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Editorial and Summary in English

by
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This Editorial is intended to make the major contents of the contributions in German known to an international readership. It is based on the supposition that such an additional overview of the journal's articles is more profitable to international English-speaking readers than just additional English abstracts at the beginning of each German article.

We appreciate any reactions and comments by readers from outside the German language context and are grateful for suggestions that can help us to further improve our journal's accessibility and attractiveness for an international readership.

(You are invited to e-mail your comments to manfred.pirner@fau.de).

This issue of Theo-Web consists solely of the Thematic Issue.

Several submitted texts for the section "Research and Discourse" unfortunately didn't pass the peer review process.

**Thematic Issue: Between religious indifference and militant atheism
– addressees of religious education beyond institutionalized or
individual religion**

**Introduction to the thematic issue: Expressions of non-consent to the Christian
religion as perceived in religious education discourse**

by Monika Jacobs & Bernd Schröder

In 1998, Karl Ernst Nipkow (*1928) in his programmatic book "Bildung in einer pluralen Welt" (Education in a pluralistic world) distinguished between four basic patterns of religious learning processes: a hermeneutics of "an already given consent to faith", a hermeneutics of "a consent to faith that has yet to be sought", a hermeneutics of "a long-existent non-consent and religious indifference" and a hermeneutics of "a consent that has been lost and is at present in a hypothetical floating state".¹

If one takes a look at the recent history of concepts and theories of religious education, one will soon realize that there has been a significant shift in the importance of these basic hermeneutical patterns. About 70 or 60 years ago, there was still a tendency to work with the pattern of an already given consent (by baptism and confirmation) which was then substituted by the pattern of a consent yet to be sought. The concept of the so-called "hermeneutical approach to RE" followed this idea on the basis that "children and young people [...] were still interested in religion" and willing to freely and constructively discuss religious contents.²

For several decades already, the hermeneutics of a lost consent has tacitly come to dominate RE pedagogy. There is a broad consensus that some rudimentary rest of religious knowledge and experience may still exist, but that by and large a lively commitment or an affirmative attitude towards the Christian faith has been lost. The

¹ NIPKOW (1998), 223; 232; 24; 252.

² Ibid., 233; 235.

context of the so-called break of traditions seems to require “experimental” and “open” forms of learning that invite learners to test religious contents and forms for themselves.³

However, especially in major parts of Eastern Germany concepts of RE based on such hermeneutics do not really work, because here, the dominant pattern among students is that of a life-long non-consent, their lack of religious affiliation going back to their parents and grandparents. Looking more closely, one may discover that in Western Germany, too, (as in other parts of Europe) increasingly more young people can be found who in fact have never endorsed any religious propositions or practice: The children and grandchildren of those great numbers of people who have left the churches since the end of the 1960s – about five million Protestants and about three million Roman-Catholics – are often without religious affiliation, distanced towards the church, and without any experience with the Christian religion.

It is the core question of this thematic issue, how these non-religious attitudes can be conceptualized and interpreted. The title suggests two preliminary distinctions between religious indifference and radical atheism on the one hand, and between institutionalized and individual religion on the other hand. The focus thus is on the diversity of what is mostly summarized as “without religious affiliation”.

PART ONE

ANALYSES ON PEOPLE WITHOUT RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

People without religious affiliation – „residual“ of Christianity or backbone of the new atheism?

by Gert Pickel

This text deals with the development of non-religious attitudes in Germany and their reasons. On the basis of empirical studies types of non-religiousness are determined and it is discussed in how far they are the expression of a ‚new atheism‘ or exemplary of a rather inspectacular loss of significance of religion. People without religious affiliation appear as a diverse group with partly diverging interests. Only a part of them are committed atheists, the greater part are people in whose every-day-life religion has long played no significant role any more. In this respect they mark the secularizing process that is going on in modern societies. Even if people without religious affiliation are not necessarily ‘religiously unmusical’, they pave the ground for a progressive secularization and alienation from Christianity by having broken with religious traditions in the forms of religious knowledge and rituals.

Non-religiousness, humanism, and religious tradition in Europe. An empirical study among young people without religious affiliation

by Boris Kalbheim und Hans-Georg Ziebertz

In the last decades, in Europe the proportion of religious and religiously affiliated inhabitants has decreased, the traditional churches have considerably lost social influence. This phenomenon can be perceived particularly in those European states that

³ Ibid., 257.

traditionally adopted the Reformation, while in countries with Catholic character the proportion of non-religious people has remained small up till today.

A comparison between young people without religious affiliation from Germany, the Netherlands, and Great Britain shows that their attitude towards the topic of religion is determined by the national religious traditions as well as by the involvement of the churches in present social activities. According to these findings, (secular) 'humanism' cannot be called a global world view, but is a particular phenomenon that has its roots in religious traditions, too.

Young atheists' attitudes toward religious diversity: a study among 13- to 15-year-old males in the UK (complete text in English)

by Leslie J. Francis, Gemma Penny & Alice Pyke

The purpose of this paper is to explore the social phenomenon of religious diversity through the eyes of young male atheists living in the UK. The responses of 1,761 atheists are compared with the responses of 2,421 theists across nine issues relevant to religious diversity. Overall the data demonstrate that young atheists are not only less interested in the challenges and opportunities offered by life in religiously diverse societies, but also less tolerant of the life styles and expectations or rights of religious people living in these societies. The implications of these findings are discussed in terms of community cohesion in which both religious diversity is becoming more visible and atheism may be increasing.

Religious indifference and religious education in the Netherlands: A tension unfolds (complete text in English)

by Paul Vermeer

Starting from a description of the worldviews of Dutch youths, this article argues that there is a growing tension between the aims pursued in religious education in school and the predominantly secular outlook on life of present-day youths. It is shown, that one of the reasons for this tension is the fact that religious education is a confessional subject in the Netherlands which is only part of the curriculum in religiously affiliated schools. Governing bodies of religiously affiliated schools and religious pedagogues are aware of this growing tension and have responded to it by transforming religious education into worldview formation. Thus the aim of religious education is no longer to socialise students in a religious tradition, but to help them develop a religious or secular worldview of their own. But also this new approach does not resolve this tension, because it still assumes a personal interest in religion and worldview among the young. The article, therefore, argues for a more radical reformulation of the aim of religious education in strictly cognitive terms.

PART TWO

ATHEISM IN ART AND PUBLISHED INDIFFERENCE

Denying God. Approaches of the 'new atheism'

by Edmund Arens

The notion of 'the new atheism' has increasingly been used in recent discourse. In the Anglo-American context, in particular, theories arguing against the existence of God and radically questioning any God-belief have been advanced over the past decades. The text distinguishes three types of such current God-denying concepts and introduces them. The positions are mostly influenced by a naturalism based on darwinism. Nine representatives of atheism with backgrounds from evolutionary biology, political theory and philosophy are sketched, and the way in which they challenge theology is discussed.

"Disgust against the Word of God" (Pascal Mercier). Atheism and religious indifference in autobiographically inspired literature

by Georg Langenhorst

"The theodicy problem" reveals itself as the "first and probably greatest problem in the God-relationship at all", Karl Ernst Nipkow wrote in 1987 in his influential book "Erwachsenwerden ohne Gott" (Growing up without God). Here he saw one of the major reasons why young people may lose their faith in God. However often this conviction keeps being cited, it has long been revised regarding present children and young people. In a comprehensive study a team of researchers around Werner H. Ritter and Helmut Hanisch was able to prove that the majority of students do not hold a belief in God any more that contains those elements necessary to generate the theodicy problem. It is clear that the theodicy problem can only arise, if the biblical – or at least a theistic – concept of God has been internalised to a certain degree.

The problem with art. Art and religion in present times

by Andreas Mertin

In contemporary art there is hardly any aggressive atheism. Artists, it seems, are too spiritual persons to commit themselves to such atheistic radicalism. They normally rather tend to be relatively indifferent, in particular as regards the institution of the church (and here especially concerning the ritual dimension). What is attractive for artists is the specific 'added value' of the spatial expressions of religion. Conflicts are likely when artists deal with the cross in a critical or playful-aesthetic way. It would, however, be helpful for the churches and for theology to learn to regard art as a form of visual work, a special way of uncovering new aspects and liquify preconceived or rigidified opinions. Theology's conflict with art is not a conflict about substance but one about perspectives.

PART THREE

DIDACTICAL PERSPECTIVES

What do you make of religion? Experiences with RE in Saxony-Anhalt

by Sylvia Hügel

As teacher trainer in the field of RE in Saxony-Anhalt the author reflects on her experiences and the challenges they pose. She starts with the difficulties she regularly faces when introducing her subject at parents' evenings where most people don't know anything about religion at all. Another problem is the dominance of non- and anti-religious students and teachers at school and in class that often forces religious students into defensive positions. This goes along with a lack of willingness to learn something new and change one's long-held ideas of religion and the churches. This situation requires a strategy for RE that sticks very closely to the students, their life-world and their questions, and that consistently explores which role religious perspectives and answers can *really* take in their lives.

Religious Education in a society with non-religious majority – challenges and approaches

by Michael Domsgen

Being without religious affiliation is not specific for Eastern Germany. The figure of those who do not belong to any religion is growing throughout Germany. About one third of the total German population is without religious affiliation. The Eastern states considerably contribute to this figure but especially in the big cities of Western Germany, non-religious people are increasing, too. For instance, in Hamburg only 40 % of the population belong to a Protestant or Catholic church.

Also, being without religious affiliation is not specific for Germany. One only has to take a look at the countries of the former Eastern Bloc (here in particular Estonia and the Czech Republic), but as well at Western European countries such as the Netherlands, where church affiliation has halved during few decades and where more than a half of the population is without religious affiliation now.

What seems specific, however, about the Eastern German situation is the profile of people without religious affiliation in quantitative and qualitative respect. This will be shown in the first section of the text. The following fundamental challenges for religious education that affect religious learning in all its dimensions, will be highlighted in the second section. The third section of the text reflects on the consequences for a concept of RE in the context of such a primarily non-religious context.

About anti-religious bus campaigns and atheistic propaganda – didactical suggestions to address criticism of religion as presented in the media

by Mirjam Zimmermann

The key word "criticism of religion" is no longer part of the high school curricula in Baden-Württemberg. One reason may be that, focusing on competences and standards, the present curricula take much less regard of contents than traditional curricula. This implies the problem that teachers have to work on the contents themselves, which, however, can also be seen as the chance that they are free to conceptualize topics themselves. For instance, they can react to current criticism of religion as presented in the mass media and address it in their teaching.

To this end, the text intends to offer support by introducing examples of criticism of religion from childrens books, youth books, commercial advertising and a medial discourse about the topic of circumcision, and by suggesting concrete teaching ideas.

Freethinkers and Religious Education – a spotlight from the Swiss canton of Zurich

by Monika Jakobs

In Switzerland, a religious education solely in state responsibility, independent of the churches is more and more being introduced on all school levels. It is to mirror the religious and world-view diversity of the Swiss society and aims at teaching the competences necessary to find orientation and be able to make informed decisions in it. In the process of producing teaching material for this kind of RE in the canton of Zurich a representative of the freethinkers' society was involved, together with representatives of different religions. Their feedback to the produced material was adopted for its final shape. The text documents an interview with the above mentioned freethinker; it can be seen as exemplary of non-religious opinions that in future will have to be increasingly taken account of regarding RE. The interview is contextualized by some theological and didactical deliberations at the beginning.