna illustrates the opportunities and limitations of this model and the new questions which arise in the process.

The project which uses confessional-cooperative teaching started in the 2001/02 school year in Vienna and was implemented in different classes at elementary and lower secondary schools³³. Six Catholic, four Protestant teachers and one Orthodox teacher of religion were involved in the project which had undergone a planning phase of four years. Half of the teachers had “unofficially” worked together even before the time. The

31. Thus, confessional-cooperative teaching of religion is unofficially offered in Germany in Rhineland-Palatinate, the Saarland and in Schleswig-Holstein; and within the framework of testing a model in Baden-Wuerttemberg. Apart from that, there are also different other projects with special permission, especially for vocational colleges and elementary schools (cf. M. ROTHGANGEL – H.G. ZIEBERTZ, *Religiöse Bildung an Schulen in Deutschland*, in M. JÄGGLE – M. ROTHGANGEL – T. SCHLAG [eds.], *Religiöse Bildung an Schulen in Europa. Teil 1: Mitteleuropa* [Wiener Forum für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, 5.1], Vienna, V&R Unipress, 2013, 41-68, p. 60). In Switzerland, one finds confessional-cooperative teaching in religion alongside ideologically neutral teaching of religion, such as, for example, in the Cantons of Lucerne, Grisons and the central part of Switzerland. Apart from that, there is also a trend to convert confessional-cooperative teaching of religion into the ideologically neutral teaching of religion, such as, for example, in Zurich and Berne. The question remains here how and on what level one can continue with confessional cooperation. Cf. C. CEBULI – T. SCHLAG, *Der Schweizer Lehrplan 21 – eine (nicht nur) ökumenische Herausforderung*, in *Theo-Web: Zeitschrift für Religionspädagogik* 13 (2014) 198-206.

32. Cf. F. SCHWEITZER – A. BIESINGER, *Gemeinsamkeiten stärken – Unterschieden gerecht werden*, Freiburg i. Br., Herder, 2002, pp. 89-96.

33. More information about this: C. MANN – M. BÜNKER, *Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede lernen – zum Projekt des konfessionell-kooperativen Religionsunterrichts in Österreich*, in H. BASTEL – M. GÖLLNER – M. JÄGGLE – H. MIKLAS (eds.), *Das Gemeinsame entdecken – Das Unterscheidende anerkennen: Projekte eines konfessionell-kooperativen Religionsunterrichts. Einblicke – Hintergründe – Ansätze – Forschungsergebnisse*, Vienna, LIT, 2006, 19-30, pp. 19f.

teachers involved in the project had qualified themselves in the seminar training course “Ecumenism”. In order to support the involved teachers in their intentions, synopses of the syllabus were written for the syllabi of the elementary school and the Secondary Grade I³⁴. Confessional-cooperative teaching in religion was not seen as an alternative, but as a concrete form of the confessional teaching of religion³⁵. From the point of view of its aims, one has to distinguish confessional-cooperative teaching from the teaching of mixed confessional groups³⁶, since the former focuses directly on the specifics of the individual confessions and does not proceed from the lowest common denominator. The cooperation took place in different set-ups between Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic teachers of religion and pupils. Apart from their pragmatically oriented motivation, they totally focused on the search for rationales for religious education and theories of education. The aim was not towards collective teaching culminating in one type of learning above others or building up from the lowest common denominator, but rather towards learning with and from the others so that, alongside the discovery of commonalities, the learning of differences is not covered up, but primarily made possible. The fact that this was apparently not viewed in this way by the teachers involved can be seen from the selection of topics which in the first instance focused on the commonalities³⁷. One should register this perception because it marks a central focus for religious education in school teaching as such.

34. In a broadly designed study, 2002 Protestant and Catholic teachers of religion were questioned on issues of cooperation. 50% indicated that they implement confessional cooperation which ranged from many occasional events of cooperation to long-term projects, the latter being the exception. It was striking, however, that the minority knew more about the majority than vice versa. Satisfaction about the collaboration was high and called for the teachers to pose questions to themselves about their own understanding of faith. Organisational difficulties were mentioned as the biggest problem (BASTEL – GÖLLNER – JÄGGLE – MIKLAS [eds.], *Das Gemeinsame entdecken* [n. 33]).

35. W. JISA, *Rechtliche Aspekte des Modells eines “konfessionell-kooperativen Religionsunterrichts” der christlichen Kirchen in Österreich*, in BASTEL – GÖLLNER – JÄGGLE – MIKLAS (eds.), *Das Gemeinsame entdecken* (n. 33), 59-77, p. 75.

36. S. PEMSEL-MAIER – J. WEINHARDT – M. WEINHARDT, *Konfessionell-kooperativer Religionsunterricht als Herausforderung: Eine empirische Studie zu einem Pilotprojekt im Lehramtsstudium*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2011, p. 178.

37. H. MIKLAS, “Wir haben sieben Sakramente, die Evangelischen zwei. Ich kann damit leben”: *Die Sicht der Beteiligten*, in BASTEL – GÖLLNER – JÄGGLE – MIKLAS (eds.), *Das Gemeinsame entdecken* (n. 33), 79-82, p. 79. Similar results can be seen in the evaluations of German projects (L. KULD – F. SCHWEITZER – W. TZSCHEETZSCH – J. WEINHARDT [eds.], *Im Religionsunterricht zusammenarbeiten: Evaluation des konfessionell-kooperativen Religionsunterrichts in Baden-Württemberg*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2009).

A preference for commonalities which often pushes the learning of differences into the background, is a phenomenon not only in Austria but can also be discerned in the evaluation of other confessional-cooperative models³⁸. There can be many reasons for that. Teachers avoid topics which could cause conflict in order to strengthen the feeling of fellowship. In general, consensus ecumenics are preferred in ecumenical relations between the Christian churches on interpersonal level, so that the boundaries between “Protestant” and “Catholic”, and also “Orthodox” become blurred. One important reason, however, could also be found in the teachers’ lack of awareness of differences, which until now has not received much attention in their training. It is absolutely essential for educational processes within schools and outside of schools in the entire European region that teachers develop an awareness of differences which recognizes plurality as an opportunity as well as a challenge and which can deal with plurality in a fruitful way.

Apart from confession-bound and confessional-cooperative teaching of religion, a model for religious instruction has been established in Northern and Western Europe which is independent from creed and for which the state takes responsibility; the latter is also increasingly suggested as a desirable model for Middle and Southern Europe. In this regard, one has to keep in mind that the models of open religious education in state schools still focus on the confessional affiliation of the majority³⁹. Confession-bound religious education and religious education independent from a creed do not have to be alternatives; they can also complement each other and be mutually dependent. Their being together with and for each other can be viewed as a third possibility⁴⁰. The example of Great Britain shows how the aims of religious education in schools have transformed in recent years from an informative to a more interpretative and integrative approach, in the sense that pupils should also learn *about* and *from* religion through the presence of others in the classroom in order to improve their religious competence and strengthen their own spiritual position in life⁴¹. In this sense, a turnaround in research on

38. Cf. L. KULD, *Konfessionell-kooperativer Religionsunterricht in Baden-Württemberg: Erfahrungen und Evaluation*, in *Schönberger Hefte* 1 (2011) 21-23.

39. Cf. A.T. FILIPOVIĆ, *Der Religionsunterricht in öffentlichen Schulen in Europa: Modelle und Entwicklungen als Indikatoren für die gesellschaftliche Bedeutung des Glaubens und die Anfrage an Theologie und Kirche*, in *Nova prisutnost* 9 (2011) 137-152, pp. 143-146.

40. Cf. M. JAKOBS, *Ist Zweigleisigfahren der Dritte Weg? Aktuelle Entwicklungen des schulischen Religionsunterrichts in der Schweiz*, in *Theo-Web: Zeitschrift für Religionspädagogik* 6 (2007) 123-133.

41. Cf. J.A. MERCER – B. ROEBBEN, *Europe: Just do it! Recent Developments in European Religious Education Research*, in *Religious Education* 102 (2007) 438-450, p. 446.

religious education is needed which will go beyond a naive confession-alism and an exaggerated rationalism or romanticism and reconciles the interests of the individual with those of the social community⁴². Religious diversity with which pupils come into contact in their closest surroundings should not only be researched with regard to its pedagogical aspects but also with regard to its theological dimension and relevance. From the considerations sketched here, it should have become clear that in view of the developments in society it is not any longer appropriate to answer ideological and religious plurality with uniformity⁴³. Rather, it will be essential to develop different models for the different regional developments and requirements.

b. *(Catholic) Education in Institutions Run by the Church*

The school is a place where the challenge of contemporary cultural developments and enquiries regarding Christian faith and its theology becomes particularly clear. This includes questions from research on gender and church-related marital and sexual ethics. These questions, linked with the introduction of sex education and political education in schools which focus on learning for democracy and civil society have caused ideological controversies, especially in Central and Eastern European countries. The questions, however, also cannot be avoided in Catholic educational institutions. The educational work in church institutions (Catholic preschools, schools and universities), which were only gradually re-established in Central and Eastern European countries after the political transition in 1989/90, faces the challenge of creating meaningful and inspiring offerings in the educational landscape of the individual countries, without being assimilated without any distinctive features or isolating and marginalising itself. In complete concurrence with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council (cf. GS 44), the development and implementation of the church's educational offerings should be subjected to public dialogue by taking into account these questions and sensitive issues. By dealing with these challenges, educational institutions run by the church will be able to justify their importance to society, to deepen the Church's theology and to expand its way of thinking.

42. Cf. P.L. BARNES, *Comparative Analysis and Research in Religious Education: A Response to Professors English, D'Souza, and Dr. Chartrand*, in *Religious Education* 100 (2005) 211-222, p. 221.

43. Cf. A. LEHNER-HARTMANN, *Religionsunterricht neu denken? Gesellschaftliche, demografische und inhaltliche Herausforderungen an einen (katholischen) Religionsunterricht der Zukunft*, in *Österreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum* 22 (2014) 103-113, p. 106.

IV. CURRENT AND TRENDSETTING TOPICS FOR RESEARCH IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (A SELECTION)

After having given attention to special challenges and lines of development in and at the different places of learning in the community, school and family, we can illustrate by means of selected examples where one can find topics and approaches which need to be (re-)examined more extensively or which will have to be developed in more detail.

1. *Investigation into Religious and Theological Statements by Children and Youths*

How do children and youths experience the Christian message? How do they link this with what they have heard and learnt in their families, schools and communities? What kind of language do they discover and develop for expressing their ideas of faith? The answers to these questions are of great importance to Religious Education which has an anthropological basis and is closely linked to life. In connection with the movement “Philosophieren mit Kindern” (Philosophising with Children), religious education started some time ago to expand the knowledge gained in this respect to “theologising” with children⁴⁴ and youths⁴⁵, and at the same time undertake empirical investigations into the religious conceptions and theological statements made by children and youths. Since adolescents are not seen as passive recipients in this approach, but are rather considered as active subjects, there is an attempt to accordingly use qualitative methods such as interviews and creative expression in the

44. The investigations first started in the field of Child Theology. For this, there is a Yearbook for Children’s Theology, which has since been published in 12 volumes and 5 special volumes. Cf., for example, A.A. BUCHER – E.E. SCHWARZ (eds.), “*Darüber denkt man ja nicht von allein nach.*” ...: *Kindertheologie als Theologie für Kinder* (Jahrbuch für Kindertheologie, 12), Stuttgart, Calwer, 2013. See also: G. BÜTTNER, *How Theologizing with Children Can Work*, in *British Journal of Religious Education* 29 (2007) 127-139; G.Y. IVERSEN – G. MITCHELL – G. POLLARD (eds.), *Hovering over the Face of the Deep: Philosophy, Theology and Children*, Münster, Waxmann, 2009; P. FREUDENBERGER LÖTZ – G. BÜTTNER (eds.), *Children’s Voices: Theological, Philosophical and Spiritual Perspectives*, Kassel, Kassel University Press, 2015. The most important representatives of Child Theology in Catholic circles are Rainer Oberthür and Anton A. Bucher. Child Theology has developed in Europe in especially the German-speaking regions. A few scholars in Religious Education have introduced this field into Eastern Europe; cf. A.T. FILIPOVIĆ, *Aktualna pitanja religijske pedagogije i katehetike*, in *Bogoslovska smotra* 76 (2006) 147-172, p. 164; EAD., *U službi zrelosti vjere i rasta osoba* (n. 14), pp. 75-81.

45. Research on Child Theology has been expanded in recent years to Youth Theology. Cf. *Jahrbuch für Jugendtheologie*, Volume 1-3.

methodology⁴⁶. Investigations so far deal with questions of theodicy, creation theology, Christology, theology of the Trinity, the revelation of God and the understanding of biblical texts. Verbal statements such as forms of creative expression by children and youths give a clear impression of how children approach theological issues, how their reception of these issues takes place and which questions emerge from this reception. The empirical insights are then used again in developing the approach even further. At the same time, one also gains information on the presentation of learning processes in religion and the role of the teacher. Theologising with children and youths can also take on many different forms. Therefore, one can distinguish between theology of, for and with children/youths⁴⁷. In practice, these various forms are not independent from each other. The interest of religious education, however, lies in the question of how theology by and with children can be successful.

In these forms of “theologising”, children and youths are acknowledged as subjects of theological thinking. This is confirmed empirically by the fact that children are already capable from an early age to develop their own religious images and metaphors as well as formulate their theological insights and questions, through which they become producers of theological thinking. The theology of children and youths is a special form of “theology from below”, of the theology of the Christian community⁴⁸. Therefore one can call this “catechetical theology”, in as far as it aims towards the reflection of young believers on the content of their faith. In this sense, it cannot be equated with academic theology, but it enriches and enhances it⁴⁹. It aims to accompany the competence of children and youths and at the same time to encourage them to think independently and creatively, to marvel and to scrutinise. Investigations have shown

46. Cf. A.K. SZAGUN, *Dem Sprachlosen Sprache verleihen: Rostocker Langzeitstudie zu Gottesverständnis und Gottesbeziehung von Kindern, die in mehrheitlich konfessionslosem Kontext aufwachsen*, Jena, IKS, 2006 and EAD., *Religiöse Heimaten: Rostocker Langzeitstudie zu Gottesverständnis und Gottesbeziehung von Kindern, die in mehrheitlich konfessionslosem Kontext aufwachsen*, Jena, IKS, 2008.

47. Cf. F. SCHWEITZER, *Was ist und wozu Kindertheologie?*, in A. BUCHER *et al.* (eds.), *“Im Himmelreich ist keiner sauer”*: *Kinder als Exegeten* (Jahrbuch für Kindertheologie, 2), Stuttgart, Calwer, 2003, 9-18, p. 11.

48. Cf. W. HÄRLE, *Was haben Kinder in der Theologie verloren? Systematisch-theologische Überlegungen zum Projekt einer Kindertheologie*, in A.A. BUCHER – G. BÜTTNER – P. FREUDENBERGER-LÖTZ – M. SCHREINER (eds.), *“Zeit ist immer da”*: *Wie Kinder Hochzeiten und Fest-Tage erleben* (Jahrbuch für Kindertheologie, 3), Stuttgart, Calwer, 2004, 11-27, p. 24.

49. Cf. R. ANSELM, *Verändert die Kindertheologie die Theologie?*, in A.A. BUCHER – G. BÜTTNER – P. FREUDENBERGER-LÖTZ – M. SCHREINER (eds.), *“Vielleicht hat Gott uns Kindern den Verstand gegeben”*: *Ergebnisse und Perspektiven der Kindertheologie* (Jahrbuch für Kindertheologie, 5), Stuttgart, Calwer, 2006, 13-25.

that previous knowledge on cognitive and religious development, based on results of the research of known authors such as J. Piaget, J. Fowler and others, can be relativized to a certain extent. Using a model with various parallel styles could be more useful than using a model with linear phases of development⁵⁰. What is interesting for religious education is the insight that with these kinds of offerings, children already become competent in symbolic and abstract thinking and therefore in forming abstract images of God much earlier than was the assumption up to now, whereas the anthropomorphic, simple images of God in adults do not disappear altogether⁵¹. These insights require new approaches and renewed attention. The focus on the subject, the way in which it is postulated in child theology or youth theology, seems to point in the right direction. A relevant question for reflection in religious education remains how one can enter into a conversation with children and youth and subsequently also with adults about religion and faith when these people are taken seriously as designers of their own faith and along with this are also inspiringly confronted with strange insights and convictions⁵².

2. *Meaning of Gender in Processes of Religious Education*

In a time when gender attributions and traditionally entrenched gender roles are questioned scientifically and by society, religious education also has the necessary task of questioning the Christian faith tradition and church tradition about where traditional conceptions about gender and androcentric thinking patterns are still harboured and communicated. In doing so, it draws on the elaborated results of feminist theology, especially exegesis, which needs to be adopted and taken into account more seriously in the future. Highly relevant for religious education are in this respect the questioning of an often one-sided masculinised image of God, the selection of biblical and other characters of faith and their meaning in teaching religion and catechesis in the parish, as well as research into understanding the church, pastoral work and religious socialisation and education from the perspective of gender⁵³. In addition, special consideration

50. Cf. BÜTTNER – DIETERICH, *Entwicklungspsychologie in der Religionspädagogik* (n. 21), pp. 68-88.

51. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 162-167.

52. P. KLUTZ – A. LEHNER-HARTMANN, *Philosophisch und theologisch denken (lernen): Fachdidaktische Skizzierungen zu einer ReligionslehrerInnenbildung NEU*, in *Österreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum* 21 (2013) 71-78.

53. Cf., for example, in A. QUALBRINK – A. PITHAN – M. WISCHER (eds.), *Geschlechter bilden: Perspektiven für einen genderbewussten Religionsunterricht*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2011 and A. PITHAN – S. ARZT – M. JAKOBS – T. KNAUTH (eds.), *Gender –*

is needed for investigating and raising awareness for the different forms and subtle mechanisms of actions which discriminate against women and which are unjust with relation to gender within the church. A big challenge in the processes of education is how one can develop a consciousness for the power factor “gender” without ending up in codification based on essentialist and biologicistic assumptions. Holding on to the guiding principle “empathic perception of gender and dealing with gender in a deconstructive way” can serve as a guideline in this regard⁵⁴. Although some insights from research are already known, one should, with regard to processes of school education, particularly enter into the discussion of how and which role models should be presented that can be useful for girls *and* boys, how hierarchies of gender can be removed for both sexes in a clear and productive way. How can one deal constructively with the power relations and experiences of violence linked to these hierarchies, and what roles do teachers, the didactical settings as well as the materials and the media play? These topics, which have already been taken up in religious education and catechetics in the western part of Europe, have been suggested in Eastern European countries by the prescriptions of the European Union and the passing of anti-discriminatory laws⁵⁵. Subsequently, syllabi and textbooks (especially those for religious instruction) were inspected with a view to gender equality and gender orientation as well as the elimination of gender stereotypes⁵⁶. In the field of religious education, implications for gender with relation to individual topics in the textbooks for religions education⁵⁷ as well as sensitivity for gender in Catholic children’s magazines were analysed⁵⁸. Together, one should continue to promote a broadly designed adoption of the available information from research in the different European contexts.

Religion – Bildung: Beiträge zu einer Religionspädagogik der Vielfalt, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009.

54. A. LEHNER-HARTMANN, *Perspektiven und Leitlinien für einen genderbewussten Religionsunterricht*, in QUALBRINK – PITHAN – WISCHER (eds.), *Geschlechter bilden* (n. 53), 79-91, pp. 86-89.

55. Cf. Hrvatski SABOR, *Zakon o suzbijanju diskriminacije*, in *Narodne novine* 85/08 (21.7.2008).

56. Cf. *Pravobraniteljica za ravnopravnost spolova, Istraživanje: Rodni aspekt u udžbenicima vjeronauka za osnovne i srednje škole*, Zagreb, 2012.

57. Cf. A.T. FILIPOVIĆ, *Wie spricht man von Leid und Hoffnung im Religionsunterricht? Analyse des Diskurses und der geschlechtsspezifischen Implikationen in den Schulbüchern für den katholischen Religionsunterricht in Kroatien*, in J.R. ANIĆ – A.T. FILIPOVIĆ – K. KNEZOVIĆ – L. ŠIKIĆ-MIČANOVIĆ (eds.), *And God Will Wipe Away All Tears from Their Eyes: A Theological Approach to the Suffering and Hopes of Women – Gott wird jede Träne von ihren Augen abwischen: Theologische Annäherungen an Leid und Hoffnung von Frauen*, Zagreb, Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar – Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences, 2013, 63-74.

58. Cf. J. MARDEVIĆ-KULAGA, *Rodna osjetljivost u katoličkom mjesečniku Mali koncil*, in *Život i škola* 58/2 (2012) 83-107.

3. *Migration as Pastoral Challenge for Intercultural Learning*

The mobility of people in the modern world and local/domestic and international migration lead to the phenomenon of cultural diversity within Christian communities. This still has to be observed and understood as a challenge to the pastoral work and catechesis of the church in many areas⁵⁹. In this regard, the relationship between catechesis and cultural diversity is not new. Already at the beginning of Christianity, the proclamation took place in different societies and cultures. From the beginning, this presented the opportunity to look for adequate symbols within the particular culture, possible intellectual links for understanding the message, translations for fundamental concepts and the development of new practices. Creativity in catechesis actually also developed in missionary contexts. Catholic plurality arises from social, cultural, ethnic and other diversities, which should be regarded as opportunities⁶⁰. One can observe and develop different ways of thinking on how Christian faith can express itself in order to become the good news and the message of life for people in different situations. The differences can be understood as bridges which lead to the expansion of horizons and enrichment of everyone involved. Thereby the question arises anew about the appropriate training and education of catechists and leaders in the church's pastoral work who should develop intercultural sensitivity. The intercultural competence of the catechists requires skills and abilities in order to be able to work with different cultures and often also different language groups⁶¹.

Plurality and multiculturalism require a theology of diversity and hospitality, so that the messenger of God or Godself can be recognised in the other and the stranger.

4. *Learning Focused on Differences as Imperative for Religious Education and Pastoral Work*

Learning focused on differences firstly directs the attention towards the other and at the same time counteracts the subjectification and privatisation of a religion which tries to isolate itself from society and tradition. Religion in a pluralistic configuration actually remains capable of discourse in its perception of difference, while it seeks agreement with

59. For further thoughts on this, cf. R. POLAK, *Migration als Gabe und Aufgabe für die Kirche*, in J. MANEMANN – W. SCHREER (eds.), *Religion und Migration heute: Perspektiven – Positionen – Projekte*, Regensburg, Schnell und Steiner, 2012, 153-169.

60. Cf. M. JÄGGLE, *Inter-kulturell, -religiös, -konfessionell*, in *Keryks* 1 (1), 175-188.

61. Cf. H. OSPINO, *Catechesis, Diversity and Culture: The Importance of (Re)Definitions*, in *New Theology Review* 24 (2011) 5-19, pp. 7-8.

the other, is being challenged about its own convictions and ways of life and therefore does not allow itself to disintegrate into subjective sensitivities. In this regard, encounters form a crucial element, which does not fade into collective harmony, but also experiences its reification in conflicts. In this way, religion in its explicit confessional configuration becomes (more) clearly visible and vulnerable in an ambiguous sense. (Confessional) taken-for-grantedness is questioned. These insecurities constitute an element of necessity for education, characterising processes of pastoral work as well as school education. The competence to deal with difference aims towards helping pupils to develop tolerance for uncertainty and to practice dealing with the uncertainty. This is not least of all because uncertainty is a constitutive feature of religion and (religious) education. Dealing with the inconceivable and incomprehensible cancels any mental, conceptual and emotional conceivability⁶². Confessional and religious differences are expressions of these inconceivable transcendental phenomena. If differences in the emphasis on commonalities or differences in the reassurance of confessional identity are dismissed or depreciated, the access to the inconceivable can be shifted and finally even lead to fundamentalist partitioning and the exclusion of others.

The perception of differences can make a substantial contribution to confessional identity, but not in the sense that one tries to isolate oneself from others, but rather in dealing with them, relativizing one's own convictions and thereby questioning anew one's own faith, the meaningfulness of religious rituals and customs, and looking for the meaning of faith more deeply. Questions open up about experiencing the other and acknowledging the otherness without attempts to exclude them or assimilate with them⁶³. The challenge of the otherness of the other also brings up the question of truth. Truth cannot be possessed; it can only be struggled for. The otherness of the other puts one's own truth claims to the test.

62. Cf. LEHNER-HARTMANN, *Religiöses Lernen* (n. 7), p. 40.

63. Cf. M. JÄGGLE, *Schritte auf dem Weg zu einer Kultur gegenseitiger Anerkennung*, in BASTEL – GÖLLNER – JÄGGLE – MIKLAS (eds.), *Das Gemeinsame entdecken* (n. 33), 31-42, p. 33; in addition: M. JÄGGLE, *Religiöse Pluralität als Herausforderung für Schulentwicklung*, in ID. – T. KROBATH – R. SCHELANDER (eds.), *lebens.werte.schule: Religiöse Dimensionen in Schulkultur und Schulentwicklung*, Vienna, LIT, 2009, 265-280; B. ROEBEN, *Religionspädagogik der Hoffnung: Grundlinien religiöser Bildung in der Spätmoderne* (Forum Theologie und Pädagogik, 19), Berlin, LIT, 2011, especially pp. 151-154.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Theories containing the explicit and implicit theologies of religious education try to provide an answer to developments and challenges in society as they become visible in different places of religious learning. Moreover, theories are essentially formed through transdisciplinary insights and interdisciplinary communication, which provide impulses. The attention for events in art and culture, politics and economy, as well as in the different academic disciplines have an important prophetic function in this regard. Because of their present development or because of being neglected, some of the topics which increasingly need more attention and could not be discussed here can at least be mentioned: the educational potential of the media as places of religious education; the intergenerational transfer of faith and the communication of faith in aging European societies; interreligious learning because of unequal starting points of different religions and confessions within the different societal institutions; the discourse on different ethical conceptions in the field of public schools; and religious learning of people with impairments of a cognitive, linguistic and social nature.

In view of the challenges, the ability for dialogue and for dealing with plurality and difference as well as communication of the Gospel within the European context presents itself as a special task with regard to the training of teachers of religion and catechists for the present, because the “‘communication of the Gospel’ should take place in such a way that the unconditional affirmation by God of each individual is attested and maintained within the structure of this communicative act. Each power-hungry exertion of influence is forbidden. Precisely that, however, enables people to become sensitive to all (psychological and structural) types of deformity in people and leads to a special partiality for all those who are denied a life of dignity and freedom”⁶⁴.

Thus it can be seen that catechetics and religious education theory make a significant contribution to the overall field of practical theology, particularly in examining the communication of faith in cultures⁶⁵ and investigating religious mediation in different processes of education and

64. N. METTE, *Einführung in die katholische Praktische Theologie*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005, pp. 20f.

65. The definition of catechetics according to A. FOSSION, *La catéchèse dans le champ de la communication: Ses enjeux pour l'inculturation de la foi*, Paris, Cerf, 1990, pp. 491-493.

in different places of pedagogical-didactic action of the Church⁶⁶. Religious education must attend to the public relevance of faith and theology. Education, formation, and mediation processes in the fields of family, Christian community, and school require a keen awareness for gender, for the coexistence of different generations, for language and influence of media, for the phenomena of pluralism in the European countries, for understanding and for values. All these sensitive and actual issues are big challenges for the church(es)/religions and the society. Practical theology in its entirety is continually obliged to do further research on these topics in an interdisciplinary way.

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66. Cf. U. HEMEL, *Religionspädagogik im Kontext von Theologie und Kirche*, Düsseldorf, Patmos, 1986, p. 39.