

BETWEEN RELIGIOUS SPEECHLESSNESS AND PLURALISM

Empirical Results and conceptual Reflections on intercultural Religious Education

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1. Introduction

The following preliminary empirical results and conceptual reflections have their roots in our interdisciplinary research project in Hamburg: "Youth-religion-teaching in a multicultural society influenced by social and economic disparities".¹ A few introductory remarks on the project: the aim of our project is to reflect on the basic requirements, possibilities and limits of religious education at schools in the Federal Republic of Germany. This seems to be especially necessary at present because, during the past 15 to 20 years or so, there has been a qualitative and quantitative decline in Germany of the role of the Christian religion in the socialization of children and the youth, as well as of the way adults lead their lives. At the same time, through substantial immigration, the Christian traditions have had to make way for completely different religions, cultures and perspectives on life amongst the population of our country. These two tendencies have led to far-reaching changes in society and school, and have affected religious education in a special way.²

If religious education should not just be secured for the immediate future, but be viable in the long term, the question must be asked how religious education can maintain its vital place as a school subject in the face of a general decline of religious ties and an increasing religious and ideological pluralism.

Our research project operates on two levels. On the one hand, we try to analyze the concrete situation of religious instruction with empirical methods; on the other hand, we want to combine the analyses with theories of religious education and results of religio-sociological findings in order to arrive at a viable, educationally- and

1 The results of our poll of teachers are more explicit in: Th. Knauth/F-O Sandt/W Weiße, *Interkultureller Religionsunterricht in Hamburg. Erste empirische Erhebungen*, in: I Lohmann/W Weiße (eds.), *Dialog zwischen den Kulturen. Erziehungshistorische und religionspädagogische Gesichtspunkte interkultureller Bildung*. Münster 1994, p. 217f.

2 Discussions around the consequences of these changes for (religious)-pedagogical action have only started, cf. J. Lott (eds.), *Religion - warum und wozu in der Schule?* Weinheim 1992, G Hilger/G. Reilly (eds.) *Religionsunterricht im Abseits? Das Spannungsfeld Jugend, Schule, Religion*. Munich 1993 and I Lohmann/W Weiße (eds.), cf. footnote 1.

theologically-sound, religious education within the context of a multicultural body of pupils.

Our empirical research is limited to the city of Hamburg, and we are aware of the fact that we are analyzing a very specific situation. (We would appreciate it if similar empirical studies would be undertaken in other Länder (federal states)). Our reference to the situation in Hamburg is not due to pragmatic reasons only. Hamburg is especially suited for our purposes because, during the last 15 to 20 years, experience was gained here with religious instruction for pupils with different religious and cultural backgrounds. Our environment, therefore, permits us to conduct an empirical-analytical study of our experiences of 'Religious Education for all'.

Our special interest is directed at religious education in which the multicultural and multireligious composition of the classes is not regarded as a hindrance, but as a challenge. In the following section we would like to provide the reader with insight into our empirical study. Within the context of our topic, it seems appropriate to convey the experiences that teachers in Hamburg have had during religious instruction, and where a large part of the class consisted of foreign pupils. The possibilities and limitations of this kind of teaching, as perceived by the teachers, provide a suitable, realistic base for further discussions about the conception and didactic implementation of religious instruction for all.³ In the final section, fundamental religio-pedagogical requirements will be discussed in the light of our empirical research and with reference to youth-sociological studies (cf. Baacke and Barz 1994:187f. and 207f.). If the increasing skepticism among the German youth vis-à-vis the church is not to be equated with disinterest in religion, but more often with religious speechlessness, religious educationists have to ask the question how the religious dimension should be addressed in class and how it can be perceived by the pupils. At the same time, religious education must take into account the plurality of religious trends in our country, and should present pupils with the opportunity to become familiar with religious traditions and convictions, and to exchange views. We regard both aims as part of an elementary religious education: in our concept, we try to consider the necessity of perceiving one religious dimension, just as much as the exchange of different religious positions. This will be discussed in part 3 of our paper.

3 In view of the aim of the empirical study, we have decided on a qualitative method employed in the social sciences. In as far as we are investigating an unknown field which has not been researched previously, the more investigative approach of the qualitative method is understandable. Our qualitative research, based on a method which employs differentiated means of gathering and analyzing data, as well as a detailed methodology was developed by Hamburg sociologist Gerhard Kleining (cf. Gerhard Kleining: *Umriss zu einer Methodologie qualitativer Sozialforschung*, in: *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 34, 1982, p. 227f.) The poll was conducted in 1992/93. 28 teachers (varied according to age and sex, grades, school types and social area) were interviewed, each for approx. 1 ½ hours, on the basis of a questionnaire with 18 open-ended questions.

2. Empirical results of intercultural religious education. Interviews with teachers in Hamburg

The research has shown two general tendencies.

- a. From our study, it has become clear that intercultural learning is only one dimension within a broader spectrum of objectives of religious education. The teachers of religious education develop their tasks against the background of a society which is regarded as being in a crisis situation. Therefore, they develop their teaching as an action to help the individual cope with experiences which make him/her feel insecure, and to enable him/her to act responsibly in a confused society.
- b. The teachers regard the reality of a multicultural society as a sign of a changing society. They see it, therefore, as the main task of religious education to teach pupils to perceive and to learn to cope with plurality. The teachers thus consciously break with the traditional form of religious education where teaching the foundations and traditions of individual confessions received priority over other religious denominations. There is wide consensus that the awareness of an own cultural and religious identity can be evoked through the examination of other cultures and religions.

It is clear that the teachers who were questioned did not regard the homogeneity of a cultural or religious environment as a prerequisite for the successful development of the identity of pupils. As a result, there is a great openness for an inclusive interculturally- and interreligiously-oriented religious education.

In the following passage, we will reflect on experiences of teachers who teach classes with a high percentage of foreigners (i.e. depending on the type of school, between 35% and 65%). Schools with a relatively high multinational composition are to be found mainly in districts with a multicultural infrastructure. With regard to the social structure of Hamburg, most of these areas belong to the poorer parts of Hamburg in which a high percentage of workers and salaried staff resides.

For the teachers, the multicultural composition of the class is the decisive impetus and reason why they want to adapt religious education to the needs and circumstances of the pupils. Their concern is to combine the knowledge or content dimension of teaching with the life experiences of the pupils.

Our study has provided the following information which will be summarized under the headings *Opportunities* and *Problems*.

The teachers see the following *opportunities* for a religious education which takes into account the multicultural character of the class.

1. There is the possibility of becoming acquainted other religions and cultures through authentic information.

“It is more exciting when there are different points of view. The learning effect is much greater than through books. It is better if they sort out the different points of view amongst themselves, than if they use me to do that.”

- Female teacher, combined school.

2. Getting to know others leads to questioning one's own models of perception and judgement which have always been taken for granted. In this way, it is possible to break down prejudices and ethno-centric perspectives.

“I personally have experienced that with pupils from different religions, one also has to reflect on one's own position. One can no longer allow oneself to reiterate one's judgement of a religion as a matter of course.”

- *Male teacher, grammar school.*

“I have actually always asked pupils to introduce themselves and to say something about themselves and their countries of origin, so that they make a contribution and also learn something about other languages and cultures. I use religious education in the same way: as an opportunity, not to learn from books only but also from one another, so that one develops more respect and consideration, more understanding.”

- *Female teacher, secondary school.*

3. The decisive aspect of religious education for pupils of different religious and cultural backgrounds is seen as the possibility to actively learn multicultural coexistence and, in this way, counter a fragmentation of society into different cultural and ethnic groups.

“The opportunity exists to prepare pupils to live in society, so that they are open and capable of compromises, something that is essential in a society.”

- *Female teacher, combined school.*

Despite the positive attitude towards the aims and possibilities of intercultural learning, the *problems* of religious education for all are also seen soberly. The opinions of the teachers regarding these problems are structured in five points:

1. The possibilities of an authentic exchange based on life experiences of pupils with different religious backgrounds is limited as pupils, due to a lack of experience and ignorance concerning their religion, are often not in a position to convey information about and experiences of their religion to the class.
2. Pupils often have more in common due to the existence of a youth culture (with its religious substitutes and para-religious experiences) than they have cultural differences. Here an ignorance of the traditional forms of religion is noticeable in the attitudes of pupils. This trend has also been observed socially and in religio-sociological empirical studies. This concerns especially the Christian churches, but also Islam.

“From my discussions with Muslim children of the second generation, I can say that their cultural identity is disappearing quickly. The question to ask is then to what extent multicultural religious education is a dialogue of the speechless, who are all no longer at home in their cultures.”

- *Male teacher, grammar school.*

3. A third difficulty concerns problems which, due to prejudices and extreme points of view, make the exchange of experiences more difficult from the outset. Especially amongst pupils with a fundamentalist religious orientation, a vehemently supported exclusivity in view of their own position can lead to a

rejecting and derogatory attitude towards other religious or non-religious leanings.

4. Structural problems within the class community, i.e. disputes about positions in the order of precedence in the class, can also be relevant for the teaching situation. In multicultural groups, it can happen that arguments about rank in the class community are fought out along ethnic, national or cultural lines. Fights for position within the class are then contested with the help of cultural or ethnic criteria. Identification with a culture can then be a resource for discrimination.
5. A further problem concerns the mistrust that especially Muslim children have regarding religious education which they perceive as being predominantly Christian, despite the openness of the teachers.

“A few years ago we had a colleague who taught religious education with a very one-sided Christian bias. She always brought icons to school and showed them to the pupils. She only spoke of Christianity, read from the Bible and staged plays during Christmas. The Turkish children took part, even those from very religious families. A girl, who had been brought up very strictly, replied to my question concerning the opinion of her parents about her taking part in Christian religious education: ‘My mother says, I must close my ears and eyes’. The Turkish parents are afraid of the German school; they recognize it as an authority. They think that they cannot or may not resist. They are quite ignorant in that respect.”

*Turkish teacher for mother-tongue tuition,
primary-, elementary- and secondary school.*

In the light of our perceptions of these possible problems, an important result of our opinion poll concerns the commitment and determination of the teachers to religious education that it is open to pupils of different religious and cultural backgrounds. This commitment was found irrespective of grade, schooltype or district of Hamburg in which the schools are situated. We regard this unambiguous support of the teachers for intercultural religious education as very important because, under these conditions, pupils are able to experience the exchange of different opinions prevalent in a society which is becoming more and more divided socially, economically and culturally.

In a situation of intercultural and interreligious exchange, the teachers themselves may assume a new role in that they may also become learners within a teaching situation which is open to dialogue. We will come back to the implications of a dialogue-oriented learning situation later.

If we now briefly look at what some of the pupils have said,⁴ the results of the opinion poll conducted amongst the teachers are confirmed: religious education is especially interesting if, as a starting-point, life situations and experiences of pupils are discussed.

Pupils regard religious education as a forum for the exchange of opinions on topics and questions which are relevant to their own lives. The aim is always to obtain

4 For more information on this, cf. the analysis of Sandt/Weisse in this issue of *Scriptura: Many Religions, different Cultures - One Religious Education? Attitudes of Young People on Religion and Religious Education: A Challenge for new conceptions.*

clarity on these personal questions through discussion and interaction with others. It is remarkable that the heterogeneous nature of the groups is natural for the pupils and they do not see the necessity of being separated.

Our study has also shown that pupils who prefer to be characterized by similarities of a specific school- or youth culture than through cultural differences, tend to be interested in ethical questions which focus on actual life situations. On the other hand, they are rather critical of religious topics, especially those with a Christian bias. Pupils suspect that religious topics limit their individual choices of experimenting with other interpretations of reality, and regard these topics as irrelevant for their personal lives. If at all present, the interest in religious questions or religions is subject to the condition that pupils are, to the largest possible extent, able to preserve their freedom and make their own decisions. Against this background, one of the large religions, Buddhism, or other forms of eastern spirituality, becomes attractive.

“I am interested in Ethics because there we do not only learn about Christianity; Christianity does not appeal to me personally. What Christians have done in the past cannot be seen as positive, and I find that Buddhism is less rigid; it does not force people to adopt that religion. Everybody can choose for himself whether he wants to become a Buddhist or not; one is not forced, one is not ‘Christianized’, as it used to be called. I appreciate this freedom to get to know other religions, other alternatives.”

- *Pupil, combined school, grade 9.*

In culturally- and religiously-diverse classes, one has done away with one-sided Christian religious education which could inhibit communication and community. Information about Christianity can, however, arouse the interest of pupils through comparison and confrontation with other religions. Sometimes pupils from other religions even demand this.

In classes with pupils of different religions, the intercultural dimension provides the pupils with a medium for self-clarification, an opportunity to get to know one another and to form a community. But this also is not without problems: it is essential to react sensitively and to adopt an accepting stance when pupils talk about their attitudes towards faith and religion. This sensitivity is often lacking, as is the interest to discuss questions about the aim and meaning of life at school.

3. Basic religious education: Fundamental perceptions of a religious dimension and interreligious encounters

Following the empirical study and teaching experiments, perspectives have emerged of a religious education which is not structured according to the separation of pupils with different religious and cultural backgrounds, but which provides the opportunity in the common learning process to experience religion: with its meaning in the lives of people, with its potential of providing hope, but also with its diversity, its differences, its individual and social potential for conflict in a positive and a negative sense. Our appeal for ‘Religious education for all’ has, according to our opinion, sound social, political, educational but also theological reasons to support it. Religious educationists cannot escape the question of how the existence of religious education at a public school can be legitimized, as it can assist pupils to cope with their problems in a society which is acutely stressed by social and cultural contrasts, and whose hidden

agenda seems to indicate that problems can be solved through power and violence only. This is an apt remark made by Helmut Peukert,⁵ an educationist in Hamburg. How can religious education contribute to the larger educational task of conveying tradition and culture to young people in such a way that these can assist them in finding a more humane future? School and tuition have to provide adolescents and the youth with the opportunity to learn elementary skills which they require to be able to live with responsibility, social empathy and in solidarity with others. This is the background against which Hartmut von Hentig's demand⁶ that schools provide *lebensraum* and opportunity for experiences can be fully understood.

According to our opinion, if pupils are separated into religious or cultural groups, religious education will not fully utilize the opportunity to assist children and the youth to jointly find their bearings when such fundamental questions about the shaping of their lives and the world are to be answered. A pedagogical and school-oriented understanding of religious education should, according to our opinion, address two areas from which the dual task in the 'elementary religious education' approach (as fundamental perception of a religious dimension and interreligious encounter)⁷ is determined.

Initially, fundamental religious questions and questioning should be encouraged and formulated. It should be possible for adolescents to develop an understanding of themselves in which they recognize that questions about the essence of their identity, the reason for their existence, their desires and expectations also have a religious dimension and are a part of their cognitive and affective development. Against the background of a fundamental crisis in religious socialization, a possibility is created to experience a religious dimension of understanding and interpreting themselves and reality.

The multicultural situation at schools and in society in general, makes it essential to respond to the question of how it is possible to deal with plurality which often takes on violent forms of separation, logically followed by enforcement and self-assertion. How can pedagogical action convey the fundamental ability to recognize that the other person provides the possibility to live in a relationship with him/her?⁸ This task requires concrete learning opportunities. In this respect, religious education has the particular potential of bringing to life and helping in the formulation of orientations and characteristics which play a role in influencing the lives of people, in their thinking, feeling and actions.

5 Cf. Helmut Peukert: *Bildung als Wahrnehmung des Anderen. Der Dialog im Bildungsdenken der Moderne*, in: I Lohmann/W Weiße (eds.), *ibid.*, p. 1f.

6 Cf. Hartmut von Hentig: *Die Schule neu denken*. Munich/Vienna 1993, especially p. 183f.

7 The theoretical systematic foundation as well as the methodical didactic conclusions of an intercultural and interreligious approach to education are part of a dissertation project on the question of religious education in a multicultural society. Within the framework of this paper it is not possible to discuss the theoretical and religious educational implications of the term *fundamentalisation* (Klafki, Nipkow) and the basic term of pedagogical dialogue (Peukert) in further detail.

8 Cf. Norbert Mette, *Subjektwerden an den und mit den anderen*, in: *Ev. Erz.* 43(1991), p. 620f. and also by the same author: *Begegnungen mit dem Fremden. Herausforderungen für den Religionsunterricht*, in: *Kat. Bl.* 12/1993, p. 815f.

A theological interpretation of the Jewish-Christian heritage, which forms an important pillar of elementary religious education, can - as Johann Baptist Metz has shown recently⁹ - enable pupils to find a religious identity when they come into contact with other religious traditions. The Biblical 'Verhaltensimperativ' - as Metz calls it - that one be aware of those people outside of one's own field of vision, can be interpreted as a demand for an education of acceptance, which, in practice, would develop learning opportunities and the ability to deal with plurality.

This task can perhaps be formulated as follows: religious education must provide the possibility of perceiving *religious dimensions*. This means:

- perceiving a religious dimension of one's own questions and experiences
- perceiving religious positions and traditions, which can influence the understanding of oneself and the world in a vigorous (but also in a destructive) way.

Facilitating a religious perspective in the perception and acceptance of plurality may lead to the development of a religious identity. Religious or confessional identity are no pre-requisite; they are rather a consequence of the insight that identity is formed when one is perceiving new people and new ideas, and then poses the question what shapes, constitutes and orientates the own person.

Suggestions for the didactic and methodical transfer of this plan can be gained from approaches to religious education which try to communicate elementary religious images and symbols to pupils, and contrast them with their life experiences, e.g. in reflections on the didactics of symbols or in the concept of elementary Biblical didactics as proposed by Ingo Baldermann.

Teaching experiments with intercultural approaches to elementary religious education have shown that the language of religious symbols has a special quality which opens up new dimensions of personal and social experiences. These can provide an important support for pupils in their own personal struggles with themselves and with reality.¹⁰

The approach which encourages the discussing of experiences common to all pupils, is one way of accessing the tasks of religious education at school as described above.

This approach starts with that which pupils have in common: experiences, needs, desires and hopes. It is closely connected with the development and practice of the ability to express themselves in religious terms. This way of penetrating a deeper level of experiences and the attempt to express this in a creative manner, we have called fundamental perception of a religious dimension. This education is religiously elementary because its aim is to make possible the ability to experience that which is a prerequisite for religious perception and religious experiences. It should be clear that

9 Johann Baptist Metz, *Wenn wir uns selbst unheimlich geworden sind... Die Christen und die Fremden*, in: *Publik-Forum* dated 29.1.1993, p. 20f.

10 An experimental lesson on Psalm words which was taught to a culturally heterogenous primary school class may serve as an example for the implementation of this approach in elementary religious education. Cf. Sabine Brandt/ Thorsten Knauth: *Viele Kinder weinen nach innen. Eine Sprache für Traurigkeit, Alleinsein und Angst im Rahmen einer Unterrichtseinheit über Psalmworte*.

such an approach would also be possible, practicable and useful in homogeneous classes, especially if one considers the fact that a number of pupils have their first experiences with a religious dimension during religious education at school. In multicultural groups, one would not only include biblical texts, but also other sacred texts and traditions of other religions, or even secular texts which are suitable due to their metaphorical qualities, to express experiences and interests of the pupils.

There is a second basic approach which is conceived for elementary religious education with an intercultural perspective which we would like to describe with the term *intercultural and interreligious encounter*¹¹. The approach of religious and intercultural encounters accepts the existing differences between the confessions and religious traditions and positions. It is seen as complementary to the approach of a fundamental perception of religion and should provide room for positionality within the framework of intraconfessional and interreligious encounters. It should be viewed together with a fundamental perception of religion; it does not attempt to replace it.

The term 'encounter' or '*encounters through dialogue*'¹² on the basis of and with the development of positionality can express, more clearly than the term 'dialogue', that the intended correlation of different positions is not dependent on religious expertise as a prerequisite. The communicative action, which this approach intends, should incorporate the existing experiences of pupils and not demand religious knowledge or religious competence as a precondition for entering into dialogue with others.¹³ The encounter-approach should make it possible for pupils to exchange

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- 11 In order to avoid misunderstandings regarding the position of the term 'encounter' within the framework of elementary religious education, we would like to emphasize that the aim of dialogue is regarded as fundamental for its two systematic components within a concept of elementary religious education. Also the approach of a fundamental perception of religion is based on dialogue in teaching (and is dependent on the basic idea of pedagogical dialogue). This actually is the precondition for a lively interaction of pupils with a '*Tiefendimension*' (depth dimension) of their experiences. Action through dialogue in tuition is, therefore, to be understood as a premise, method and result of religious learning processes.
- 12 The term 'encounter through dialogue' was used by the scholar of ecumene, Hans Jochen Margull, in the early seventies, in his detailed studies and activities on interreligious dialogues of the Ecumenical Council of Churches (cf. HJ Margull: *Die Herausforderungen der Kirche durch den heutigen Buddhismus*, in: Religion, Mission, Entwicklung, Stuttgart/Berlin 1973, p. 45f. (reprinted in: HJ Margull, Zeugnis und Dialog. Ausgewählte Schriften, mit Einführungen von Th. Ahrens, W. Weiße et al., *Ammersbek bei Hamburg* 1992, p. 273f.). In the recent ecumenical movement and in ecumenical theology there is a great potential for fundamental discussions, experiences and reflections on interreligious encounters. Ideas on how religious education, based on dialogue and encounters, could be realized with its basic premisses and its concrete possibilities and limitations, could release vital impulses in view of this ecumenical potential. I will restrict myself to these general remarks.
- 13 The term 'encounter' (*Begegnung*) consciously refers to the work of Martin Buber on an education of dialogue. Against this background, it is clear that the term 'encounter' refers to the whole person and is linked to the realization of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of people who recognize one another in their uniqueness and distinctiveness (cf. Martin Buber, *Das dialogische Prinzip*, Gerlingen 1992; *Martin Buber, Reden über Erziehung*, Heidelberg 1986).

views on religious and ideological positions extensively, and to develop and clarify their own. The positions present in class should be related to the confessional and religious traditions found in the wider context of our society. In this context, Christianity with its different confessional and cultural forms of expression, will receive special interest. It would also seem unavoidable to include Islam, atheism and a far-eastern religion, even if this is not represented in the class. It is extremely important that all these positions are accessed with great circumspection and with reference to the variations within these teachings and their meaning in life.

(This also refers to, and in the light of recent sociological studies of the youth, one should say it refers especially to Christianity and its different forms.) This approach does not constitute a hermeneutics of methodical induction of similarities, but a hermeneutics of differentiation. Its aim is to create an awareness of religious and confessional differences, to make these differences clear and to make their internal plausibility and coherence comprehensible: this hermeneutics first demands understanding, then comparison, and, only when these two levels have been discovered, critical reflection follows. The hermeneutics of differentiation requires vivid mediation, encounters with forms of practiced religions and their customs, rites and implications for the shaping of every-day life and its ethical orientation.

This elementary approach to an encounter with differences of religions and confessions could be sought on the different levels which make up the vitality of a religion. Questions about the '*Lebensgestaltung*' (organization of life) would be the subject of discussion just as much as religious implications of ethical actions, as well as spiritual and theological questions. The comparison between the different positions cannot always take place on the same level, but would have to be sought among those elements which every religion regards as its own centre.¹⁴

Religion really becomes attractive when it is combined with concrete biographies which reveal what an important role religion can play in determining one's orientation. Religion which is not introduced as teaching matter, but as part of a context of biographies or biographical reports, converts an abstract entity into a concrete form, one could also say, gives it a face, a countenance.

In this way, the pupils learn that understanding a religion is always combined with respecting and recognizing people who live this religion and give it life.

Secondly, the potential of a symbol-didactic approach could also be applied in interreligious didactics, in which central symbols and symbolic practices of different religions are experienced and made accessible in a multidimensional way.

Apart from the potential of a didactic of interreligious encounters and positionality, its limits must also be recognized clearly.

To teach or understand the various religions comprehensively would be an excessive claim, in view of the richness of their traditions and the complexity of their inner life. Encountering different religious positions can lead to no more than an approximate understanding of them, and should always take place with the proviso that religions are more, and can be more, than a brief encounter can fashion.

14 Cf. R Paniker, *Der neue religiöse Weg. Im Dialog der Religionen leben*. Munich 1990, p. 92f.

Religious education which sees itself as a forum for encounters with religion(s), should generally be aware of the non-negotiable nature of religion, or, to use a term from the field of religious studies, 'in awe of the holy'.

Religious education as elementary religious education, with the elements of opening up religious dimensions in people and of interreligious encounters, needs a wider scope in view of the pupils. It has to leave pupils, who are still in the process of developing a religious self-understanding, the freedom to obtain clarity about their own questions and their own existence. This search for an identity can also take place within the framework of certain confessional or religious traditions and community experiences. The tasks of religious education at school can be summarized according to three points: the security offered by religious traditions, the search for very personal connections in the process of finding a religious identity, and exposure to completely different religious and ideological positions. Care should be taken not to ascribe to pupils a religious, cultural or confessional identity to which they do not wish to be committed. To teach them that they themselves must respond and that nobody can reply on their behalf would be a fundamental concern of religious education at school.