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Ambiguity - in school material

von
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Abstract

Ambiguität und Ambiguitätstoleranz haben in unterschiedlichen Disziplinen Konjunktur. Auch in der Religionspädagogik wird Ambiguitätstoleranz gefordert. Im Beitrag wird anhand von drei exemplarisch ausgewählten Schulbüchern die Präsentation von Ambiguität und von Umgangsweisen mit Ambiguität erkundet. Im Ergebnis zeigt sich eine Tendenz zu synthetisierenden und akzeptierenden Umgangsweisen, wobei auch vereindeutigende Strategien identifiziert werden können. Die Ergebnisse der Erkundung lassen außerdem nach Unterschieden zwischen der Darstellung von Ambiguität in der Referenzreligion und jener in interreligiösen Zusammenhängen fragen. Der Beitrag schließt mit Ideen für weitere Forschungsarbeiten.

Ambiguity and tolerance of ambiguity are booming in different disciplines. Ambiguity tolerance is also demanded in religious education. In this article, the presentation of ambiguity and ways of dealing with ambiguity are explored on the basis of three exemplarily selected textbooks. The results show a tendency towards synthesizing and accepting ways of dealing with ambiguity, although unifying strategies can also be identified. The results of the exploration also allow us to ask about differences between the representation of ambiguity in the reference religion and that in interreligious contexts. The paper concludes with ideas for further research.

Schlagwörter: Ambiguität, Ambiguitätstoleranz, Religionsbuch, Schulbuchanalyse, religiöse Bildung

Keywords: ambiguity, tolerance of ambiguity, religion textbook, textbook analysis, religious education.

1 preliminary considerations

The question of ambiguity and tolerance of ambiguity has been a virulent one for several years, especially in the fields of language, art, civic education, and religion, including current debates; in areas, in which ambiguities and perhaps also contradictions belong to the genuine characteristics of disciplinary objects and discourses and are in principle rather evaluated as positive.

Especially in the pedagogical (sub-)disciplines, the phenomenon of ambiguity is linked to the goal of tolerance of ambiguity (e.g., Wörn, 2020, 26ff.). Also within religious education this demand is perceptible especially where the clash of different religious-ideological positionings is expected. Thus, it is not surprising that in the context of interreligious learning (EKD, 2014; Meyer, 2021, chapter IV), in the question of

confessional-cooperative arrangements (Schröder & Woppowa, 2021) or the dialogue between ethics and religious education (Simon-Winter, 2021), and correspondingly in the context of required changes of perspective (Meyer, 2019; Tautz, 2015; Jakobi, 2011), tolerance of ambiguity is considered a desirable competence.

Surprisingly, those ambiguous phenomena associated with objects within religion/denomination are far less in view (Roose, 2021; Bell, 2014), although biblical texts, conceptions of God, theological figures of thought, or ethical questions offer sufficient ambiguous potential.

This potential for ambiguity is pointed out, among others, by Islamic scholar and Arabist Thomas Bauer in his essay "The Ambiguity of the World" (Ders., 2018) and philosopher John D. Caputo in "In Praise of Ambiguity" (Ders., 2005). According to Bauer, a high tolerance of ambiguity is the sine qua non for religion to thrive. Thus, within religion there is the necessity to accept transcendence as such. Transcendence transcends the rationally recognizable and thus remains ambiguous. In the religions of revelation there is also the horizontal dimension of communication between people and the vertical dimension to the transcendent. The latter is reflected in the Holy Scriptures, because ambiguity is inherent in all complex texts; due to the ambiguity-containing topic, they have a high degree of ambiguity. (Bauer, 2018, 31-41)

Caputo writes that religious belief has an irreducibly ambiguous character, which can be seen, for example, in the variability of expression of religious life. Moreover, ambiguity has a religious quality that Caputo defines as essential ambiguity, "the ambiguity that goes to the heart of the human condition, that envelops what theologian Paul Tillich liked to call matters of ultimate concern, which are also matters of ultimate passion" (Caputo, 2005, 33), because: "Ambiguity is a gift (...) that preserves the essential mystery of our existence, that ensures that life will be (...) an endless provocation, an infinite passion." (Caputo, 2005, 33-34)

In his contribution to the didactics of religion on the tolerance of ambiguity, Bernhard Dressler, links perspectives from the theory of education with those from the didactics of religion: "One can define education as the non-arbitrary, judgmental handling of ambiguities. Already the term "ambiguity" shows that it is about different perspectives of interpretation in view of different world phenomena. A didactics oriented towards interpretative processes must therefore be an "ambiguity didactics" - more and more so as the pupils get older. The ambiguity of the world is not only to be accepted as a tribute to the plurality of modern culture, but to be productively shaped as a condition for the possibility of learning that is up to date. (...) It (religion, S.S.) certainly achieves not little, if it connects the experiences of unavailability and unconditionality to a world and self-interpretation, which does not deny the insights and rules of other (...) world approaches, but moves them into an overarching horizon of meaning" (Dressler, 2020, 223). For Dressler, the potential addressed in the last sentence results from the fact that ambiguity

or ambiguity "is to be understood beyond plurality aspects as a religion-internal and religion-specific, indeed: religion-constitutive characteristic" (Dressler, 2020, 225). In terms of didactics of religion, the author concludes, "Because of the surplus of meaning of metaphors and narratives, because of their openness to interpretation and need for interpretation, religious learning cannot aim at unambiguous insights, but at the understanding of and dealing with ambiguities. For this reason, too, didactics of religion is only appropriate as "didactics of ambiguity" (Dressler, 2020, 226-227). According to Dressler, these considerations also have consequences for interreligious encounters, because "respect for foreign religiosity cannot be developed without a readiness to understand, but above all not without religious self-assurance" (Dressler, 2020, 228).

One can certainly ask whether a religious self-assurance or - as Dressler writes in view of religiously abstinent or indifferent people - a "serious reflection of one's own decision (!, S.S.; see on this also Lorenzen, 2020) for an a-religious or religiously distanced way of life" (Dressler, 2020, 228) is needed in order to be able to develop a tolerance towards other religions/religiosities. Finally, it should be considered whether the connection between religion-related (!) self-assurance and understanding as well as respect for other worldviews/religiosities/religions is not also possible in other socializing, educational and training-related ways.

In so far as education should enable to identify ambiguities, to understand how to deal with them and religious education makes an essential as well as specific contribution to this, because ambiguity is constitutive of religion, it would have to be asked, how this requirement and task is dealt with in didactics of religion.

After the description of the procedure, a short analysis of three exemplarily selected textbooks and a conclusion with an outlook follow.

2 Procedure

Not only for a textbook exploration, but also for the religion-didactic discussion, the clarification of the used concept of ambiguity is helpful. For example, in her dissertation published in 2020, Katharina Wörn (Dies., 2020) shows that the term ambiguity is currently used in at least three different ways:

- a. In terms of equivocality
- b. In the sense of multiplicity as denoting a plurality or
- c. As a meta-terminus for various forms of unclear meanings (Wörn, 2020, 32-33).

In this textbook exploration, ambiguity is used in the sense of ambiguity as a designation of plurality. According to Wörn, the use of the term is almost never value-free, (Wörn, 2020, 35) which is why the references should be disclosed. Religious education belongs to those sciences that want to receive the concept of tolerance of ambiguity, value

ambiguity positively, and promote tolerance of ambiguity.

The evaluation also results in preferences for ways of dealing with ambiguity. According to Wörn, these could be

- a. unambiguity, i.e. only one side alone is valid, to
- b. synthesization, i.e. ambiguities are overcome on a higher level, single elements may remain,
- c. acceptance, i.e. ambiguities are endured
- d. indifference, here ambiguities would then not matter. (Wörn, 2020, 35)

From the impulses of Bauer, Caputo and Dressler, impulses for the topics of textbook exploration can be gained, insofar as both religion-constitutive aspects of ambiguity and ambiguity due to religious plurality come into view:

First, then, we ask,

- a. To what extent does the ambiguity of the *concepts of God*
- b. the ambiguity of the *biblical texts*¹⁾
- c. and the different *forms of expression of religious faith* come to representation

Following closely on from this, the second question is how ambiguity is dealt with in school material.

Is

- a. a *unifying*,
- b. a *synthesizing* one,
- c. an *accepting* or
- d. an *indifferent* handling of ambiguity recognizable?

The exploration is about the representation of the ambiguous constitution of aspects of (Christian) religion such as religious plurality and the handling associated with it.

The following three current textbooks have been taken as a basis for the exploration:

Once the textbook *Ortswechsel plus in Kontakt*, intended for the 9th school year at grammar school (Gymnasien) and published in Munich in 2021 (Grill-Ahollinger, Görnitz-Rückert, Gojny & Rückert, 2021).

The second textbook is a textbook published for elementary school grades 1-3 in the area of the Evangelical Church Berlin-Brandenburg-schlesische Oberlausitz 2020. With the help of continuous reflection questions, the interest of religious as well as non-religious children is to be aroused.

1) This is preceded by the preliminary assumption that biblical texts are always ambiguous texts (cf. Caputo/Bauer) that can be interpreted in different ways.

The third textbook is the new course book Religion elementar, developed for Haupt-, Real-, and Gemeinschaftsschulen (Eilerts & Kübler, 2016).

The following exploration is not intended as a textbook comparison, especially since the selected textbooks differ with regard to the addressed school types and grades and ambiguity (tolerance) is not one of the explicitly stated goals of the respective textbook concepts, but rather an exemplary insight into representation and handling strategies with ambiguity.

3 Textbook exploration

3.1 Change of locations (Ortswechsel)+, 9th grade Gymnasium (Grammar school)

a. Concepts of God

As an example, I refer to the chapter *Contact*, in which *In Contact with God* is discussed on a double page (p. 16-17). The painting "The Creation of Adam" by Michelangelo serves as an impulse. The students should describe the painting, compare it with Gen 1 and 2, refer to other biblical contacts between God and man and compare them under the aspects of who makes the contact, through which medium the contact takes place and how close the contact is. Finally, the question is why this painting is so often parodied. With the last task, students are asked to write down their own thoughts, questions, rebuttals and objections on a sheet under the heading *My Contact with God* and glued hands. On the second double-page spread are different student expressions of belief in God, which the learners are asked to examine for the motive of contact. Finally, learners are to filter out motives for and against belief in God and choose one thought that they feel particularly appeals to them. Finally, the religion parody of the flying spaghetti monster is to be analyzed for its appropriateness. In the last task, it is suggested to conduct a survey on faith. In addition, on the same page, there is the comment that it is strange that Jesus is not mentioned in the student statements.

In Kontakt mit Gott –

Ich?



Michelangelo Buonarroti, Die Erschaffung des Adam, Deckenfresko aus der Sixtinischen Kapelle in Rom (1508–1512)



BERÜHRT?

1. Beschreibe und deute das Gemälde von Michelangelo unter dem Aspekt des «Kontaktes»!
2. Vergleiche das Bild mit der Darstellung der Erschaffung des Menschen in Gen 1 und 2 [5,8]!
3. Erinner dich an weitere Situationen aus der Bibel, in denen es um eine Kontaktaufnahme zwischen Gott und Mensch geht! Vergleiche sie unter Aspekten wie: Wer nimmt den Kontakt auf? Über welches «Medium» geht der Kontakt? Ist er eher eng oder distanzierter?
4. Michelangelos «Erschaffung des Adam» gilt als das am häufigsten reproduzierte Werk der Kunstgeschichte – und ist wohl auch das am meisten parodierte. Suche nach Gründen dafür! Deute die Parodien auf dieser Doppelseite!
5. «Mein Kontakt zu Gott» – Kriebe eine Kopie der «Hände» auf ein leeres Blatt und schreibe dazu eigene Gedanken, Fragen, Widersprüche!

SCHÜLERINNEN UND SCHÜLER DER 9. KLASSE ÜBER IHREN GLAUBEN AN GOTT

- «Ich glaube, weil ich an Wunder» und die Wunderbarkeit des Lebens glaube. Ich bin dankbar für jeden Tag und mein Leben. Ich glaube, dass Gott mir das geschenkt hat und ich durch ihn dieses Leben ermöglicht lebe. Ich glaube daran, dass es etwas Höheres gibt und er uns hier überwacht. Viele Dinge sind noch unerklärlich und hier kann auch die Wissenschaft nicht Antworten geben. Dies ist für mich ein Grund an Gott zu glauben.»
 - «Ich kann keinen Gott sehen oder fühlen, geschweige denn hören.»
 - «Ich bin der Meinung, dass viele Menschen sich immer dieselben Fragen stellen: «Welchen Sinn haben die Menschen? Wie wurde das Leben geschaffen?» etc. und da sie persönlich keine zufrieden stellende Antwort finden «erfinden» sie Gott.»
 - «Ich glaube an Gott, weil ich denke, dass es wichtig ist (für mich persönlich) dass man immer jemanden hat, mit dem man über alles reden oder sich Gedanken kann. Da man einfach manche Dinge nicht mit seinen Mitmenschen, seien sie einem auch noch so vertraut, teilen möchte.»
 - «Ich glaube an Gott, weil mir der Glaube Hoffnung und Vertrauen im Alltag gibt. Gott hilft einem, egal wie schwer die Zeiten auch sind. Gott hört dir zu und oft ist es wirklich so, wenn ich für etwas bete, dass es sich dann auch erfüllt.»
 - «Nein, da es keinen Beweis für ihn gibt und viele Sachen über ihn oder über die Erde, die in der Bibel stehen, naturwissenschaftlich widerlegt worden sind. Also, solange wie es keine Beweise für die Existenz Gottes gibt, glaub ich persönlich nicht an ihn.»
 - «Wenn es einen Gott gäbe, dann wäre er allmächtig. Jedenfalls gehe ich davon aus. Und in diesem Fall würde ich von ihm erwarten, dass er etwas gegen das ganze Leid auf der Welt tut.»
- Aus einer Untersuchung über die Gründe für Glauben und Unglauben bei Jugendlichen*



ICH UND GOTT?

1. Untersuche die Aussagen der Jugendlichen und achte dabei wiederum auf das Motiv des Kontakts!
2. Arbeite aus den Aussagen Gründe für und gegen den Gottesglauben heraus, ordne sie und finde Oberbegriffe!
3. Wähle einen Gedanken aus, von dem du dich besonders angesprochen fühlst, und nimm Stellung! Beziehe dabei ggf. deinen Text von S. 16. (5. Impuls) ein!
4. Bewerte die Religionsparodie «Fliegende Spaghettimonster»: Ist sie einfach «Quatsch» oder steckt ernsthafte Kritik dahinter? Ist es angemessen, so mit Religion umzugehen?
5. Vielleicht möchtest ihr eine eigene kleine Umfrage zum Thema «Der Glaube Jugendlicher» vorbereiten? Überlegt euch hierzu geeignete Fragen und entscheidet, in welchem Rahmen (z.B. Religionsgruppe, Klasse, Jahrgangsstufe) ihr die Umfrage durchführen wollt!

MERKWÜRDIG – von Jesus ist in den **Stammbaum keine Rede!**



Das Fliegende Spaghettimonster (FSM) ist die erfundene Gottheit einer im Internet verbreiteten Religionsparodie. Sie entstand 2005 in den USA in Auseinandersetzung mit dem Ekklesiasten «18» und hat inzwischen schnell Anhänger:innen. Wie bei einer authentischen Religion gibt es eine Gemeinschaft und teils kirchenähnliche Strukturen, Glaubenslehren, Gebete, Feste, Symbole usw. Mit dem Antrag, als Religionsgemeinschaft anerkannt zu werden, ist die «Kirche des FSM» allerdings vor deutschen Gerichten gescheitert.

Abb. 1: Beginning of the chapter *In contact with God* (Grill-Ahollinger, Görnitz-Rückert, Gojny & Rückert, 2021, p. 16-17)

b. Bible

The chapter *For Me?* is about faith in Jesus Christ, focusing on the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The hermeneutical framework of the chapter is established with the chapter title, biblically justified on the basis of Rom 8:31b-32 (p. 45) and unfolded in the following on the basis of the gift idea. Thus, the students are to find out, among other things, how the Bible expresses that "For me" in manifold images (p. 45-47). Furthermore, they are to interpret the texts of the Gospels under this aspect. Information boxes explain that the first Christians interpreted the seemingly contradictory experience of the cross and resurrection as a supreme gift and used different metaphors for it (p. 51). It is also shared that these are the oldest and most important statements of the Christian faith, and the most difficult ones to grasp. In discussing Rom 8:31b-32, students will relate various "For-me-statements" to the text, relate previous reflections on gift-giving to the text, and note open questions. Finally, a narrative in which God chose to become human out of passionate love will be used as a trial to interpret the biblical passage and highlight the importance of contact (p. 47).

c. Different expressions of religious faith

I stay in the same chapter where, under the subtitle *Fence Talks*, Easter and Good Friday are described as a serious case for the dialogue of Christianity with other religions. In the interview with a religious scholar, it is explained that in Islam the crucifixion is told

differently because Jesus is described as God's messenger and therefore cannot be killed violently by human hands. The interview highlights that this idea is connectable to discussions in the early church. Christians could thus recognize that Muslim perspectives are not completely foreign, but occur in their own history. Finally, reference is made to an event with Christians and Muslims during the Passion season, reflecting on Jesus, violence, and martyrdom. Finally, the relevant sura is printed on the page.

Students' tasks are to summarize the text, identify similarities and differences with Christianity, and identify issues that may be difficult for Christians as well. Finally, students will draft fence talks and create posts for an interfaith panel event.

Analysis:

In the topic area *concepts of God*, the students learn about different biblical forms of contact between God and humans, which are to be compared. This task presumably aims to identify the multiple concepts of contact rather than ambiguity. The ambiguity is marked solely in the students' utterances, leaving the discussion stimulated on this subject in the subjective. Here one could speak of an indifference to ambiguity, because other aspects are in focus and the handling of the differences between the students' statements remains unclear.

The *biblical text* (Rom 8:31b-32) is introduced as a hermeneutical framework and explained using the gift idea with the metaphor 'For Me'. Within and with the help of this hermeneutical framework the students can interpret the cross and resurrection. At the same time, Rom 8:31b-32 is marked as a not very simple text and it is pointed out that the first Christians needed metaphors to be able to formulate the contradictory meaning of the cross and resurrection. While the hermeneutical framework is more of a synthesizing way of dealing with ambiguity (the framework itself is not up for discussion, after all), the explanation for the use of metaphors by the first Christians is an impetus to understand and be able to accept ambiguity. The handling of ambiguity with regard to biblical texts moves against the background between a synthesizing and an accepting one.

In relation to other truth claims (*different expressions of religious faith*), the ways of interpretation of the crucifixion event by different religions are presented in a well-founded way. The described and intended handling of ambiguity moves between accepting and synthesizing, when on the one hand the differences are described as revealing, as well as at the same time parallels in the history of ideas within the christian religion are pointed out.

3.2 All together, 1st-3rd grade, elementary school

a. Concepts of God

The textbook does not contain a separate chapter on conceptions of God, but rather questions scattered throughout the book that invite reflection on conceptions of God.

In the chapter *More than Stones*, which deals with the different places of worship, the story of Jacob and the ladder to heaven is introduced: "Jacob dreamed and saw a ladder reaching from the earth to the sky When he awoke, he was afraid and said, 'This is a holy place. This is where God dwells. Here is the gate to heaven'." (p. 63) Under the picture of Jacob dreaming, the children find the questions: "Is there a connection between heaven and earth? Jacob says: This is where God dwells - how can he know that? Doesn't God live somewhere else entirely?" (p. 63)

An example of a thematically loose connection can be found in the chapter *on expressing oneself*, in which prayer is considered. About a first approach to the prayer on the basis of silence it says on a double page, which illustrates individual comic-like pictures of Berlin with in each case different animals on it: "Also in the noise of the large city one can hear, how everything is connected. Some call that GOD. Let me tell you what Amalia experiences in Berlin". (p. 78-79) Under it, the following questions are to be read: "How can it be actually that each animal tells something completely different from God? Each animal tells something different from God - how does that come? Do they have to argue now? Can animals believe in God?" (p. 78-79)

b. Bible

In the chapter *Books are like movies in the mind*, a heading reads *The Bible tells: What God is Like*. Below that is the painting "The Return of the Prodigal Son," in which the youngest son kisses the father's hand and the older son watches what is happening. It goes on to read, "Sometimes people came to Jesus, wanting him all to themselves. 'Don't put up with the others,' they said, 'not with these losers!' 'Losers?' asked Jesus then, telling a story of a father and his two sons ..." (p. 115) This is followed by the question directed to Jesus as to why he was telling it. The question section states: "What is going on with the elder son? What does Jesus want to explain with this story? Do you wish you had a father like that?" (p. 115)

c. Different expressions of religious faith

In the same chapter, there is a double page spread titled *When it snows in Jerusalem, the camels wonder ...*. There are drawings showing children in Jerusalem, snow and camels. The children argue about which god made the snow and set out to find an answer to this question and to whom the snow belongs. There is also the line of text that the snow has a secret and that God, like the snow, also has a secret. The questions below are: "How did

God come to be? And whether he really exists? Once? Twice? Three times? ...". (p. 118-119)



Abb. 2: From the chapter *Books are like movies in the mind* - subtitle: *when it snows in Jerusalem* (Evangelische Kirche, 2020, 118-119)

Analysis:

With regard to the *concepts of God*, the textbook works with individual aspects that are put up for discussion with the help of the questions. Ambiguity is not presented here, but generated by the questions. An explicit way of dealing with it is not recognizable and is not explicitly suggested. It can be assumed that the generation of ambiguity is also intended to initiate an accepting approach.

In the example of the *biblical dimension*, it can be seen that various hermeneutic reading aids are offered when the heading says that the story shows what God is like, when a historical context is outlined where people do not want Jesus to deal with so-called losers and Jesus reacts to this with this story. The questions here encourage more of an answer, less of different interpretations.

On the basis of the third dimension, the snow event in Jerusalem is used to show the ambiguity that exists due to *Different expressions of religious faith* in the three Abrahamic religions. The questions formulated for this purpose show both the tension and the desire to resolve it. The motif of mystery is presumably intended to introduce the idea that this question cannot be resolved and remains with God. The further questions about God's origin and his existence are further intended to make visible or first generate

the ambiguity between the reading of a world *etsi deus daretur and etsi deus non daretur* (cf. D. Bonhoeffer). Regardless of the fact that this snow frame narrative seems very constructed, because children probably prefer a snowball fight to this dispute, the intended handling of the ambiguity presented remains vague. The reference to the secret can be classified as an attempt to accept the question as unsolvable and thus to let plurality be plurality. The mystery motif, however, can also be understood as an attempt to synthesize or unify the different positions. Here, it probably depends on how the teacher relates the different interpretations to each other. Overall, it would be worth considering where and how students are given the opportunity to expand their conceptions of God in a structured way in terms of content and to make connections. The questions scattered throughout the book stimulate thought, but are presuppositional and could overwhelm students without a material foundation or leave them in a speculative vagueness.

3.3 Course book Religion elementar, 5th/6th grade, Haupt-, Real- und Gemeinschaftsschulen (Secondary schools)

a. Ideas about God

The chapter *My God! - What do you look like?* starts with a blackboard picture showing different Wh-questions, each with a different set of answers (e.g., Where does God live? Everywhere - Heaven - In every person). With one of the tasks on the next page, students are asked to talk about each question and try to find answers together in each case. On a subsequent page, different student statements are printed (e.g., I don't believe there is a God because you can't see anything; you can't understand God or he wouldn't be God). Students are asked, among other things, which statements they agree or disagree with and how they would justify their position.

The next page is titled *Biblical Experiences with God* and brings in as an example the story of Moses at the thorn bush - which the bush was on fire, but was not consumed by the flames - in which God announces his name "I-am-there-for-you" (p. 84). The thorn bush is not discussed further, because the students are supposed to think about the name of God and about possible situations where they noticed that God was there for them; the opposite experiences are not asked. This track is also followed on the next page, when it is introduced with the heading *God honors his name* and biblical verses are introduced to describe the experience of God's nearness (p. 85).

At the end of each chapter, what the students know is summarized under 'Knowledge and Skills'. Following on from the beginning of the chapter, it can be read that people all over the world ask questions about God. Since there are no provable answers, everyone has his own ideas about God, whereby these ideas can always be only partial aspects, because God can never be completely understood. It is also mentioned that there are many linguistic images for God, because different people have had different experiences

with God. Also noted is the challenge of how God can be there even though he is not seen. This ambiguity is answered by the fact that there are things that are there although we do not see them, but their effect can be felt; accordingly, traces can be found that point to God (p. 90-91).

b. Bible

The chapter *The Bible* contains a factual introduction to the structure, origin and search strategies. In the chapter *Creation*, the presentation of Gen 1 and the Creation Psalm 104 is followed by a conversation between the religion teacher Mrs. Christ and her student, who doubts that the creation of the earth could have happened as in Gen 1, under the question “Was it all really like that?” (p. 109) In her answers, the teacher distinguishes between taking things seriously and taking them literally, points out that the sequence in the biblical narrative is similar to the scientific explanation, that the Big Bang was caused by God, and concludes by explaining the correct way to deal with the Bible. This consists in recognizing that the biblical stories do not answer the how-question, but other questions.

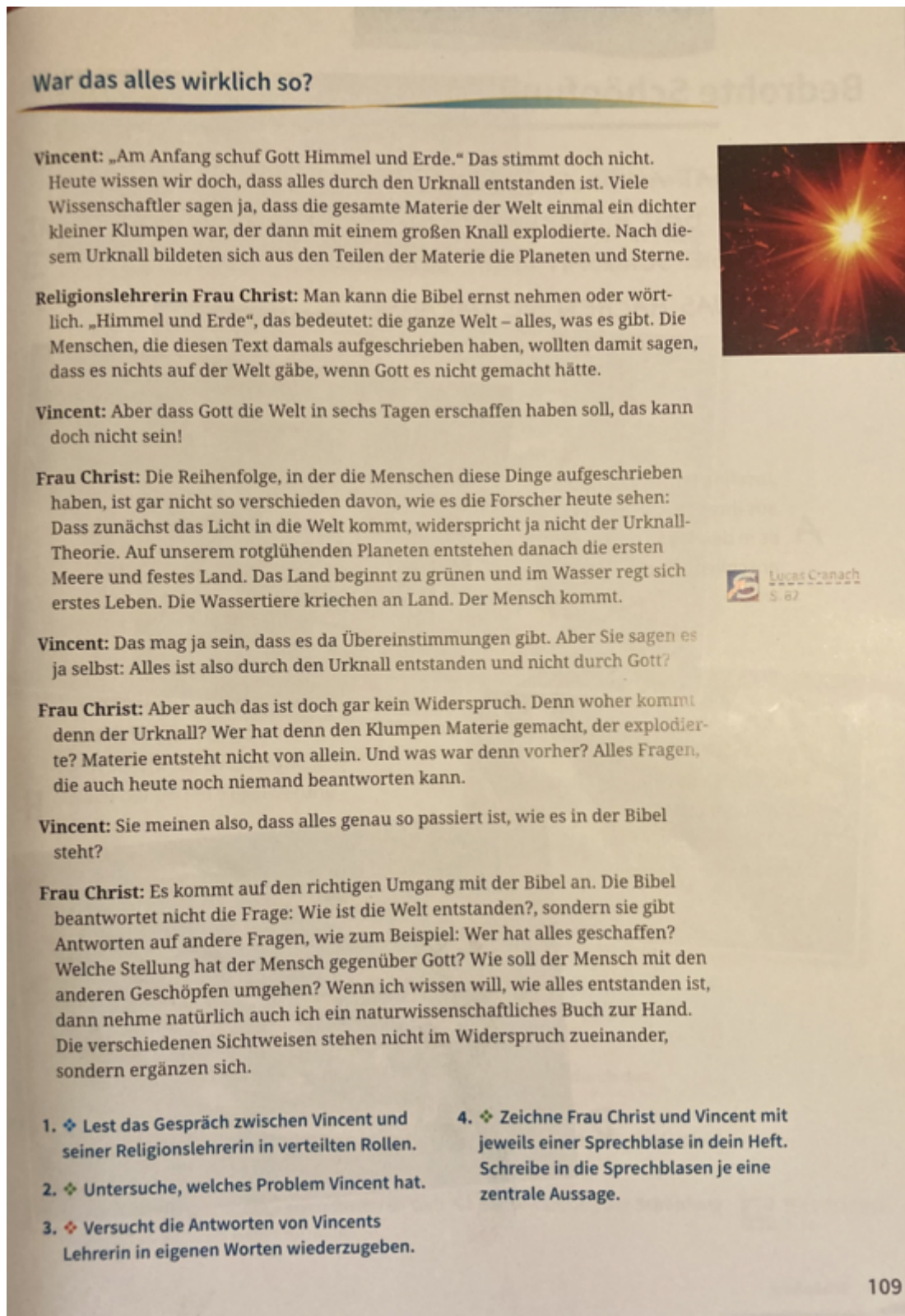


Abb. 3: Chapter Creation, subtitle: Was it all really like that? (Eilerts & Kübler, 2016, p. 109)

c. Different expressions of religious faith

In the last chapter of the book *World Religions Christianity, Judaism, Islam*, among the introductory questions in the chapter is the following: "Does everyone believe in the same

God?" (p. 178) This question is not addressed in the initial assignments, nor throughout the chapter. In the chapter, the three religions are introduced one after the other, with Christianity being titled "My Religion." (p. 180) The relationship is essentially established through the festivals, which are to be compared with each other. However, the students are also asked to compare the opinions of the three religions about Jesus (p. 187), which was explained in one sentence on the previous pages. Thus, Christians believe that "Jesus came into the world as God's Son to redeem mankind" (181); Muslims assume "that Allah sent prophets, including Moses and Jesus, to teach us his laws" (183); and Jews are guided by the fact that Jesus was a Jewish man, a rabbi, who is neither God's Son nor the Messiah (187).

Analysis:

In the chapter on *conceptions of God*, ambiguity is not only presented in different ways, but also different ways of dealing with it become apparent. At the beginning of the chapter, students are asked to perceive the different answers to questions to/about God and to come to a common answer, while in the summary of the chapter it is emphasized that these questions can only be answered subjectively and never completely. Ambiguity is presented here as a phenomenon resulting from unprovability. If an almost unifying treatment is provoked at the beginning, the preferred treatment cannot be assigned completely unambiguously. Are the subjective opinions synthesized below the idea of non-answerability, an acceptance of the subjective answering as well as the objective non-answerability suggested or is even an indifferent handling towards the solely subjective answering possibilities recognizable? It is also open why in the following only the experience of God's nearness, but not God's remoteness is discussed. Here it would have to be asked whether this approach is a unifying one, insofar as the ambiguity of God's experience, which also includes the experience of God's remoteness, is faded out. This is also supported by the summary at the end of the chapter, when it is emphasized that traces of God can be found even if he is not seen.

In the creation chapter not the ambiguities of the *biblical texts* are presented, but ambiguities due to different approaches to the world. This example shows possible overlaps between ways of dealing with ambiguity and a complementary understanding. Both strategies of unification are presented, insofar as on the one hand a correspondence between big bang theory and creation narrative is suggested, but on the other hand also hermeneutical readings are offered in order to synthesize, perhaps also to accept, the different approaches underneath.

In connection with the third area of exploration (*Different expressions of religious faith*), ambiguity is made visible on the basis of the religion-specific approach to Jesus, or the students are made aware of the ambiguity without a way of dealing being presented or suggested. It can be assumed that an accepting way of dealing with it is meant, since neither an offer of clarification nor of synthesis is presented. Since this non-resolvable

plurality is pointed out, an indifferent approach is not suggested. However, this interrelationship remains dependent on the pedagogical guidance, which can turn out differently.

4 Conclusion and Outlook

Overall, it can be seen that ambiguity is represented in the selected textbooks, and in some cases even generated. The chosen ways of dealing with it can be classified predominantly as synthesizing and accepting. Partly, however, unifying or indifference strategies (insofar as these can be described as active strategies) are also used. On the basis of the exemplary exploration, it can be seen that a sensitivity for the ambiguities present in the respective topics flows into the presentation of the topics and into the work assignments in different ways.

It is striking that the presentation and the handling of potential ambiguities and ambiguities that are constitutive for the reference religion differ from that presentation as well as those handling strategies that refer to any ambiguities between different religions. It is obvious that the visibility and perception as different, as distinguished and thus potentially ambiguous (socia-)structurally runs along implicitly, while the relationship to the ambiguities of the (own) reference religion is one that (implicitly) presupposes something common and grasps ambiguities as subjective expressions or leaves them to subjective decision.

The question is open here whether these are different kinds of ambiguities or whether the relation to the ambiguous can be described as different; certainly it could be instructive to pursue these differences more systematically and analytically. In that context, it would then also be possible to think more precisely about the potential that lies in a sensitization to and dealing with the ambiguous in the reference religion, as a contribution to tolerance of ambiguity and to interreligious-intercultural learning.

It would also be worth considering whether the question of the intertwining of vertical and horizontal ambiguities, as Bauer has pointed out, allows for a further differentiation. Also insofar - this would be a hypothesis - as it can be assumed that vertical and horizontal ambiguities can be perceived as interconnected in practice.

Furthermore, it is striking that ambiguities in the textbook for non-high school secondary education are addressed in a more reserved way, less hermeneutic reading aids can be recognized, and answers to potential ambiguities have a more clarifying character. Here, it would be worth considering whether learners might not want to be confused by teachers for (developmental) psychological or other reasons. An almost opposite strategy can be seen in the primary school textbook. Against this background, it would be necessary to gain more clarity about (developmental) psychological as well as motivation-theoretical preconditions and conditions for understanding and dealing with ambiguities

in order to be able to reflect on the appropriateness of ambiguity presentations and, starting from there, to specifically promote ambiguity tolerance. Furthermore, it could be informative to relate the development of ambiguity ability and tolerance to the development of complementary thinking and to differentiate between them.

Another open question is whether the (often rather implicit) goal of tolerance of ambiguity should not itself be open to question, in order not to be misunderstood as ambiguity itself and in order to take educational processes seriously as such. Of importance would be a differentiated description of the concept of tolerance of ambiguity also on the basis of the two different concepts within the term and the relationship, in order to also reveal normative implications and to work out differentiation aids for different types of ambiguities as well as ways of dealing with them.

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