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As early as in the 1970s, there was debate in the German-speaking world as to how the process of religious pluralisation should be addressed in textbooks. At that time it was a particular accomplishment to even have textbooks from the subjects of religious education, history and geography include topics such as Islam and Hinduism, to say nothing of providing accurate information pertaining to them. Today, textbooks face rather different tasks. The situation has changed in that we now observe not only a variety of religions and often differentiation and radicalisation within one and the same religion, but also a pronounced pluralism of worldview and secular discourse, which has led Peter Berger to speak of “the two pluralisms” (2014). At this point we must differentiate between the terms “plurality” and “pluralism”. While religious “plurality” refers neutrally to a diversity of religions, the catchword “pluralism” signifies a normative political perspective which, on the one hand, considers religions to be systems that are ideally reconciled with one other and, on the other hand, the assimilation of different religious groups within one political system. In secular societies the “two pluralisms” can give rise to both fruitful debate and interference between secular and religious worldviews. Youth

studies specialising in religious, sociological and theological aspects have revealed that, when young people address and discuss genuinely religious issues, they have open questions that suggest a privatisation and broad interpretation of religious semantics. While in the 1990s the idea of the occult was still fashionable amongst young people, for instance, today the prevailing topic is spirituality.

As a result of these developments, we can observe changes within the field of education in secularised countries which – amongst other things – have led to the introduction of new school subjects. The wealth of educational concepts and didactic models of which each in its own way seeks to do justice to religious pluralism as well as all other processes and concepts of diversification, include approaches that are intercultural, interreligious, interdenominational, ecumenical and transcultural. All these concepts share a normative perspective built on existing social structures and legal systems. It is questionable, however, whether current textbooks allow, firstly, for such normative objectives and, secondly, for the competencies envisaged by the curricula to be attained. These new subjects such as “Practical

Philosophy” in North-Rhine Westphalia, “Values and Norms” in Lower Saxony and “Ethics” in different other German states address religion from a critical and scientific perspective. These subjects are both witness to and products of the tension between the trends towards secularisation, (religious) pluralism and individualism, and are a tentative new response to the challenges presented by these societal shifts.

In the textbooks there are different approaches to depicting religious plurality. Many textbooks only present the monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, be it via scientific facts or a more confessional approach. Other textbooks address the five so-called world religions, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, which are often not understood as being part of the society in which we live but rather as the sustaining religions of faraway nations or civilisations. There are textbooks that focus on only

MANY TEXTBOOKS ONLY PRESENT JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

the Christian denominations or only on Islam. Interesting, however, are the latest results from scholarly research on the questions of individual religion and the expression of individual religiosity (Christoph Bochinger) and secular religiosity (Monika Wohlrab-Sahr) as part of the European religious landscape, yet which only to a limited extent find their way into textbooks.

Another question addresses whether the portrayal of various religions in textbooks indeed reflects – amongst other things – the *religious interlacement* that we see lived out in our society. In other words: What is the function or effect of plurality

in the textbook? Which structures does the textbook address, and which activities between various religions (e.g. interreligious dialogue, youth groups) allow for such a dialogue? Which activities between various religions and society itself (intercultural dialogue, church work in the community, etc.) define the interlacing of religion and society? Which media are implemented to this purpose; which sources and which paths of knowledge (language, images, emotions, memory, intuition, etc.) are used? Which aspects are rendered problematic (the wearing of headscarves, the building of mosques, etc.)? Religious pluralism as experienced in everyday life is, on the one hand, dramatically underrepresented in contemporary textbooks, as religions are often presented side by side as separate entities. On the other hand, certain topics relating to Islam are given special emphasis in order to underline that fact that the textbooks are also addressing “problematic” issues. Here the textbooks often reproduce stereotypes generally found in the media.

These questions reappear in textbook analyses. While the oldest textbook analyses from the 1980s inquire as to the factual accuracy of how a specific religion is presented, or the prejudices and/or ideologies associated with specific portrayals of a religion, later analyses focus on topics relevant to society as a whole, on diverse constructions of religions, individualised religion, and the problem of transferring scientific knowledge into the textbook (how sophisticated a portrayal can a textbook manage?). The pattern for presenting different religions in religious education and ethics textbooks is often very similar. Textbook critics have found fault with portrayals that – to put it simply – have reduced Islam to its five pillars,



Hinduism to Gandhi and cows, and Buddhism to non-violence. Positive feedback has been given to books that enter into open debate regarding verifiable data and historical facts. There are only sporadic examples of textbook contents adopting a broader approach towards a more generous definition or a concept of religion that places it in relation to other religions. Nor do textbooks engage with similarities and differences between various religions and secular ideas that have a significant impact.

This is all the more surprising given that both the religious and the secular protagonists of education policy find themselves faced with the same challenge: a changing religious landscape and

**CHALLENGE: A CHANGING
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NEW NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

new needs of young people. All these examples emphasise that more research needs to be carried out with

regard to the understanding and portrayals of different religions in textbooks.

The trends towards the pluralisation described above on both the micro and macro levels stand in contrast to the tendencies towards standardisation to be found in the work of global organisations on the macro level. These include, for instance, the resolutions and recommendations of international organisations such as the UN, UNESCO, the EU, the Council of Europe and the OSCE. These organisations have designed theoretical concepts for addressing religion in education that are to be valid for all member states. An access requirement as stated in the “Toledo Guiding Principles” is “teaching about religion” by conveying primarily facts and data on different contem-

porary religions. The term “religion” typically refers to a number of “large” religions in terms of numbers, despite the fact that in the last few years the UN has begun to shift its focus towards the religions of indigenous peoples. These organisations, however, do not concentrate primarily on religion per se but rather seek to implement an effective security policy via a specific subject matter and a certain approach to various religions in individual states, and also to minimise risks of discrimination, persecution and anti-Semitism, etc. In this context, for instance, the Council of Europe has provided a wealth of material for schools and teaching.

The GEI’s working area on “Religion and Diversity” closely analyses many of these issues. Of particular relevance in this context is the workshop on “Textbooks and Religion” which took place in 2014. Alongside diverse approaches to religion in the subjects of history, religion, ethics and language classes and various methodological stances such as the praxeological, the workshop also examined the problematic nature of the term “religion” itself in the context of what can be considered “religion” or “non-religion”. A publication is currently in progress. In our project “Between Transnational Education Policy, Pluralisation and Individualisation of Religion: Religion in Ethics Education”, transnational and national levels are interlaced via individuals and institutions, curricula and textbooks. Which concepts of pluralism and semantics of international organisations find their way into the curriculum? This project thus also investigates what knowledge about religion is negotiated in different national textbooks and international discourses, and which are to be considered relevant for the future.