Drifting away from religion? A perspective from German teacher education

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Abstract

Due to the dynamic situations in Germany and other Western European countries, the break with religious traditions has been already completely achieved and a far-reaching spiritual-religious plurality has been formed. Against this backdrop of a multitude, in part contradictory, spiritual signs of the times, even prospective teachers of religion can no longer assume an already established and reflected spiritual-religious identity. The following article indeed will deeply explore and interpret personal and professional experiences through self-reflection and writing and relate these, for example, to religious, cultural, and social implications. In addition, it will reflect more closely the field of tension between pluralistic-secular life-world and (Christian)-religious traditions in which prospective teachers of religion find themselves and present a time-sensitive and addressee-oriented spirituality module supporting them in establishing their own spiritual-religious identity. It is hoped that this sustainable and communicable model serves to enable teachers of religion to communicate about it (with pupils) and to meet others' religious identities in an open and empathetic way.

Disebabkan oleh keadaan yang dinamis di Jerman dan Negara-Negara Eropa Barat lain, pemutusan tradisi keagamaan telah tercapai sepenuhnya, dan kemajemukan spriritualitas agama sudah terbentuk. Dengan latar belakang beragamnya tanda-tanda spiritual zaman ini, sebagian kontradiktif, calon guru agama tidak dapat lagi mengambil identitas spiritual-religius yang sudah mapan dan mencerminkan identitas spiritual-religius. Artikel berikut setidaknya akan mengupas secara mendalam dan menginterpretasikan pengalaman pribadi dan profesional melalui refleksi diri dan tulisan reflektif dan mengaitkannya dengan

agama, budaya dan implikasi sosial. Selanjutnya, makalah ini akan merefleksikan lebih dekat terkait ketegangan antara dunia kehidupan pluralistik-sekuler dan tradisi keagamaan (Kristen) di mana calon guru agama menemukan diri mereka dan menyajikan modul spiritualitas yang sensitif terhadap waktu dan berorientasi pada penerima yang mendukung mereka dalam membangun identitas spiritual-religius mereka sendiri. Diharapkan bahwa model yang berkesinambungan dan komunikatif ini memungkinkan guru agama untuk berkomunikasi dengan murid dan untuk bertemu dengan identitas keagamaan orang lain secara terbuka dan dengan cara yang penuh empati.

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Introduction

In contemporary Western European societies, an increasing plurality and a simultaneous trend towards secularity are among the defining characteristics of spiritual-religious life-worlds. The break with, religious traditions is also considered to be largely complete in Germany, which is sometimes reflected in the fact that institutions such as the Catholic Church are losing more and more validity and have already had to give up their former monopoly position. Such developments, which concern so-called signs of the times and will be outlined in more detail in this article, sometimes lead to the fact that even prospective teachers of religion, who ultimately want to make reflections and questions about the existential, religiosity, and spiritual, their profession, can no longer assume an already established and reflected spiritual-religious identity. Rather, this represents a goal, possibly even an ideal. In view of this situation, the question becomes virulent as to how the training of future teachers of religion can adequately take into account the developments that have just been briefly

outlined and will be further elaborated, on or how future teachers of religion can be supported in establishing their own spiritual-religious identity. This should be sustainable and communicable as well as enable them to communicate about it (with pupils) and to meet others' religious identities in an open and empathetic way. In the following article, precisely these questions will be explored and corresponding concepts and methods will be presented.

Religiosity and spirituality in postmodernity

It is certain that the project of describing contemporary life in terms of spiritual-religious contexts means a confrontation with a distance from God felt by many people and also with far-reaching indifference to God. However, this does not mean that the desire for contingency awareness must automatically be weakened in times of growing crisis awareness. Breaks with tradition that have already taken place and a turning away from institutionalized and communally experienced religiosity can certainly favor spiritual search movements – after all, they reflect the desire of the contemporary individual for self-determination also with regard to religiosity and spirituality – or even lead to a resurgence of the desire for religious rituals that provide security and a clearly defined religious identity. Such a quest for meaning and orientation reveals both phenomena of privatization or individualization of religion and an increase in the desire for the intensity of experience in multiple facets up to a partly fundamentalistic return of religion in certain social milieus (Riesebrodt, 2011). According to this, religion today is on the one hand decisively characterized by "individuality, autonomy, patch-work-like construction and changeability" (Möller & Wedding, 2017), and on the other hand by the desire for rules and commitment. Accordingly, current religious or spiritual offers are of an increasingly complex and confusing nature and are often combined with each other. The radical pluralism manifested here and a certain syncretic character

leads to a significant degree of contradictoriness, which is mainly due to partly opposing trends (Englert, 2006).

Breaks in tradition and their after-effects

Since the 1950s, theology and the church have lost their sovereignty of interpretation with regard to both religiosity and spirituality. Functional differentiation has limited the religion to its own separate sphere alongside politics, science, art, etc. For many people, religion has become a "private matter" and is thus at least partially withdrawn from the public sphere. Moreover, the willingness of many to join religious institutions and follow their norms is dwindling. These are often perceived as too ideological, disturbing, and threatening (von Stosch, 2012). They have therefore clearly lost popularity, at least among the general public (Woppowa, 2018). For many, the interest in a community with corresponding rules and rituals is to be assessed as extremely low and also limited in time. Others, however, seem overwhelmed by increasing plurality and therefore long for clear rules and organizational structures. It can be observed, for example, that in times when warlike conflicts have returned to Europe, religious rituals such as ringing bells or memorial services for the victims of war have gained in popularity, and not only on the part of religious or practicing people. Thus, spiritual offers and patterns of interpretation meet with a kind of welcoming culture, especially in the context of the crisis.

Outside of this, it can be said that belief in God is certainly desired by some, but without being tied to the denominational (Ebner, 2018): "Consequently, with regard to the self, religious identity can in principle be understood as a dynamic process, but not as the result of ideological sophistication: identity here means the reflexive ability to self-identify – in the constant process of confrontation with the foreign, the other, the alternative, as well as in the constant process of critically appropriating and selectively

adapting confrontation with one's own Christian-religious world of origin" (Drehsen, 2001).

In this context, it is noteworthy that although the question of God is currently coming back into focus as a result of this ongoing critical engagement with religion, it is at the same time possible, and increasingly practiced by many, to live completely without God.

The new possibility of secularity with simultaneous radicalization tendencies

For the first time in history, this is possible and socially accepted. With Charles Taylor, secularity can therefore be seen as a framework of still possible, but no longer indisputable (Taylor, 2020) The formation of religious-spiritual identity thus becomes more of a short-term project that can be adapted to the respective circumstances of life and exists alongside many others. However, it has been shown that such diffuseness and fast-movingness (Woppowa, 2018), triggered by processes of privatized handling of religion and increasing globalization, are of a double nature (Keupp, 2012). On the one hand, the contemporary individual clearly gains freedom of choice and decision, and new possibilities for self-realization open up; on the other hand, precisely this can lead to an unsettling lack of orientation as well as to excessive demands in terms of tendencies towards radicalization: "Lost home, fragile relationships, uncertain life worlds lead to identity crises on the part of individuals as well as groups." (Boschki, 2017) In this sense, one can speak of an ambivalent liberation of the individual through postmodernity (Wagerer, 2012).

Individualization and pluralization

Religious plurality is expressed primarily by extracting fragments from diverse spiritual offerings and combining them with one another. In this way, a patchwork religiosity (Drehesen, 2001) or the syncretic world of meaning(s)

emerges, which is subject to the increasing influence of Asian religions without divine power, wellness offers, and holistic healing efforts, as well as of secular meanings from the fields of art, culture, and politics. In a post-migrant society, in which the question of majorities or minorities can already be considered at least partially outdated, being born into a certain life context is, therefore, less decisive than the fact that the individual is faced with the task of making various choices on life, particularly with regard to the area of religion and spirituality (van Knippenberg, 2002). Today, predominantly, it is no longer just a question of belonging to a religion, but of how this personal religiosity is lived out (Charim, 2018). However, such a space of opportunity or decision does not apply, or only to a very limited extent, to those social milieus in which a strengthening of fundamentalist views of religion can be observed. Accordingly, the focus here is on a narrowly defined area that defends against external influences.

In principle, one can speak of a development from "trust in God to trust in oneself" (Wodtke-Werner, 2016) because the "appropriation and transformation of religion has undergone a characteristic change of perspective and paradigm under the conditions of social individualization: It is not conformity with the prescriptions of the church system that is decisive, but compatibility with the experiences of the religious subject." (Drehsen, 2001) In the foreground is the respective own development history of the individual, into which religious ideas and orientations must fit. Thus, the direction of vision has turned: The focus is now no longer on the formation of the person by religion, but on the integration of religious traditions into the person's search for life and meaning. That this individual finds his or her way is decisive (Englert, 2006).

Contradictoriness

Living with various uncertainties and an increased awareness of the ambiguity of existence (Roebben, 2020) make the individual increasingly look for what supports, comforts and gives (supposed) security. Two basic trends can be observed in this regard: On the one hand, there is a recourse to a spiritual market of possibilities, on the other hand, a strengthening of religious organizations and identity structures with a clear tendency towards fundamentalism can be witnessed.

The spiritual market of possibilities offers a wide variety of options and invites people to choose or construct their own individual religiosity: "The individual is, as it were, released from the obligatory power of his or her social and traditional determinants into an ambiguous freedom of religious self-determination." (Drehsen, 2001) However, such a "self-construction" often is not sustainable because it risks not to be coherent in itself and therefore does not satisfy rational demands. Such spirituality is thus largely vague and not infrequently esoteric, which favors developments and experiences of identity diffusion or chaos (Woppowa, 2018). At the very least, a multifaceted contradictoriness manifests itself when, for example, non-religious rationality – in the sense of a sober, purely empirically oriented view of the world – goes hand in hand with irrational religiosity that does without agreement on different (faith) statements (Englert, 2018). Thus, on the one hand, certain tensions can be felt between secularization tendencies and a resurgence of spiritual-religious search movements up to fundamentalist currents in certain cultural milieus (Riesebrodt, 2011); on the other hand, something new can emerge through precisely this complex interplay of pluralization and secularization (Grümme, 2017): "The interesting thing is that both have found each other: a (diffuse) religiosity without rational claims to justification and a rationality without (concrete) religious contents of consciousness." (Englert, 2006) While the number of spiritual "seekers" is growing, that of the spiritually "apathetic" as

well as that of the fundamentalists is increasing at the same time. The former is indifferent to religious questions and the answer of traditions even more so (Halík, 2020), the latter use religion not only as an orientation as an answer to the impression of being lost in a strongly pluralized world of life, but sometimes as a justification of a patriarchally oriented structure of organization and authority (Riesebrodt, 2011).

Spiritual search movements

The preceding analyses have shown that there is a great abundance of spiritual search movements of the most varied nature. Accordingly, there seems to be at least a desire to transcend the mundane and search for deeper meaning. Gottfried Bitter interprets these developments as "spirituality hunger [or] hidden longing for heaven, [as] God longing" (Bitter, 2007) which "are kindled by virtue of the Holy Spirit" (Bitter, 2007). In view of the above-outlined tendencies towards indifference to God and religiousness, it remains to be asked how many people such striving for religious security and closeness to God is really significant. However, it is certain that religiosity and spirituality are also important for the individual of the present, even if in a different form. Thus, it is true to a great extent that religion has changed.

The multitude of spiritual search movements indicates that the thesis that has been put forward for two centuries, according to which religion would become virtually superfluous with the advance of scientific knowledge and would gradually disappear altogether, is not confirmed in this way (van der Ven, 1998). Therefore, it is by no means sufficient to understand man merely as an *animal rationale* in order to be able to approach his essentiality and mysterious nature. Rather, man should also be perceived as an *animal spiritualist* (Bucher, 2009), because spiritual connectedness is to be understood as a basic human need (Rosenberg, 2009).

The distinction between religiosity and spirituality

Up to now, the terms "religiosity" and "spirituality" have largely been used synonymously. This in itself can be interpreted as a reference to the fact that the terms in question are usually mixed up in general usage, which, however, increases the danger of their meaning becoming increasingly unclear (Ebner, 2018). In order to achieve greater clarity, these will now be differentiated, because this distinction is essential with regard to the research question posed at the outset.

The term "spirituality" is derived from the Latin word spiritus and originally meant "air", "breath" or even "wind". However, the Hebrew term *ruach*, in addition to meaning the divine breath that hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation, can be interpreted as "enthusiasm" (Num 11, 25) (Bucher, 2014). Thus, it describes phenomena of a life practice from the power of the (Holy) Spirit. Spirituality is currently a collective term that is used in a wide variety of contexts and stands for numerous forms of life. The concept of spirituality is therefore multidimensional and broad (Bucher, 2014). It can look back on a long history, which is fed by Hellenistic-biblical roots: A spiritual life here means one that is shaped by a spiritual center, by God. Starting from European-Christian monasticism, spirituality gained increasing importance and since the 17th century has been declared a principle of life recommended to all Christians. From the 20th century onwards, the concept of spirituality has undergone a significant broadening of meaning and it has become a symbol for a conscious as well as alternative life beyond the boundaries of the religious (Bitter, 2007): "Yesterday, spirituality was something explicitly related to religion, namely that form of life that emerges from personal, everyday contact with God; today, spirituality is rather a general cultural phenomenon that is critical of the zeitgeist and is characterized precisely by non-identification with what is generally customary." (Bitter, 2007)

The term "religion" goes back to the Latin word *religio* "conscientious consideration" or "recommitment". The corresponding verb *relegere* thus means "to bind back" or also "to consider something with care". With regard to a distinction between the term religiosity[1] and spirituality, reference should first be made to Jan Woppowa, who makes a general approach to the concept of spirituality by describing it as a dimension of human experience that relates to faith[2] and religion, but is not identical with them (Woppowa, 2018). Birgit Heller conveys a more differentiated understanding of the two terms by emphasizing that the term "spirituality" in particular can be characterized as fuzzy. Accordingly, it is difficult to distinguish it from the term "religion". However, an at least rough distinction is possible, because it can be assumed that "religion" in the current understanding is mostly regarded as a system or, according to the etymology of the word, is (re)-bound to a faith community. "Spirituality", on the other hand, is seen alongside "religion" and more as an alternative to religious forms of organization (e.g. churches), which many contemporaries regard as outdated or, for various reasons[3], associated with a negative image. For many people, therefore, the term "spirituality" has far more positive connotations and is more attractive because it is less institutionally charged and ideologically loaded (Heller, 2014).

Both from the discussion of the characteristics of postmodern spirituality and from the necessary differentiation between the term religiosity and spirituality, it can be concluded that most people today cannot be described as

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[1] It is also possible to make a distinction between the terms "religiosity" and "religion": While "religiosity" rather means the individual behavior in concrete religions, the term "religion" aims at the objective side, at the institutionally constituted with its respective own rites, etc. However, both "religion" and "religiosity" are concerned with reconnecting a reality constituted by the world and human beings to the transcendent and numinous. Therefore, both terms are clearly different from "spirituality", because the latter emphasizes the independence of belief (from a religious community) in current usage.

[2] The term "faith" refers to man's personal relationship with God.

[3] Examples include dealing with abuse, lack of equal rights for women and men, loss of connection to the living world of the contemporary individual, potential for violence and fear of radicalization etc.

religious, but rather as spiritual. If spirituality is understood in the sense of self-transcendence or as a search for meaning or striving for embedding in a larger whole, which definitely has transcendent references, the designation "spiritual" applies to numerous people. It must also be taken into account that there is a great deal of diversity among these spiritual convictions. At the same time, a clear shift away from established religion can be determined, so that the number of people who can be described as religious in the traditional sense is increasingly decreasing. Not to be forgotten and to be carefully observed should be the trend, already drawn attention to, of resorting to religion as a place for cultivating backward-looking and freedom-threatening traditionalism or fundamentalism. This, too, is a social task and a special mission for religious education.

Tasks for religious education teacher formation

As part of pluralistic contemporary societies, prospective teachers of religion are themselves confronted with the signs of the times outlined above, and their own spiritual-religious identity is shaped by them. They should therefore learn to know and interpret the signs of the times in two ways: on the one hand, in order to better understand themselves or to be able to fathom their own spiritual identity, and on the other hand, in order to be able to approach the (spiritual) life worlds of their students. The two also go hand in hand, especially when the teacher is seen as a spiritual guide.

The question of how a personal and, above all, profession-oriented spirituality can be established, lived, and accompanied is essential and gains virulence in view of the genesis of professional identity or spirituality of new generations of religious education teachers, who have increasingly experienced less religious socialization from the family and church congregation (Lück, 2012), is of great importance. This is also confirmed by the theologian Viera Pirker: "A Catholic (normal)-biography structured by sacraments without risks

and breaks is no longer a matter of course even for Catholic religious education teachers. And so, also with regard to this professional group, it is an open question whether the long-term accompaniment of changing life courses and fragile life concepts is planned on the part of the Church, as well as whether and how it can be accompanied in a sacramental perspective." (Pirker, 2019)

In view of all this, the acquisition of purely cognitive knowledge in theology studies should be complemented by offers to establish spiritual-religious competencies. The wealth of knowledge acquired in this way during the study period, or the formation of spiritual-religious resources from the Christian faith, should above all strengthen theology students and religious education teachers in the initial phase of their careers, with the aim of being able to act more confidently in the area of tension between faith and the world in which they live, and also to learn to deal better with demands that are made from a wide variety of side such as from the church, societal and school authorities.

Between minimum conditions and unavailability

According to the theologian Christhard, students who have taken up their theology studies solely for pragmatic or extrinsic-utilitarian motives tend much more often to change or drop out of their studies (Lück, 2012). Therefore, first-year students should have "at least an interest in the faith experiences of others and a positive view of Christianity and the Church, as well as a positive relationship to the theologian's fields of work and activity" (Jung, 2004) i.e. a certain passion for theology and its neighboring disciplines. Manfred Pirner also comments on the question of how "faithful" theology students should be. He refers to the model of Stefan Huber (2008), which addresses this specific question in the following areas: an intellectual dimension in the form of religious knowledge, an ideological dimension consisting of attitude and faith content, a ritual-practical dimension in prayer, liturgy, etc., an experiential

dimension concerning the relationship with God, and an ethical dimension that relates to many areas of life. It is worth noting that according to this model, all dimensions should be brought to bear with regard to the (future) religious education teacher, even if to different degrees (Pirner, 2012), which makes a high standard clear. After all, an intensive familiarity with the faith and a living relationship with God are presupposed here, which should be expressed in everyday activities, but also in liturgical performances: "Anyone who cannot do anything with the Christian faith itself should not become a Protestant or Catholic teacher of religion." (Pirner, 2012) There is a consensus – even across Christian denominations – that "a religious education teacher should have a religious orientation and be able to identify with the religion or denomination he or she teaches." (Pirner, 2012)

However, this is by no means about an unshakeable faith that uncritically believes all catechisms and confessional writings to be true, but about the assumption of responsibility for serious theological work and the readiness for constant spiritual-religious search and further development, i.e. a critical, living and mature spirituality. After all, one does not "have" one's faith like an unchanging possession (von Stosch, 2021): subjective appropriation and critical examination, a reflected faith and the ongoing development of religious competence are necessary. (Pirner, 2012) This means an awareness of one's own biographical and cultural conditions, an open attitude towards those of a different religion, but also the consciousness of unavailability, in the sense that faith is always to be seen as a gift, which God gives voluntarily (Schambeck, 2010) and man accepts just as voluntarily: "Mystagogy is a process that is conditioned by God and man. Therefore, although it takes place in a certain historical way, it nevertheless remains unavailable, both in terms of its conditions and its goal." (Schambeck, 2010) If this real process is transferred to the context of religious education, the teacher of religious education takes on the role of the mystagogue who, with God's help, introduces the pupils to the

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mysteries of life. In order to be able to do this, however, it is necessary for the teacher to be an expert in this field, i.e. to have already had mystagogical experiences, to be able to classify them intellectually, to communicate about them, and to stage them didactically. Consequently, this is an interplay of activity and passivity, of giving and receiving. Both students and teachers as well as God are involved in this interplay.

It is essential that spirituality, given its unavailable character, should not carry with it anything coercive. This view correlates with the authority of the Gospel, which focuses on the form of the request by addressing those invited to their freedom (Moltmann, 2018) Thus, it is within the realm of possibility that not "every teacher of religion [...] wants to be understood as a mystagogue" (Schambeck, 2010) who introduces students to the mystery of faith. On the one hand, this is to be respected for the reasons described, on the other hand, the exercise of the profession is linked to the minimum conditions presented above, which should also be respected if religious education is not to lose its special spiritual mission, which – at least in denominational forms – is closely linked to the teachers' sense of mission. Thus, the demand on the professional profile oscillates between the necessity of a religious positioning and the establishment of a professional spirituality as well as the requirement of not wanting to exert coercion and pressure on (prospective) religious education teachers. Ultimately, the aforementioned area of tension cannot be resolved without further ado. Rather, it is important to take it seriously and to look for ways to explore it conscientiously and to shape it as positively as possible.

The spirituality module

With regard to the development of a spirituality module, which aims to support prospective teachers of religion in establishing their personal and professional spiritual identity, the following conception can be useful: In a first step, the so-called "typifying" is to take place, which aims to gain greater clarity and

orientation with regard to the status quo concerning the spiritual-religious identity of prospective teachers of religion. The following questions will guide this process: What does spirituality mean to me? What specific approaches can I find to it? Is there something that "carries" me in this respect or supports me in my search for meaning and in coping with contingency in my personal life? Do references to the religion already exist that I can strengthen and that can strengthen me? Within "typing", the main aim is to initiate or strengthen self-reflection with regard to the role of the spiritual in one's own life. However, it is by no means about a classification into a rigid system in which an already prefabricated objective religiosity is simply imposed on the person. Rather, the focus here is on paving paths of spiritual-identity development within which constant processes of negotiation between objective and subjective religiosity take place.

In this regard, it should be pointed out that a model-like character does not imply any specific guidelines that are simply to be emulated, but contains something fundamental that can be used and made fruitful in different situations for different purposes and addressees (Ziebertz, 2010). For example, just as there are many models of Christian living, there are also many individual approaches that are needed to generate a spiritual architecture that is truly sustainable in both the personal and professional spheres. In relation to teachers of religion, this means that they should follow their own spiritual path or have the basic willingness to engage in such development processes and to actively shape their spiritual life in order to deal with it again and again. In this respect, the ability to reflect plays an essential role as a basic competence with regard to an adequate exercise of the profession of religious education teacher. Thus, the paradigm of self-reflection should be in the foreground as an essential element of the (initial) training of teachers of religion.

The second step within the model is supposed to consist of the so-called "confronting", which basically describes a duality in unity: The focus here is

initially on the acquisition and "incorporation" of primarily cognitive knowledge, i.e. a confrontation with the objective faith and here above all with the Christian proprium, which is brought to bear in the various disciplines of university studies. Already at this stage, however, an engagement with other denominations, religions and world views etc. is not only desirable but also indispensable due to social developments. In all of this, it is essential to gain an inner perspective with regard to one's own denomination, which also includes relating one's objective faith to one's subjective faith, possibly also initially establishing the same.

In the third step, "subsuming", the focus should be on reflecting on whether and how one's own person fits the professional profile of a teacher of religion and how this role can be fulfilled as adequately as possible while taking its spiritual dimension seriously. Even if there cannot or should not be a ready-made and "rigid" professional profile and it is certainly possible to practice the profession (well) in different ways, certain necessary minimum requirements must be determined, without which sound religious education is simply not possible. Thus, in the final step, "Accept or Negate", it should be a matter of examining for oneself personally whether there is sufficient aptitude and willingness to be able and to want to practice the profession of religious education teacher. In this respect, it is not a question of the spiritual-religious identity of the prospective teacher of religion being already mature – this can hardly be the case, because in this respect the path character should be in the foreground. Rather, reflections should be made on whether there is a genuine willingness to acquire religious knowledge, to engage in a spiritual journey and a relationship with God, to examine for oneself whether there is sufficient interest and curiosity regarding the spiritual-religious dimension of reality and a certain religious musicality that enables one to be able to communicate about religious questions, especially with pupils.

The so-called "acceptance" in this case would mean wanting to embark on a spiritual journey or a religious learning path and want to continue it permanently. Such "acceptance", but also "negation", can be considered as an expression of (religious) maturity, because conscious and responsible decisions are made with regard to one's own future, but also with regard to those of the students.

It is essential that „acceptance" is also connected with a critical view of social and institutional structures. Thus, it is at least to be hoped that religious education teachers, in a prophetic manner, also draw attention to the danger of misuse of religion, and practise social as well as system criticism, especially in the area of school and church, when it is necessary. This is about taking responsibility for one's own person and their spiritual identity as well as the willingness to help others in the development of their spiritual identity. In all this, one should not lose sight of one's own spiritual polyphony by becoming aware of, including and taking into account all levels of the transcendent. After all, these are an inseparable part of the respective spiritual path of the teacher of religious education or their religious architecture and also promote the openness of teachers of religious education towards their students. Last but not least, it should be emphasized that "acceptance" is associated with an awareness that the Christian faith fundamentally stands for affirmation of life and joy of living and thus for a contemporary Christian mysticism that is characterized by openness and readiness for dialogue.

Methodological setting: autoethnography as a possibility for spiritual self-reflection

The teaching of religious education is not exclusively focused on a professorial positioning of the teacher and thus primarily cognitively justified, but a narrative and biographical approach can also be pursued which, in addition to the indispensable acquisition of cognitive knowledge, has made not only

personality formation but also the generation of the greatest possible openness for basic existential questions its task. After all, the latter in particular are always spiritually and religiously charged in religious education. At this point, methodological aspects, i.e. the question of the implementation of the goals pursued with the model, should be dealt with very briefly. To this end, the narrative and biographical approach of auto-ethnographic self-reflection will be discussed.

Ethnography (from Greek ἔθνος (ethnos) = people and γράφω (grapho) = I describe) originally means the description of a people and is therefore to be understood as a reference to the cultural anthropological roots of this approach. The focus is on the cultural aspect; people and their behavioral patterns are considered and analyzed in the context of the surrounding social, ecological and historical environment. The style of knowledge follows heuristic principles in that previously unknown or foreign things are to be discovered and opened up for scientific discourse (Friebertshäuser, 2010). Particularly in times when firmly established social lifeworlds and styles are increasingly dissolving and social life is composed of newer and more individual forms and ways of life, research strategies are needed that can both provide precise descriptions and take into account the perspectives of all participants, their subjective and social constructions of the world (Flick & Kardorff, 2008).

Basic principles of knowledge

While ethnography focuses on participant observation (Breidenstein et al., 2020), autoethnography concentrates on the self or self-observation. Through self-reflection, authors explore personal experiences and link them to aspects of the lifeworld in specific areas (Ellis et al., 2011). A particularly great challenge here is to take an internal as well as, if possible, simultaneous external position on the inner events. Autoethnographic reflection processes oscillate between closeness and distance because the change between participant and observer

perspectives on a person is combined. The following questions are central: What is actually going on here? How exactly do everyday and often seemingly self-evident routines take place? Ultimately, the aim is to alienate one's own culture and to understand it better through a change of perspective. All this presupposes a preoccupation with one's own, which is seen as the basis for training one's attention to what is foreign and irritating. This is done by first illuminating the (apparently) normal in order to then make specific changes in perspective (Bude, 2008). Following Pierre Bourdieu, this also includes reflecting on one's own positioning in the field of science and action and the associated perceptions and convictions concerning one's own professional environment. In addition, one's own professional cultural socialization, the respective theoretical perspectives as well as the biographical knowledge, presuppositions and hypotheses that have arisen.

Part of (auto)ethnographic research is a practice of writing and narration: writing calls for explication. The fleetingness of (social) events is fixed and can thus be opened up under a different temporal logic of slowing down. Such an approach enables in-depth analysis, which is linked to work on theories, stimulating processes of thinking in terms of possibilities and alternatives. In writing down what is observed and experienced, there is an alternation between reducing complexity through focusing and at the same time producing complexity through widening (Kelle, 1997). As "glasses" in the sense of structuring, viewing, and analyzing instruments, theories can open up new approaches and perspectives and thus alienate "original" interpretations.

Conclusion

Various demands from different sides, but above all the present and future signs of the times, demand that the role of the religion teacher not only becomes more intellectually resilient, but that he or she can also act as a spiritually inspired guide in school learning processes. This requires not only

theological or cognitive knowledge but also cultural hermeneutic skills, communicative abilities, and the establishment of one's own spiritual identity. In Western European post-secular contemporary societies, of which Germany is a part, religion and dealing with an abundance of different spiritual and religious currents, which have a shaping effect on both pupils and teachers, becomes an important task. In this respect, not only plurality and secularity are to be regarded as a challenge, but also the increasing tendencies towards radicalization in certain cultural milieus are becoming a central issue.

Even if it is clear that the institutional religions in Western Europe are currently losing influence, the search for meaningful answers to existential questions and uncertainties continues unabated. Teachers of religion can make important contributions with regard to the creation of meaning, spiritual orientation and dealing with crisis-related challenges. In order to be able to meet this high demand, a well-founded education is needed that not only relates theology and postmodern (Western European) life worlds, but also and especially – despite the existing disharmonies – brings them into a harmonious harmony in which polyphony also has its place.

In order for all this to succeed, adequate support for religious education teachers is needed, if possible, already during their studies. The planned module is intended to serve this purpose. In further steps, it should be filled with content, implemented in practice, and evaluated.

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