

AN INTERCULTURAL APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN HAMBURG

Construction, Reform and Curriculum Planning

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1. Introduction: Construction of religious instruction

I personally regard this proposal [the introduction of Islamic religious instruction in North-Rhine/Westphalia] as an important impulse for the present discussion about the demands and reality of a society in which people from many nations live together according to the principles of solidarity and tolerance. Indeed, the question must be asked how the religious and cultural identity of substantial minorities can be preserved adequately in our country. On the other hand - and I say that in the face of a more integrative approach which we strive for in religious education at schools in Hamburg - we may not ignore the danger of cultural fragmentation."¹ This dictum of the Minister of Education of Hamburg summarizes, in a nutshell, the challenges facing religious education in Germany. At the same time, she indicates that the answers to the question differ significantly. Since school and education policy in the Federal Republic of Germany is not determined on a central level, but falls within the jurisdiction of the respective education ministries of the 16 Länder, the point of departure for education varies from state to state. In almost all Länder, except Hamburg, religious instruction is taught separately according to confession, i.e. either as Protestant or as Catholic. In practice, this means that Catholic pupils are taught by a Catholic teacher with Catholic-oriented teaching material, and Protestant pupils are taught by a Protestant teacher with Protestant-oriented teaching materials. The structure principle is aimed at Christian-confessional homogeneity. Pupils should grow into their faith. Those, however, who are not included (e.g. the Catholic minority in the Protestant north, or the Protestant minority in the Catholic southern part of Germany and, other than these, all pupils of other religions, and atheists) must leave the classroom. The price of homogeneity in religious education is high: it exists to the exclusion of others. This mechanism, which exists in most of the Länder, is only modified in that parents have the right to withdraw their children, up to 14 years of age, from religious education, and thereafter, pupils have the choice to attend religious instruction of the other confession or, to choose, as an alternative school subject, Ethics/Philosophy. The possibility of withdrawal and selection of an

1 Comment of the KMK President [Chairperson of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany] Rosemarie Raab on the introduction of Islamic religious instruction in grades 5 to 7 in all schools in North-Rhine/Westphalia, letter dated 16 January 1995, distributed by the information office of the Ministry for Education, Youth and Training of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg.

alternative also exists in Hamburg. Contrary to the confessionalist approach, a different approach has evolved in the federal state of Hamburg: here religious instruction is taught to all pupils integratively, and their respective confessional, religious or ideological background plays no role.

Even if, as has been indicated, education policy is the responsibility of the Länder, the completely different structures of religious education are astounding. It is the only school subject guaranteed by the central constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany. This constitutional guarantee still stems from the period after the First World War, when the empire was replaced by a republic. The old alliance of throne and altar had to make way for a separation of church and state. The constitutional proposals discussed after 1918 envisaged such a separation, but, due to pressure from the two main churches (Protestant and Catholic), at least religious education in schools was secured. And, therefore, to the present day, we have a guaranteed existence for religious education as a regular school subject in a Germany where a democratically acknowledged separation of state and church generally exists.²

In short, the different structures of religious education are due to different interpretations of the relevant article in the constitution. The numeric majority interpret it that religious instruction should be taught separately, according to confession. This point of view needed to be revised: more and more pupils are neither Catholic nor Protestant; as children of mainly Turkish migrant workers are Muslims, it was conceded that they should also have their own religious instruction. Two motives can be found for this decision: on the basis of religious instruction, which should help pupils to grow into an 'own' confession, it is a concession for other groups of increasing numbers to have their own religious instruction. Other considerations indeed also play a role here, since the separation according to confessions can no longer be justified, if a growing number of pupils of other religions are not also granted the possibility to enjoy their 'own' religious instruction.

Hamburg is one of the few Länder which has chosen a different path. Within the liberal spirit of a mercantile city, where religious questions play no role in public life (i.e. as long as they do not stand in the way of commerce), Protestant and Catholic religious instruction has never existed separately at any public schools, and that includes almost all the schools of Hamburg. Partly due to an insight in the mutuality of the two Christian confessions, and due to the numeric dominance of the Evangelical-Lutheran church, which never regarded the few Catholics in Hamburg as competition, pupils received religious instruction, which was not limited only to Protestant teaching. Religious instruction was offered to all pupils in the classroom, but not according to their confession. From here it was only a small step towards religious instruction in which children without any or with a background other than a Christian religious background, could participate. Statistics show the following: in the nineteen fifties more than 90% of the population belonged to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Hamburg; approximately 5% were Catholic. Through massive waves of

2 Cf. Article 7.3 of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany in which is stated: 'Religious education is a regular subject in all public schools, with the exception of the non-denominational schools. Without prejudice to the obligation of the state, religious education is taught according to the principles of the religious communities.'

resignations from the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, the numbers in Hamburg have shrunk to 40%. There has been a corresponding reduction in the number of pupils baptized in the Lutheran church, and a marked increase in pupils without a specific religious background. At the same time, the diversity of religions and ideologies in Hamburg has both changed and grown substantially through migration. Through immigration, especially from Poland and South America, the Catholic church has grown to 10% of the population: a culturally-diverse Catholicism is manifesting itself in our city. Through large numbers of Turkish immigrants, Islam has become the third largest religion. Eighty other religions are now present in Hamburg as a result of groups of immigrants from all over the world and converts who are dissatisfied with the Christian churches.³

These changes in the religious-ideological spectrum have been apparent in the pupil population for the past 20 years. Teachers of religious instruction have adapted to these developments as well as they could, and have tried to widen the scope of their tuition to make it possible for all children, irrespective of their culture, religion or ideology, to take part in religious education together. The advantages of tuition in culturally- and religiously-homogeneous groups, were always regarded as secondary in Hamburg (since such homogeneity is present neither in Christian nor, e.g., in Islamic pupils), sometimes even (as in the dictum quoted above) as socially dangerous and pedagogically irresponsible; therefore, an integrative approach was primarily followed in religious instruction.

Positions and models supporting such an approach, as well as curriculum development, which aim to provide 'religious education for all', will be discussed under the following heading.

2. Positions and models

Whereas scientific research is often characterized as a quest to understand and change reality with concepts which have been arrived at through painstaking achievements, our research project embarked on a different course. We first of all set out on the painstaking task to ascertain, empirically, the position of religious instruction, as viewed by Hamburg's teachers and pupils, and, from a practical perspective, to develop options for integrative religious instruction.⁴ At the same time, we worked in co-operation with other institutions, especially the central institute for religious education, the *Pädagogisch-Theologisches Institut*, to find ways to improve religious instruction. This will be explained in terms of the concepts and models of new forms of religious instruction, both of which are directional in the establishment of a new curriculum for the subject Religious Instruction in Hamburg.

Two drafts, regarding conceptional dimensions, will be discussed. These are essentially indebted to the director of the *Pädagogisch-Theologisches Institut* in

3 Cf. W Grünberg/D.L. Slabaugh/R. Meister-Karanikas: *Lexikon der Hamburger Religionsgemeinschaften. Religionsvielfalt von A-Z*, Hamburg 1994.

4 Cf. Knauth/Sandt/Weiße: *Interkultureller Religionsunterricht in Hamburg - Erste empirische Erhebungen*, in: Lohmann/Weiße (eds.): *Dialog zwischen den Kulturen...*, ibid. p. 217-232, as well as contributions by Sandt/Weiße and Knuth/Weiße in this issue of *Scriptura*.

Hamburg, Dr. Horst Gloy. The drafts were supplemented, confirmed and passed by a number of panels, of which the author of this paper is also a member. The first paper from 1993 carries the distinctive title: *What sort of school do we owe our children and the youth in a changing world?* A contribution towards the further development of the Hamburg school system and religious education in a 'school for all'.⁵ The point of departure of these deliberations is *not* how to convey the Christian message at school during religious education, but a fundamental reflection on that which children and the youth should be taught against the background of a comprehensive Christian education. The right of all children to education is in the foreground and is likewise an indicator of a humane society: "Our society will, therefore, only be called humane to the extent that it manages to make the rights of children part of the knowledge and conscience of as many people as possible, and to orientate practical pedagogical actions accordingly." (p. 2) The basis for this is the Biblical motif that all people are children of God, and the UN Charter on the rights of children.

It is, therefore, necessary to fashion an education and schooling system which provides adequately for children:

"The mission and responsibilities of the school are based on the right of the child to education, i.e. the right of all children to realize their human capabilities and inclinations. They have a right to develop a broad spectrum of abilities essential for life, and to obtain the knowledge necessary for that, as well as to develop a personal identity and 'existence knowledge' with a differentiated social, cultural and political competence. This should enable them to lead a personally- and socially-conscious life, to take part in the spiritual and cultural wealth of society, and to assume critical co-responsibility in public affairs. This is, without doubt, an educational vision, which can, at the most, only be achieved to a certain extent. However, without this vision, education and training will, without fail, degenerate into servants of existing power and utilization structures." (p. 2)

The aim of this approach does not lie in regaining the supremacy of the church in the field of education. It should, however, be recognized that in the Jewish-Christian 'inheritance - amidst all the ambivalences, it also contains invaluable possibilities of existential self-assurance, aesthetic power of perception, cultural participation, ethical orientation and the ability to determine the socio-political contexts and aims' (p. 5). Education cannot do without this potential to 'strengthen people' (H. v. Hentig). In a 'school for all', it can 'no longer be the aim of religious education to convert young people to the Christian faith or to add them, as members, to a certain denomination' (p. 6). Religious instruction should rather be part of the reform-initiatives of the school system as a whole (internal and external school reform; school as a place to live and gain experiences; opening schools up for interaction with other social groups; intercultural education). For religious education itself, the demand is to make it relevant to the life and experiences of pupils and to base it on the following four religious-educational dimensions:

5 This seventeen-page document is at present only available as an unpublished manuscript. At the end of 1995 it will appear in a periodical published jointly by the Department of Religious Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Hamburg and the Pädagogisch-Theologisches Institut Hamburg. The pages quoted refer to the unpublished manuscript.

- a) Symbol-didactic approach: elementary Biblical didactics and introduction to religion, in which symbols and images from the world of religious language are developed according to the potential meaning for the pupils' own life.
- b) Biblical, thematic, problem-oriented approach: discussion of origins, and content of religious motives which have 'played an important role in the history of our culture and society, both positively and negatively'.
- c) Multicultural, interreligious approach: to accept the plurality of our society in such a way 'that a culture can develop in which people can learn to recognize, respect and understand one another, a culture where there is a creative striving and struggle for the truth, as well as a reciprocal enduring and tolerating of diversity.'
- d) Ecumenical, future-oriented approach: to teach children to face the future courageously, as well as, within the framework of the conciliatory process, the preparedness to accept responsibility for 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation' (p. 11-12).

The arguments contained in this basic document can also be found in an assessment, made during March/April 1995, of the draft act for a new school law in Hamburg. This draft act was presented to the public by Hamburg's Minister of Education. The Church Council of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, to which Hamburg also belongs, has adopted an abbreviated version of this assessment.⁶ It refers to the equality of all people before God, and concerning the question of the role of the church in defending the rights of children, it states:

"Today, however, the recognition of the rights of the child is no longer dependent on ecclesiastical-theological legitimation, but the result of an understanding of basic human rights, which are non-negotiable, with the resulting consequences and obligations. As part of their task, the churches also have to see to it that these rights are not taken away from particularly those who have been forced to the verges of society, those who are weak, whose voices are not heard or who no longer have a voice" (p. 1).

This leads to a formulation regarding the educational task of the school. The formulation will be quoted verbatim due to its extensive claim:

- (1) The task of the school to provide education and training is based on the basic and human rights enshrined in the Basic Law. The conceptions of human dignity and humanity contained therein are influenced and formed mainly by Jewish, Christian and humanistic traditions, through encounters and discussions with other, especially Islamic, cultures, by the Enlightenment, as well as by the democratic, social and liberal freedom movements. In the light of world-wide and regional encounters and discussions concerning different lifestyles, cultures, religions, social and political systems, as well as in the light of

6 Cf. *Stellungnahme der Kirchenleitung der Nordelbischen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche zum Entwurf für ein neues Schulgesetz der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg*, 8 pages, unpublished manuscript, dated 4 April 1995.

growing ecological demands, the school encourages pupils to assess critically and try to understand basic perceptions of human dignity and humanity.

- (2) It is the task of the school to promote the spiritual, physical and social abilities of pupils by providing appropriate content for and organization of tuition and school life, in order to increase their preparedness and to make it possible for them to
- ◆ form relationships with other people according to the inviolable principles concerning the dignity of the human being, freedom of faith and conscience, respect and tolerance, justice and solidarity, and the equality of the sexes, and to take responsibility for themselves and others;
 - ◆ participate in the formation of a democratic society, which is committed to humaneness, and to stand up for peaceful coexistence, as well as for equality and the right to life of all people;
 - ◆ become sensitized to their own physical and spiritual development, to take care of their health and, when meeting with others, to respect their physical, mental and spiritual integrity;
 - ◆ accept joint-responsibility for the preservation and protection of the natural environment.
- (3) The school presupposes that the pupils grow up in a multicultural society; it has the task to promote intercultural learning by providing school structures and school life with the necessary content and form of instruction. (p. 5).

Within the framework of such a fundamental, intercultural and interreligious aim, religious education finds itself embedded in those dimensions which were quoted from the first paper earlier in the text.

I would like to mention briefly that as a result of the trend towards openness, the structure and content of religious education at schools have to be revised. In cooperation with the *Pädagogisch-Theologisches Institut* and a comprehensive school, our research project planned a year-long experiment with a ninth class in Hamburg. The experiment was conducted and monitored scientifically.⁷ Pupils did not, as usually is the case, choose the subject Religious Education or Ethics, but had a joint thematic introduction to religious-ethical topics, and only thereafter, was a

7 This experiment was planned by F Doedens, the Vice-Director of the *Pädagogisch-Theologisches Institut* in Hamburg, cf. F Doedens: *Interkultureller Religionsunterricht in Hamburg: Lernbereich Religion - Ethik - Philosophie*, in: Lohmann/Weiße (eds.): *Dialog zwischen den Kulturen...*, Münster 1994, p. 333-334. Two teachers taking part in the experiment compiled the following assessment: H-F Güse-Kerkmann/G Mebus: *Fremdsein: Der Fremde - die Fremden - das Fremde. Eine Unterrichtseinheit in Religion/Ethik im Jahrgang 9*, in: *Pädagogik* 9/1993, p. 11-14. On the scientific monitoring of the investigation, which includes an empirical study in view of the participating pupils and which draws analytical conclusions, cf. T Knauth/W Weiße: *Religionsdidaktik auf der Suche nach neuen Wegen. SchülerInnenbefragung an Religion/Ethik (Klasse 9)*, in: H Gudjons/A Köpke (eds.): *Gesamtschule in Hamburg. Erfahrungen und Perspektiven nach 25 Jahren*, Hamburg 1993, p. 83-97.

specialization in either religious- or ethically-oriented topics offered. Pupils could make a new choice every time. This model, which has the advantage of not separating pupils into groups which take either the subject 'Religious Instruction' or 'Ethics', is part of the striving towards tuition which is oriented towards the interests and life situations of the pupils and thereby ignores neither the humanistic nor Christian, nor the perspectives of other religions. The scientific monitoring of the project has shown that such a model considers both the interests of those who would never take part in church-oriented religious instruction, but are interested in (individual) religious topics, as well as the interests of confessionally- or religiously-oriented pupils who would like to become acquainted with the ideological or religious positions of the co-pupils which are different from their own.⁸

Both the outlined new approach to religious education and the pilot project, which aim to combine religion and ethics, are provisional conceptual and structural attempts on the way towards a pedagogically sound religious education, which uses as a point of departure, the rights of children in a multicultural and multireligious society. To what extent is such an undertaking formalized in the curriculum?

3. Curricula for religious education in Hamburg and the striving for the inclusion of intercultural aspects

The curricula for the subject Religion in Hamburg are based on the interlacing of problem-oriented and Bible-oriented education.⁹ Both dimensions are, for example, for the first form divided within the field of 'Current interpretations of reality' with topics such as fear, discord - reconciliation, obedience - disobedience and prejudice, and within the field 'Biblical interpretation of reality' into the topics Jesus, creation, God and the influence of Jesus on the first-century church. Both fields should make up approximately half of all the lessons, but they should rather be integrated than be separated from each other. Whereas the curriculum for the first form, which has been in force for 20 years, and is by far the oldest, does not explicitly include any other but the Christian religion, it does, however, as far as grades 5 and 6 are concerned, allow quite considerably for the inclusion of other religious groups. Three themes are mentioned in this regard, one of which is directed at the 'Religious communities in the pupil's environment'. (The two others encompass individual/social experience and biblical tradition.) Within these themes, the different forms and varieties of Christian traditions as well as 'non-Christian' religions are discussed. Interesting and, according to our opinion, appropriate is the approach based on life-situations:

"In order to encourage children at this age to come to understand foreign religions, teaching abstract religious commandments or the origins of the various religions should not be of primary concern. The children should rather study concrete

8 See the two articles by Sandt/Weiße and Knauth/Weiße in this issue of *Scriptura*.

9 In contrast to its interconfessional interlacing, Hamburg is no exception in this regard. Cf. C Brühl: *Überblick über evangelische und katholische Lehrpläne*, in: F Schweitzer/G Faust-Siehl (eds.): *Religion in der Grundschule. Religiöse und moralische Erziehung*, Frankfurt/Main 1994, p. 326-334. Cf. also KE Nipkow: *Perspektiven der Lehrplanreform für die Zukunft*, in: *Evangelische Erzieher* 45 (1993), p. 532-545.

manifestations of religion in the lives of people, as they can, for example, be observed amongst the Turks in the Federal Republic of Germany and amongst the Turkish children in the class.”¹⁰

Here we can see in the curriculum a reflection of the changing composition of Hamburg's population and scholars. References to other cultures and religions can also be found in the curricula for higher grades.¹¹ These thematic references to intercultural and interreligious education, however, only appear on the periphery of the problem- and Bible-oriented curricula which are in use today.

Why do teachers attend to the needs of their pupils, who are, increasingly, coming from different religious backgrounds? I think that, on the one hand, this is due to the flexibility of the curricula, which allows for a lot of leeway to introduce themes which are not compulsory. On the other hand, the teachers in Hamburg could justify the inclusion of interreligious themes into their teaching by adhering to and interpreting the general instructions, which act as a preamble to all curricula for Religious Education. The first part of this ‘preamble’ reads as follows:

“Religious education, in keeping with the ability of pupils to experience and understand, addresses their questions about the aim of life, about truth, justice, values and norms for responsible actions. The elucidation of these questions will help the pupils, as they grow older, to come to terms with various religious, ideological and political beliefs, which influence our present-day lives. In encouraging this process, religious education is based on the supposition that religious traditions and true convictions of faith offer possibilities of giving meaning to life, that they can encourage pupils to act with responsibility and, in that way, promote one's self-identification and ability to act.”

This foundation for religious education is without doubt pupil-oriented and emphasizes the plurality of religious, ideological and political convictions which mould their own lives. This wide perspective did, from the outset, not allow religious education to be limited to ecclesiastical-confessional education. The second part of the preamble, however, left no doubt that ‘in our cultural environment’ the Christian church and theology require special consideration. Hereby the emphasis of Christianity in religious education was legitimized. At the same time, during the editorial stage of the curriculum, this passage, which was included at the insistence of those for whom the first part of the preamble quoted above was too unlimited, indirectly provided an opening for the inclusion of other religions. Since this text was written, it has become clear that an increasing number of other religions and cultures have become part of ‘our cultural environment’, and this has become particularly evident in the school community. (Immigrated foreign workers have, on average, many more children than the average ‘German’ family.) Therefore, it seemed

10 Cf. Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg. *Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung. Amt für Schule: Lehrplan für die Sekundarstufe I (Klassen 5-10) Religion*, Hamburg 1986, p. 9.

11 E.g. the theme *Muslims in Hamburg* for grades 9 and 10, as well as references to interreligious dialog in senior high school, cf. *Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg. Behörde für Schule, Jugend und Berufsbildung. Amt für Schule: Lehrplan Religion für die gymnasiale Oberstufe*, Hamburg 1990, p. 4.

appropriate that the field of religious education could no longer be limited to Christianity.

The present curriculum-development, which is concerned with a new curriculum for the first form, was undertaken with the explicit aim of firmly establishing an interreligious and intercultural dimension. This was a major change when compared with the existing syllabus. Participating representatives of the teachers, the school board, the organizations for continuing education and the university agree on this change. What exactly will the new curriculum look like? At the moment, this cannot be said because the curriculum is not yet complete. However, the main tendencies can be sketched from an inside perspective. (The author is a member of the curriculum-planning committee.) The committee agrees that the first passage of the 'preamble' quoted above should be included in the new syllabus. Up to now, it is unclear whether the second part, in which special reference is made to Christianity, should remain in the same or in a revised form and be complemented by a further passage referring to other religions (acceptance of this alternative would mean that a compromise reached earlier on would not be overturned), or whether the passage about the inclusion of the Christian and other religions should be redrafted. There is agreement in the curriculum committee that the intentions of the curriculum will have an effect only on the way the subject is taught if a few teaching modules, in which the committee shows how important general objectives for teaching at the primary level can be reached, are published parallel to the syllabus. One of these modules is published in this issue of *Scriptura* in an abridged form. It considers the aspect of increasing religious speechlessness and the perspective of an introduction to a language of hope in the light of a reality which is experienced as hopeless by many. Such tuition is drafted for classes in which different religious and ideological positions are represented, but where many pupils also have no definite positions.

The committee agrees on the necessity of entrenching an ethnically-relevant intercultural and interreligious dimension based on real life situations both in the fundamental aspects of the curriculum, as well as in the proposed teaching modules. The general parts will refer to the statements, which were presented in the second part of this article as important religious-pedagogical positions. The rights of children and taking into consideration the differences of their social, ethical, cultural, ideological and religious biographies will play an important role in the curriculum. In addition to the Jewish-Christian faith, other religious and ideological traditions will be included in the syllabus. In order to help pupils become culturally competent, it is proposed to 'make the pupils aware of both the cultural and religious heritage of Europe, as well as the cultural and religious plurality in our society and in the world community; this, so that a culture of mutual recognition and reciprocal enrichment, respect and understanding, creative and patient striving and struggle for the truth, but also mutual tolerance and endurance of diversity can be learnt'.

The term 'encounter' will play a central role in the syllabus. In one of the drafts, we read the following:

"Religious education provides an opportunity for pupils of different social, cultural and religious origins to exchange their experiences and to become familiar with, to understand and to reflect on different values. This contributes to the process of developing an own, also religious, identity and provides a perspective

on the peculiarities, interests, advantages and problems of other people within a framework of questions about justice, peace and creation.”

The proposed topics occur on two levels; as in the present curriculum, they focus on a level concerned with a general problem-oriented perception and understanding of reality, as well as on the level of religion. Recently included are religious traditions from the non-Christian domain. For example, a proposed teaching unit on the theme ‘Talking about God’ and ‘People from all over the world talk about God’ takes into consideration that other religious and ideological perceptions exist in the classroom besides the Christian faith. These have to be addressed. The theme ‘religious festivals’ is also to include traditions other than those on the Christian calendar. As far as ‘Christmas’ is concerned, it is seen as important that this festival is viewed from different perspectives, i.e. that it is seen as an ‘own’ and as a ‘foreign’ festival. The well-entrenched traditional teaching unit on ‘Jesus’ is supplemented with a second one on the theme ‘Mohammed supports the poor’; and, in addition to the themes which focus on the Bible and Christianity, a teaching unit on the theme ‘Islam’ will be entrenched in the new curriculum.

These were some comments on the endeavors of a new curriculum for religious education in the first form. This curriculum will be tested at the end of 1995, revised one year later and then implemented. We do not know how the final phase of discussions on the revision of the curriculum will proceed, but we are certain that the draft will lead to heated debate among the interested public. Some will argue that the intercultural approach does not go far enough: the curriculum was only established by members with a Christian background. Muslims did, however proof-read and add to themes such as ‘Islam’; representatives from different religions will also be invited to a hearing, as soon as the first complete version of the curriculum is ready. In no way, however, did different religions and ideologies make an equal contribution to the drawing up of the curriculum.

The curriculum will, nonetheless, meet with criticism due to its religious and cultural diversity because the dominant role of Christianity in our country has been sacrificed, because the interreligious perspective would make the school children insecure, and it would be uncertain in which direction religious education was heading.

A controversial discussion about religious education should not do the subject any harm, if the situation and interests of the children to whom the subject is taught, are the primary concern. There is in any case no easy or generally valid answer to the question what the curriculum should look like. The responses of teachers and pupils have shown us that in our empirical study. In the curriculum we will, therefore, have to indicate adequately that the composition of a class, for example, is important in determining the way in which a theme is taught and discussed. When, for example, the theme ‘Islam’ is discussed in classes with Muslim pupils, one should rather choose an approach based on life-experiences, whereas in other classes, biographical texts and real encounters should be emphasized.

Altogether, the new curriculum seems to be directed clearly at the perception of the pupils' life-experiences and at mutual exchange. Basic constructive and promising aims and objectives, but also potentially destructive dimensions of religions and ideologies can thus be discussed in class so that an important contribution can be made towards the comprehensive development of children in our pluralistic society.

Hamburg has been the first of the Länder to provide an answer, on curriculum level, to the question of the important challenges which are facing religious education today: the increasing internal and external pluralization of religion and the non-confessional interreligious approach to religious and ideological questions in school education.