Anders gemeinsam – gemeinsam anders?

IN AMBIVALENZEN LEBENDIG KOMMUNIZIEREN

MARIA JUEN / GUNTER PRÜLLER-JAGENTEUFEL /
JOHANNA RAHNER / ZEKIRIJA SEJDINI (HG.)

Learning (in/through) Religion in the Presence of the Other

Accident and/or Test Case in Public Education?[1]

Matthias Scharer

1 What Is at Issue?

Throughout Europe, religious "monoculture", which has persisted into the 20th century in Catholic Tyrol, has given way to a world of varied religious convictions and cultural attitudes/world views[2]. This fact is challenged by the presence of an increasing proportion of Muslim citizens. To some this seems to give rise to "a market for religions"[3] competing with each other. Here there seems to be a variety on offer from which individuals can liberally choose, irrespective of traditional commitments, and thus arbitrarily combine/put together "their" religious product.

In contrast to this seeming arbitrariness/freedom of choice, a large number of Muslim citizens consider themselves bound to tradition in a way only known to members of an older generation of Catholic Christians recalling times of their youth[4]. This traditional orientation confuses some Christians – and Catholics in particular. To them the "foreign" religious practice appears to be more strongly bound to tradition than their own.

In the midst of this varied and surprising – sometimes even challenging – world of religions, religious studies/learning religion forces a new set of questions.

These are reflected in designs for:
- "Inter-religious learning"[5]

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[1] See SCHARER, MATTHIAS, "Learning (in/through) Religion" in der Gegenwart der/des Anderen. Unfall und Ernstfall öffentlicher Bildung, in: Österreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum 22 (2014), 93–102. The English text in this book differs from the German article in the journal. Here is the translation of the origin final lecture at the University of Innsbruck. German video of the final lecture see: http://streaming.uibk.ac.at/medien/c102/c1021081/m_scharer/index.html (4.7.2015).

[2] For a discussion of world views, religions, religious convictions and well-founded differentiations see MUCK, OTTO, Grundlagen des Sprechens vom Wirken Gottes im Leben von Menschen, in: SIEBENROCK, ROMAN A. / AMOR, CHRISTOPH J. (Hg.), Handeln Gottes. Beiträge zur aktuellen Debatte (Quaestiones Disputatae 262), Freiburg u. a. 2014, 105–131.

[3] See ZINSER, HARTMUT, Der Markt der Religionen, München 1997.

[4] See, for example, BÖHEIM-GALEHR, GABRIELE / KOHLER-SPIEGEL, HELGA, Lebenswelten – Werthaltungen junger Menschen in Vorarlberg, Innsbruck u. a. 2011.

[5] See LEIMGRUBER, STEPHAN, Interreligiöses Lernen, München ²2012.

- Religious education catering for a "plurality of religions"[6]
- "Inter-religious competence"[7]

For years I have worked with colleagues from here and abroad on Communicative Theology[8]. This is the concern which brings us all together at this conference and which informs the theme of this lecture. I am both unable and unwilling to provide an introduction to Communicative Theology here, but I can call to mind some few essentials of this approach:

Our view is that theology (that is, speaking of God) derives from the human person speaking of a reality which is unattainable and cannot simply be grasped from the library or the lecture hall but can be experienced at multiple levels of encounters, namely:

- At the level of the immediate meeting of men/individuals
- At the level of their experience and interpretations
- At the level of principled methodical, conceptually structured discourse

Theology refers to:
- Individuals and their history
- Processes in groups and communities
- Contexts and traditions, the Judeo-Christian tradition, for instance, among many others

As theological spaces they are significant because they make the reality of God present and actual.

On the background of Communicative Theology I enquire about the criteria for determining the place of religious education in public educational institutions, in preschool and secondary school. In adult and tertiary education, which takes a religious and cultural/world view, variety is the paradigm of religious education.

Here I refer to the American religious educator Mary C. Boys who created the phrase "Learning in the Presence of the Other"[9]. Learning in the presence of the Other is not the exception or even a threat to religious education but its test case.

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[6] See ENGLERT, RUDOLF u.a. (Hg.), Welche Religionspädagogik ist pluralitätsfähig? Kontroversen um einen Leitbegriff, Freiburg i. Br. 2012.

[7] See SCHAMBECK, MIRJAM, Interreligiöse Kompetenz. Basiswissen für Studium, Ausbildung und Beruf, Göttingen u.a. 2013.

[8] HILBERATH, BERND JOCHEN / SCHARER, MATTHIAS, Kommunikative Theologie. Grundlagen – Erfahrungen – Klärungen (Kommunikative Theologie 15), Stuttgart 2012. This book includes an up-to-date list of both book series on Communicative Theology.

[9] BOYS, MARY C., Learning in the Presence of the Other, in: Religious Education 103 (2008) 502–506.

2 Acknowledging Variety

Even if we assume the general acknowledgement/acceptance of the variety of cultural-religious worlds of learning/education we must, however, expect that the awareness of this fact will not have reached all aspects of society. In this context I can recall the following event: At a joint seminar organised by myself and my Muslim colleague Hamideh Mohagheghi on the topic of "The Image of Man in Islam and Christendom" last year we worked with a mixed group of Muslim and Christian students. The seminar was conducted with a focus on processes according to the principle of Theme-Centred Interaction (R.C. Cohn). We were concerned to make the religious diversity represented by the student group visible. Thus we switched between the secular university halls, the Catholic training centre for students of theology and the Bosnian Islamic religious and cultural society in Innsbruck. Both Muslims and Christians took part in the Catholic Sunday service in the Jesuit Church and the Muslim Friday prayers in the Islamic centre on a voluntary basis. When leaving the Muslim prayer room, I overheard a Catholic student whispering to his fellow student: "But these are all Tyroleans". By "all" he meant those mainly male members of the congregation who, in the most part, spoke Tyrolean dialect.

It is possible that there is no space in Europe that is not affected by the diversity of religions and world views of Muslims, Christians, Jews and Buddhists and from which they could draw, as if from a reservoir, in order to establish their own identity in the absence/presence of the Other. Based on my own experience I can claim: Whoever is prepared to learn in the presence of Others in an existential way, will be missed by the Other just as the Other will be missed by them/him. Although this does not necessitate physical presence, learning in the presence of the Other has a different quality than the many inter-religious dialogues that take place. If – as is the case now – Ramadan is imminent, then I find myself in a personal relationship not with Muslims in general, but with Hamideh, Hülya, Ednan, Zekirija, Fuat and all the names my Muslim colleagues bear. I know further that the fellow believers/sisters and brothers in faith are thinking of me when we celebrate Christmas or Easter together.

Inter-religious dialogue provides a substantially inadequate description of what learning in the presence of the Other is about: It is the immediate meeting of individuals with different religious or cultural backgrounds, which are foreign and are allowed to remain so without this affecting the relationships between individuals. Indeed, it is the foreignness and the Other-ness that adds the spice to our relationship.

The existence of a variety of religions and world views/cultural perceptions is a public fact. We who come from different religions and cultural perspectives do not meet only through our families and private encounters. With our varied backgrounds we generate public space. Thus I claim precisely the opposite of what is suggested by the privatisation or secularisation hypothesis, i.e. that religion in a modern or late modern society is considered private and that the public educational space should be devoid of it. This concerns the human right to religious freedom: Is it to be interpreted as either freedom from religion or freedom to manifold religions and cultural views in the public space?

2.1 The Second Vatican Council

The controversy concerning the variety of cultural views and religions caused the Second Vatican Council to set a number of new principles. Only some of these can be recalled here:

- The central significance of conscience: The council calls it the most concealed centre and inner sanctum of the individual, where she/he is at one with God, whose voice can be heard from within.[10]
- The emphasis on the right of every individual to freedom of religion[11]: In this context children's rights are particularly important to me, as children are least protected when exposed to religious abuse when religion is turned into an ideology.
- Recognition of many paths to salvation in different religions and their specific value/esteem.[12]

This means neither an
- Inclusivism, as the indiscriminate absorption of other religions and cultural attitudes into one's own.
- Nor exclusivism, as a dogmatic isolation of one's own truth claim.
- Nor undifferentiating pluralism, claiming that we are all the same/all one and believe essentially the same thing.

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[10] See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World "Gaudium et spes" (7 December 1965), Art. 16 (GS 16); A German-language version can be found in: RAHNER, KARL / VORGRIMLER, HERBERT, Kleines Konzilskompendium. Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils, Freiburg i. Br. u.a. 2008.

[11] See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Declaration on Religious Freedom "Dignitatis Humanae" (7 December 1965) (DH).

[12] See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions "Nostra Aetate" (28 October 1965) (NA).

The question is how can we do justice to the different relationships which define individuals with different religions and worldviews?

2.2 Religious Education and/or Catechesis

What does this mean for religious learning in public education, specifically for religious education in schools? In this respect in the public educational space the distinction between religious education and catechesis in the community/parish has been established in German-speaking countries in reaction to cultural diversity and pluralism. This is made even more decisive by the fact that we must take into account the background of the faithful whose faith is challenged by this reality and by those who call themselves atheists/unbelievers. According to the unanimous decision of the Würzburg Synod[13], a distinction was made between religious education in public schools and catechesis in Christian communities.

During the synod, now more than forty years ago, this distinction led to a liberation of religious education in public spaces. Religious education was no longer founded on theology and the church but based on the goals of public schooling. At the same time a certain amount of estrangement occurred between religious education and catechesis, particularly concerning its theological foundation. The tension was increased by a specific interpretation of catechesis and practical theology as expressed in the well-known speech by Cardinal Ratzinger, the later Pope Benedict, on overcoming the crisis of catechesis.[14] Practical theology did not merely define itself as a continuation and concretization of systematic theology but as an independent discipline, which, influenced by neo-Marxist and positivist philosophy, extended its influence on theology.[15]

It is understandable that such a view would have near traumatic effects on religious education, which had to distinguish itself from such an interpretation of catechesis and theology. In particular as the old interpretation of catechesis was reflected in Pope Benedict's criticism of Austrian religious education and the books educators used during his pontificate.

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[13] See BERTSCH, LUDWIG u.a. (Hg.), Beschlüsse der Vollversammlung (Gemeinsame Synode der Bistümer in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1), Freiburg im Breisgau 1978; SCHARER, MATTHIAS, Der Synodenbeschluss zum Religionsunterricht in der Schule: heute gelesen und im Blick auf morgen weitergeschrieben, in: Österreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum 17 (2009) 30–38.

[14] See RATZINGER, JOSEPH, Die Krise der Katechese und ihre Überwindung. Rede in Frankreich, Einsiedeln 1983.

[15] See RATZINGER, Krise der Katechese, 15–16.

2.3 New Distinctions

In the meantime, the distinction suggested by Michael Grimmitt,[16] a religious educator from Birmingham,[17] has been adopted by numerous European professionals in the field:[18]

- Learning about religion
- Learning from religion
- Learning religion or learning in/through religion, a term also used by the Dortmund religious educator Bert Roebben.[19] Learning religion belongs exclusively to the internal sphere of religions, i.e. the Christian congregations, mosques and synagogues.

In contrast to such a division of religious learning spaces into public and church, or internal religious spheres, I would suggest some gradual transitions.

Should children, youths and adults in public spaces be deprived of the possibility to learn about their own religion and that of others through believers and their thoughtful and responsible conduct to gain experience and understanding, i.e. to learn *in* a religious context? It is not true to claim that it only makes sense to speak and learn *about* and *of* religions on the basis of such encounters and the experiences gained from these.

A necessary precondition for switching between learning *about, of* and *in/through* religions is that learning *in* religion is to be found in immediate experience and in the conduct of religious life. Religious life is liberated from

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[16] See GRIMMITT, MICHAEL, When is "commitment" a problem in religious education?, in: British Journal of education studies 29 (1981) 42–53.

[17] A paradigmatic case for the confrontation with the plurality of world views and religions in Europe is provided by religious education in English schools. Under the Education Act of 1944, religious instruction was determined to begin with a daily act of collective worship, i.e. daily Anglican Christian services at school. In 1988, the economically motivated Education Reform Act defines religious education as obligatory but takes into account the right of the parents to dispense their children from all religious activities at school. Furthermore, religious education is exempted from attainment targets and assessment procedures. There is no nationally binding syllabus for religious education. However, nowadays religious education – a term used since 1988 – submits itself more and more to the standardized system so that there now exists a recommended model for religious education which is demographically adjusted. But it was just this standardisation that lead to disagreements concerning the proportioning of the respective religions. Conservative Christians exerted their pressure so that 51 % of study time is now devoted to the Christian tradition and the remainder to other religions.

[18] See MIEDEMA, SIEBREN, Contexts, Debates and Perspectives of Religion in Education in Europe. A Comparative Analysis, in: JACKSON, ROBERT u.a. (Hg.), Religion and Education in Europe. Developments, Contexts und Debates, Münster u.a. 2007, 267–283.

[19] See ROEBBEN, BERT, Religionspädagogik der Hoffnung. Grundlinien religiöser Bildung in der Spätmoderne (Forum Theologie und Pädagogik 19), Berlin u.a. ²2011.

a mono-religious or even catechetically confined view; this liberation is fostered by coming in contact with the Other on the same level.

However, in this form of living *in/through* religion, there exists the fear that there would eventually be no room for the deductive transfer of faith and doctrine in catechesis.

We are, however, rather more interested in "learning in the meeting of the Other", where in contrast to learning *of* religion – frequently equated with the inter-religious model – authenticity and immediacy and the freedom of meeting are prioritized.
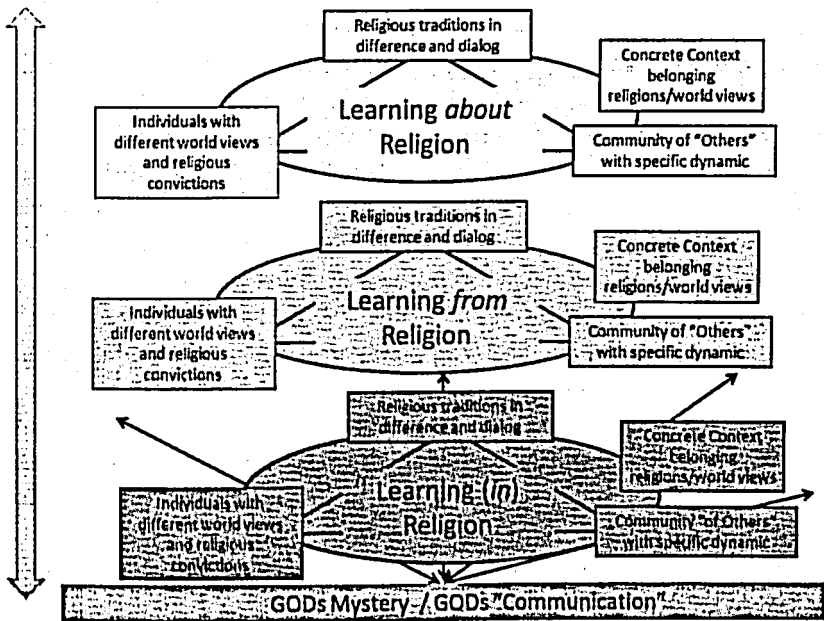
3 Holy Ground

More significant than the separation of catechesis from religious education and learning *in/from/about* religion are questions concerning the specific nature of religious communication as far as it concerns the Other. Specifically, the public educational space generates the challenge inherent in the fact that cultural religious learning as a meeting with the "Foreign Other" requires a high level of sensibility on all levels. It turns into a test case of humane and appropriate education, which, from my point of view, begins from childhood and appears as a comprehensive and sensitive series of communicative events and not as a strategy of efficient knowledge transfer.

In effective religious practice – i.e. learning *in* religion, understood as religious learning in the presence of the Other – being competent in the selective authentic treatment of one's own and the Other's religious convictions gains in significance. Neither can we expect a kind of religious soul-searching in each and every possible situation and one's cultural orientation and religious conviction being exposed in public – from a Christian perspective this reminds us of the "arcane disciplines" of the early Church – nor are we concerned to hide our own convictions even in their own symbolic ritual practices.

Certainly the expression of religion in the public educational space raises the question of the sensitive balance between one's own needs and the freedom of the Other. Neither one's own freedom nor the freedom of the Other is to be impinged upon. In this respect there are points of comparison with creative language or expression in other subjects of study.

In this context the metaphor found in the Old Testament in Moses' confrontation with God (Ex 3), which the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar already drew on, seems applicable. It is the metaphor of holy ground, which can be transferred to the intimate religious sphere. We can only tread on the Holy Ground of the foreign Other barefoot, that is with the greatest amount of respect and only with regard for the greatest possible freedom of the Other. One should certainly not trample on the Other, even if this were to happen in the context of religious education. Religious transgressions are perceived by individuals as being similarly injurious as are sexual transgressions. If both transgressions coincide, the destruction of the individual is most radical.

The ability to interact with competence in a non transgressive, non injurious or even abusive way, dealing with religions and cultural attitudes whilst not ignoring the differences, belongs to the most basic religious competences to be shared by as many citizens as possible in an open society. It cannot be acquired by creating educational spaces that are as religiously and confessionally neutral as possible, but by providing individuals with the opportunity to practice an open, differentiated and at the same time respectfully sympathetic dialogue with a variety of convictions – all within the framework of a faculty for mutual understanding and recognition of differences. Thus, selecting confession- and religion-free experts, who know a lot about religions and cultural differences, does not per se preclude the dangers of cultural and religious oppression and transgressions to which modern societies react in such a sensitive way. Individuals bound to confessions and religions are generally better in communicating beyond the limits of their own religion, as they are better able to understand the dif-

ferences, limits and transgressions and the abuse of religion based on their own experiences.

The first comprehensive investigation of the construction and determination of levels of religious competence in public education by Dietrich Benner[20] confirms that inter-religious competence correlates positively with the extent of religious education received. The authors recommend that, this being the case, the Protestant Church should not withdraw from religious education because this would have a counterproductive effect on the inter-religious competence of relevance to society.

The acquisition of inter-religious contact competences in future-oriented public education, not restricted to the learning *of/about* religion, requires the presence of confessional and religious teachers and consultants for young people at public schools and other public educational institutions. These must focus not only on the knowledge about, but in particular on the meeting with people of different faiths and cultural backgrounds.

According to this, specific religious competence acquired at a theological faculty should combine a well-founded knowledge about religions and cultures – particularly concerning one's own – with the necessary authenticity, sensibility and communicative competence required by the meeting of individuals in the presence of the Others.

4 Strategic Treatment of the "Foreign Other"

The meaning of the term "Foreign Other", the experience of being perceived as foreign and the concept of the Other as a mirror, has for years been extensively researched and discussed. As Bernhard Waldenfels[21] observes, "the Foreign" is an object for which disciplines compete.[22]

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[20] BENNER, DIETRICH u.a. (Hg.), Religiöse Kompetenz als Teil öffentlicher Bildung. Versuch einer empirisch, bildungstheoretisch und religionspädagogisch ausgewiesenen Konstruktion religiöser Dimensionen und Anspruchniveaus, Paderborn u.a. 2011, 138–139.

[21] See WALDENFELS, BERNHARD, Das Fremde im Wettstreit der Disziplinen, in: GMAINER-PRANZL, FRANZ / SCHMIDHUBER, MARTINA (Hg.), Der Anspruch des Fremden als Ressource des Humanen, Frankfurt/M. u.a. 2011, 11–23.

[22] See, among others, LARCHER, DIETMAR, Fremde in der Nähe. Interkulturelle Bildung und Erziehung im zweisprachigen Kärnten, im dreisprachigen Südtirol, im vielsprachigen Österreich (Dissertationen und Abhandlungen / Disertacije in razprave 27), Klagenfurt 1991; SUNDERMEIER, THEO, Den Fremden verstehen. Eine praktische Hermeneutik, Göttingen 1996; ARENS, EDMUND (Hg.), Anerkennung der anderen. Eine theologische Grunddimension interkultureller Kommunikation. Helmut Peukert zum 60sten Geburtstag (Quaestiones disputatae 156), Freiburg i. Br. 1995; SOLBACH, RENATE / DÜSSEL, REINHARD, Die Macht der Differenzen. Beiträge zur Hermeneutik der Kultur (Hermeia 4), Heidelberg 2001; KOHLER, HÉLIANE, Exterritorialité, énonciation, discours. Approche interdisciplinaire, Bern 2010.

The challenge of the Foreign or the Other in the educational and social context provides a powerful motivation for attempting to reach the goal we term social integration. Integration is of significance not only to individuals with a different cultural or religious backgrounds but also in regard to limitations of various kinds. These include linguistic and cultural differences as well as physically and cognitively different abilities which are considered deviant. A placard of the Austrian Caritas which once read "Whoever cannot love is disabled" provided a useful inspiration to reflect on the changeable and one-sided perception of impairment.

Whatever is perceived as Foreign or Other and identified as such by society must undergo a process of integration. The manifold attempts to integrate, to reconstruct, to revive, to renew, to repair an assumed/presumed communality or unity that is seemingly threatened by the Other, plays a dominant role in the educational goals of a plural(istic) society. How difficult integration can turn out to be, even for those who are willing to integrate, is illustrated by the comment of a Muslim student, who belonged to the third generation of migrants and was an Austrian and European Union citizen from birth, made at the seminar: "As much as I try to become a Tyrolean, it has turned out to be impossible. In the eyes of many I am and will always be a migrant."[23]

This view of integration in the public educational space is of great significance for religious learning/education, even if belonging to another faith is publicly perceived as some kind of limitation on what could be learned in a secular school or a secular kindergarten.

A particular challenge is presented by the attempts at integration in kindergarten, the first public educational space for many children. In her report on the promotion project, the Salzburg child educator Bettina Brandstetter[24] describes the kindergarten in its heterogeneity of cultures and religions.

In her view, kindergarten teachers are presented with a dilemma in the choice between homogenising and pluralising. Should they treat all children as equals and share the opinion of one of Brandstetters colleagues, who says "the children from other countries soon fit into the group and to me all

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[23] Martina Kraml pointed out that we can here observe what Foucault called subjectivization and others call attribution. The Other determines the bounds of self-determination. However I perceive myself, I cannot assert myself if others see me differently. I am entangled in a network of attributions, that defines the bounds of my personal development.

[24] See BRANDSTETTER, BETTINA, Zwischen Homogenisierung und Pluralisierung. Der Ort der Kindergartenpädagogin in der Heterogenität von Kulturen und Religionen, in: GMAINER-PRANZL, FRANZ / GRUBER, JUDITH (Hg.), Interkulturalität als Anspruch universitärer Lehre und Forschung (Salzburger Interdisziplinäre Diskurse 2), Frankfurt/M. u.a. ²2012, 89–104.

children are equal irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. We are like one great family..."[25] or should they pursue a pluralising strategy according to which cultural and religious variety is highly valued?

The author can show convincingly that the strategy of pluralisation can result in a number of challenges for the children of the cultural majority. These children should experience the Other as an enrichment and as an extension of their competences and should learn acceptance of individuals who are different. The cultural specifics of the children of a non-Austrian culture could be introduced as highlights of everyday life at the kindergarten.

Brandstetter sees some advantages and disadvantages in both strategies. She argues for the possibility of a third space. This is found in a strength/weakness strategy somewhere between homogenising and pluralising. What is conspicuous is that neither the kindergarten teacher nor the researcher can transcend strategic thinking and action. Her goal is to increase efficiency by selecting the most effective strategy to harmonize, pluralize and to combine them in the third space.

5 "Learning (Religion)" in Strategic Contexts

It is not just due to a supposedly careless use of terms that Brandstetter wants to deal with the challenge of a heterogeneous kindergarten strategically. Here she is in good company and in accord with the educational concepts furthered in the European Union.

The concept of strategy reminds us of the philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas. He distinguishes between instrumental, strategic, or communicative action. I cannot explicate the distinction in detail here. But I can note here that for Habermas strategic action, following instrumental rationality, is incompatible with communicative action, but it reflects social reality. According to Habermas, strategic action is subject to the danger of being determined by other interests and finally by deception and violence, whilst communicative action aims at generating understanding within a variety of truth claims.

The context in which learning religion in public education spaces – increasingly in Christian churches – occurs is a strategic one, but I do not venture to make claims about other religions. The specific vocabulary, whose effect should not be underestimated, plays a significant role. In the present educational glossary, the educators Agnieszka Dzierzbicka and Alfred

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[25] BRANDSTETTER, Zwischen Homogenisierung und Pluralisierung, 92.

Schirlbauer[26] have critically reviewed concepts like educational standards, blended learning, diversity management, excellence, flexibility, gender mainstreaming, human capital, lifelong learning, soft skills, etc. in a deconstructive mode. In the preface Ulrich Bröckling (University of Constance) writes: "The ironic comments on newspeak in the time of Pisa confirms this power. They make fun of rampant 'evaluitis' and await with interest the next ranking, making jokes about the pain of lifelong learning and defining a module in the context of high school pedagogy."[27]

Let me reflect on two pedagogical/educational strategies in whose context religious learning in public spaces takes place.

5.1 When One's Heart Hangs on/Depends on the "Outcome"[28]

"The shift from teaching to learning"[29] as the Festschrift for the well-known high school/university educator Johannes Wild is titled, implies a central change in the European Union's understanding of education. The focus on learning should shift from the seemingly ineffective consideration of educational goals to an efficient strategy for competence-oriented learning.

Standardised and valuable outcomes and outputs focus learning strategies on measurable learning results. The novelty lies in the awareness that learning consists of the acquisition of competences. Gestalt theory spoke of competences decades before the OECD and Pisa studies made competence the leading concept of learning.[30] Even the notion of habit (habitus) can be linked to the definition of competence which, in my thinking, is used in language didactics. Yet here we are concerned with a more flexible perception of competences than a tightly defined one which is restrictively framed in mechanistic programmes which define educational standards.

In contrast to this, I consider the very reasonable and creative way, how Austrian religious educators of all religious communities face the challenge of formulating competence orientated educational standards. Transcending

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[26] See DZIERZBICKA, AGNIESZKA / SCHIRLBAUER, ALFRED (Hg.), Pädagogisches Glossar der Gegenwart. Von Autonomie bis Wissensmanagement, Wien 2008.

[27] DZIERZBICKA / SCHIRLBAUER, Pädagogisches Glossar, 7.

[28] See SCHARER, MATTHIAS, Wenn das Herz am Output hängt. Kommunikativ-theologische und religionsdidaktische Kompetenzorientierung in Religion, in: Österreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum 18 (2010) 16–24.

[29] WELBERS, ULRICH / WILDT, JOHANNES, The shift from teaching to learning. Konstruktionsbedingungen eines Ideals. Johannes Wildt zum 60. Geburtstag (Blickpunkt Hochschuldidaktik 116), Bielefeld 2005.

[30] See LEITMEIER, WALTER, Kompetenzen fördern. Gestalttherapeutisches Lehrertraining für Religionslehrer, Berlin 2010, 348.

religious and cultural borders, they agreed on the basics of confessional and religious education for which the religions claim responsibility.

5.2 Global Immunity or Learning Global Responsibility

In their small cartography of the "European educational space", the Dutch educators Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons go so far as to claim that in the European educational dogma entrenched educational concepts, which go back to the Enlightenment, would be perverted in the following way:

> "To be entrepreneurial (unternehmerisch) spells the escape of the individual from their self-inflicted un-productivity. Un-productivity is the inability to use human capital without being determined by others. This lack of productivity is self-inflicted when the cause of it is not found in the lack of human capital, but in the lack of courage and determination to use one's human capital without determination by others."[31]

It is certainly astonishing that, as the two educators warn of a global immunity, encouraged by economized learning strategies, Pope Francis speaks of the globalization of indifference in rich countries. "Without really noticing it we become incapable of feeling sympathy towards the painful outcry of the Other, we no longer break into tears in the face of the dramatic fate of others, nor are we interested in caring for them as if their situation were not our responsibility which should concern us all."[32]

6 Perspectives as Potential for Hope

Where learning religion/religious learning in the presence of the Other takes place, some expect clear cultural religious positions and arguments to demonstrate the superiority of one's own convictions in contrast to others. One could ask whether such truth claims represent the most traditional strategies of churches and religions. With respect to the Catholic Church this misunderstanding has repeatedly become evident in the context of catechesis and missiology.

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[31] MASSCHELEIN, JAN / SIMONS, MAARTEN, Globale Immunität oder Eine kleine Kartographie des europäischen Bildungsraums, Zürich 2012, 84–85.
[32] See POPE FRANCIS, Evangelii Gaudium, 96.

Some also believe that the strategically orientated educational space can only be regained by using a counter strategy. On the level of religious learning the concern is not to prove that one or more religions can prove and retain their validity against other religions or the convictions that determine the secular educational sphere.

Pope Francis, whose authenticity and humility continue to inspire us all, has repeatedly and surprisingly encouraged this kind of learning in the presence of the Other. He has introduced a new tone to the Catholic Church in his apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. Francis does not want a church "concerned with being at the centre and which then ends up by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures"[33]. True power lies not in a truth claim, driving the desire to use argumentation to convince the cultural and religious Other, but in the service of others and the world. Religious education in the public space cannot be anything but diaconic, understood as a liberating service to humanity in all its facets.[34] Religious learning is not an additional strategy for the efficient spread of faith and religion; rather, it is a change of perspective on the world and life in general. In this respect religious learning generates competence.

In everyday life we feel pity for individuals who have lost all perspectives on life or reality. Perspectives transcend the given, the easily doable and the efficient. They bear within them a potential for orientation and hope, which acts as a gift to individuals transcending cultural and religious bounds. This also applies to the reality of death, as the end of hope, which either has to be accepted without a perspective or can be changed through the hope for new life. From this point of view hope and life are related. The perspective of a good life for all, as it is called, does not refer to short-term happiness; such a perspective contains a future, even when it is not perceived in Christian terms. To facilitate the meeting of individuals, which always occurs in the presence of the Other, communication here proves to be the key on different levels and from different perspectives.

Pope Francis addresses the potential for life and hope to be found in human communication when he writes:

> "Today, when the networks and means of human communication have made unprecedented advances, we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a 'mystique' of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic,

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[33] POPE FRANCIS, Evangelii Gaudium, 49.
[34] See the dissertation project of Alexander van der Dellen.

can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage."[35]

The Pope hopes that greater possibilities of communication provide a greater chance to meet and develop a sense of solidarity.

7 "Communication" in Meeting/Communion/Understanding and Persisting Difference

The well-known Viennese physicist Herbert Pietschmann wishes to replace the *cogito ergo sum* by *communico ergo sumus*, i.e. "I communicate and therefore we are" or "We communicate and therefore I am. The individual alone is not a true human being. Only through the ability to communicate does the individual become a human being."[36]

Human communication as a process of "symbolically communicated interaction"[37] that realises meaning represents a category which can be extended in the context of cultural attitudes and religions. From a Christian perspective, the understanding of communication in each person not as an enforceable event is rather the experience of human relationship as a gift in which the otherness, the other and finally the unfathomable secret of God can all at the same time bring us to experience closeness and kindness.

From a theological perspective, learning religion in the presence of the Other is the gift that can free us from ideologizing and violent impositions of cultural attitudes and religions, to which we are exposed in secular spheres of learning. It is no longer the certain knowledge about religion, about individuals and the last things that is the focus of learning: Not the inter-religious dialogue that is always threatened by the non-committal but, as well expressed by the Protestant religious educator, the common search for a truth that would provide certainty, hope and orientation to life.

A living communicative process repeatedly ascertaines truth which opens up many opportunities for attachment, entrance and differentiation in learning religion in the presence of the Other on all levels. Only in an authentic and respectful dialogue between individuals with different cultural and religious backgrounds can this be achieved.

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[35] POPE FRANCIS, Evangelii Gaudium, 87.
[36] See PAWLOWSKY, PETER, Grenzen der Wissenschaft. Interview mit HERIBERT PIET-SCHMANN, in: Quart. Zeitschrift des Forums Kunst-Wissenschaft-Medien der Katholische Aktion Österreich 1 (2014), 4–6.
[37] See BURKART, ROLAND, Kommunikationswissenschaft. Grundlagen und Problemfelder, Wien u. a. ⁴2002, 35–66.

I am most grateful that the theological religious educational conversation with Muslim colleagues in Innsbruck was not conducted as an abstract inter-religious dialogue, but as a deep and friendly meeting between individuals in our fields of research. This dialogue for sure will continue to validate its usefulness beyond my retirement. Religious learning in the presence of the Other is not an accident, but the test case for public education with a great potential for the future.