Uta Pohl-Patalong

VII. Learning in school and in the congregation. A comparison with regard to confirmation work

Traditionally, institutionalised religious learning in Germany takes place in two different locations: on the one hand there is Religious Education in school, on the other hand there is church-based teaching, i.e. Protestant confirmation classes as well as Catholic communion classes and confirmation catechesis. As both of these locations of education basically focus on the same contents and address the same group of adolescents, a clarification of the relation between religious learning in school and in the congregation is necessary and requires reflection. It is all the more surprising, then, that currently this relation attracts little attention in the respective pedagogical literature.[1]

In 1921, Friedrich Niebergall focused decidedly on the relation of school-based Religious Education and church-based confirmation classes.[2] And although his propositions cannot be automatically transferred to the 21st century, they still offer valuable suggestions for today. Niebergall argues that Religious Education and confirmation classes have different objectives. The former wants to educate pupils in order for them to participate in cultural life (*Kulturleben*) while the latter sets the focus on an independent religious identity (*religiöses Eigenleben*) as well as participation in congregational life.[3] However, Religious Education and confirmation classes share common contents regarding both

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[1] If anything, it occurs in anthologies as one topic among many, cf. Bernd Dressler, Schule und Gemeinde: Religionsdidaktische Optionen: Eine topographische Lageskizze zum Unterschied zwischen Religionsunterricht und Konfirmandenunterricht, in: id. / Th. Klie / C. Mork, Konfirmandenunterricht: Didaktik und Inszenierung, Hannover 2001, 133–151, who argues in favour of considering the distinction between both learning locations and their respective didactic possibilities in a "topographic perspective" (134) or Th. Böhme-Lischewski, Konfirmandenarbeit und Schule, in: id. / V. Elsenbast / C. Haeske / W. Ilg / F. Schweitzer, Konfirmandenarbeit gestalten: Perspektiven und Impulse für die Praxis aus der Bundesweiten Studie zur Konfirmandenarbeit in Deutschland Deutschland (Konfirmandenarbeit erforschen und gestalten 5), Gütersloh 2010, 213–222.

[2] F. Niebergall, Der Schulreligions- und der Konfirmandenunterricht (1921), in: Chr. Bäumler / H. Luther (eds.), Konfirmandenunterricht und Konfirmation. Texte zu einer Praxistheorie im 20. Jahrhundert, München 1982, 51–66.

[3] Ibid., 51.

Christian tradition and today's religion (*religiöse Gegenwart*). Niebergall then
gradually differentiates between both learning locations: While confirmation
classes are said to put more emphasis on the soul and the participants' volun-
tariness, Religious Education mainly focuses on reason and is less characterised
by voluntariness.

One should take up these considerations, although against the backdrop of a
different social, religious and didactical situation. Therefore, it seems useful to
ask for both similarities and differences between the respective locations of
religious learning. One must then divide the results into perceptions and con-
ceptual deliberations.

1.   Perceptions – on the state of religious learning in Religious Education and confirmation classes[4]

1.1.   Similarities

1.1.1. Reliable and designed religious learning

Of course church and school are not the only locations in which religious
learning takes place. Despite the dramatic diagnoses of a widespread break from
tradition, religious socialisation still takes place in many families as well as in
denominational kindergartens. Above all, however, religion is present in the
public sphere where it can take different and often diffuse and very disparate
forms. It is because of this considerable heterogeneity regarding religion and its
disparate public manifestations that places where reliable religious learning can
take place become more important. School and church, i. e. Religious Education
and confirmation classes, are the only institutions in society which appeal to a
wide target group and in which an intentional and reliable religious learning is
possible.[5] In these locations of learning, religion takes shape and becomes the
subject. Moreover, religious communication is promoted and the experience of
religion is communicated and reflected upon.[6] Hence, both learning locations
play an important role in dealing with diffuseness and inexpressibility con-
cerning religion in society. Religious Education and confirmation classes are

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4 'Confirmation classes' is used as an inclusive and linguistically short expression. A fixation on
   confirmation as final act of service and blessing is not intended.
5 Especially „since many adolescents hardly gain experience with 'lived religion' anymore, great
   weight is nowadays attached to attempts to make this 'lived religion' accessible in intentional
   and reflexive modes." R. Englert, Religionspädagogische Grundfragen. Anstöße zur Urteils-
   bildung (PTHe 82), Stuttgart 2007, 273.
6 Cf. U. Pohl-Patalong, Räume für Religion. Kirche und Schule im Kontext religiöser Pluralität,
   in: PTh 97 (2008), 186–205.

essential for Christianity, church and society – assumed that one considers some form of religious education to be a vital part of education itself.[7]

1.1.2. Religious learning within the context of plurality

In school as well as in congregation, religious learning takes place within the context of plurality. This does not only apply to the pupils' and confirmands' contextual environments but also to their own individual and heterogeneous backgrounds.[8] In both fields, one has to take into account the adolescents' various attitudes towards religion as well as their different religious beliefs, skills and experiences. Religious plurality is indeed diagnosed in Religious Education lessons but is very often interpreted mainly as a 'loss of religion'[9]. This is all the more so in congregational work, which has quite significant difficulties dealing with religious plurality as such.[10] In 2009, a nationwide study about confirmation classes in Germany was published. The study shows that up to the present day, commonalities and differences between the Christian confessions are not even a subject for discussion in most confirmation classes. Pastors usually reject demands for such topics referring them to Religious Education in school, while confirmands insistently ask for this.[11] Thereby, however, the church neglects an important task:

> "If the church itself cannot tell why one should be a member of it – considering the numerous alternatives – then it fails to give adolescents an essential answer and hence inevitably loses credibility."[12]

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7 Cf. D. Fischer / V. Elsenbast (Red.), Grundlegende Kompetenzen religiöser Bildung. Zur Entwicklung des evangelischen Religionsunterrichts durch Bildungsstandards für den Abschluss der Sekundarstufe I, Münster 2006, 13 ff.

8 For a more extensive reading cf. F. Schweitzer, Schule und Religionsunterricht, in: id. / R. Englert / U. Schwab / H.-G. Ziebertz, Entwurf einer pluralitätsfähigen Religionspädagogik, Gütersloh / Freiburg 2002, 159–171, here 159, who, together with his co-authors, develops and postulates for both learning locations a 'religious education which is capable of pluralism' (pluralitätsfähige Religionspädagogik).

9 Ibid., 160: "In practice, nobody seems to take into account that effects of pluralism do not always have to be interpreted as signs of a loss of religion."

10 For specific problems in dealing with plurality in the congregation cf. U. Schwab, Kinder- und Jugendarbeit in der Gemeinde, in: R. Englert / U. Schwab / H. G. Ziebertz, Entwurf einer pluralitätsfähigen Religionspädagogik, Freiburg 2012, 172–183.

11 Cf. W. Ilg / F. Schweitzer / V. Elsenbast i.V. mit M. Otte, Konfirmandenarbeit in Deutschland. Empirische Einblicke – Herausforderungen – Perspektiven. Mit Beiträgen aus den Landeskirchen (Konfirmandenarbeit erforschen und gestalten 3), Gütersloh 2009, 107 f.

12 F. Schweitzer, Neue Leitbilder für die Konfirmandenarbeit? Rückblick und Ausblick auf weitere Reformaufgaben, in: Th. Böhme-Lischewski u. a. (eds.), Konfirmandenarbeit gestalten, Gütersloh 2010, 271–282, here 279.

1.1.3. No religious learning without presuppositions

In both Religious Education and confirmation classes one cannot presuppose that the adolescents have had a specific Christian socialisation. This, however, does not mean they have 'irreligious biographies'[13]. The pupils and confirmands are not blank sheets of paper. Instead, they bring their own religious beliefs and shapings to class as well as their knowledge, which can quite often be diffuse. In order to encourage useful learning processes, one has to didactically appreciate and take this knowledge seriously – even if it is very heterogeneous and coming from different situations of socialisation. At this point, Religious Education and confirmation classes are closely related to one another because the quantity and quality of Religious Education have a significant impact upon the knowledge as well as the skills necessary for dealing with religious issues, which are also addressed in confirmation classes.[14] Conversely, confirmation classes impact Religious Education in the last years of school.

1.1.4. Reliable adults as role models

In both learning locations teachers act as reliable persons and role models when it comes to dealing with religious as well as existential questions and topics. Therefore, teachers play an important role. Not only do they impart knowledge, but they also act as orientation figures that are relevant for the adolescents' relationship to the Christian faith. In this respect, religion teachers as well as pastors, deacons, Christian educators (*Gemeindepädagogen*) and other people actively involved in confirmation classes, including young team workers, are also constantly participating as persons with a unique biography regarding their faith. In terms of Religious Education in school, the complex relationship between personal faith and the respective didactic consequences has been empirically well researched.[15] Thus, teachers use their own 'lived religion' as a resource for religious learning processes, for which they take responsibility. However, their 'lived religion' does not function as an immediate and unreflective model of faith but rather as a subjective and didactically reflected

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13 F. Schweitzer, Konfirmandenarbeit im Umbruch: bleibende Aufgaben – neue Herausforderungen, in: Th. Böhme-Lischewski / S. von Stemm / V. Elsenbast (eds.), Konfirmandenarbeit für das 21. Jahrhundert. Dokumentation zur EKD-weiten Fachtagung der ALPIKA-Arbeitsgruppen Konfirmandenarbeit vom 4. bis 6. November 2009 im RPI Loccum, Münster 2010, 14–22, here 16.

14 Cf. S. Kruse et al., Erhebung religiöser Kompetenz im Konfirmandenunterricht. Erste Ergebnisse einer Studie in einem Berliner Kirchenkreis, in: PTh 98 (2009), 430–446.

15 Cf. A. Feige / B. Dressler / W. Lukatis / A. Schöll, 'Religion' bei ReligionslehrerInnen. Religionspädagogische Zielvorstellungen und religiöses Selbstverständnis in empirisch-soziologischen Zugängen, Münster 2000.

resource so that a "didactically fruitful relation between a lived and a taught religion develops"[16]. In terms of confirmation work, the nationwide study about confirmation classes in Germany shows that pastors are of great (largely positive) significance for confirmands.[17]

1.1.5. Parallelism of didactic conceptions

Considering the disparity between both of these learning locations, it is striking that since the early days of religious education as a discipline, the didactic conceptions for Religious Education and confirmation classes have largely been formulated in a parallel manner (e. g. liberal religious education, evangelical catechesis, problem-oriented and therapeutical religious education, symbol didactics, performative approach; exceptions are, for instance, hermeneutical religious education – which is distinctly referring to school – as well as the constructive-critical approach). The same applies to current approaches such as theology with adolescents[18] and Bibliolog[19]. These approaches were initially developed for Religious Education in school, but later they were also – at least partially – adopted for the work with confirmands. Thereby, the fundamental didactic questions of the orientation and the aim of religious learning are answered in a surprisingly parallel mode. Apparently these are much more shaped by the respective societal situations in which the didactic conceptions were developed. Didactically, the respective religious locations with their specific challenges played a secondary role.

Against this background, the question of the distinction between these learning locations arises all the more sharply.

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[16] B. Dressler, Religion unterrichten – als Beruf. Persönliche Religiosität und religions-pädagogische Professionalität, in: LOG 21 (2003), issue 4, 39–42, here 41.
[17] Cf. Th. Böhme-Lischewski, Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer, in: id. et al., Konfirmandenarbeit gestalten, 45–55, here 48.
[18] Cf. P. Freudenberger-Lötz, Theologisieren mit Jugendlichen – ein neuer religions-pädagogischer Ansatz?, Praktische Theologie 45 (2010), 158–162 or J. Conrad, Theologie mit Jugendlichen, in: Th. Böhme-Lischewski et al., Konfirmandenarbeit gestalten, 159–171.
[19] Cf. U. Pohl-Patalong, Bibliolog. Impulse für Gottesdienst, Gemeinde und Schule. Vol. 1: Grundformen (second edition), Stuttgart 2010; id. / M. E. Aigner, Bibliolog. Impulse für Gottesdienst, Gemeinde und Schule, vol. 2: Aufbauformen, Stuttgart 2009.

1.2. Differences

1.2.1. The character of the learning locations

Indeed, the different characters of school and congregation as learning locations greatly influence the respective religious learning. School, as a "place of formal teaching" with "decidedly planned and verifiable educational principles", is much more involved in public and societal structures, whereas confirmation classes can be more open and free because they are informal and thus "educational processes take place in a rather open and less standardised and regimented learning location."[20] Admittedly, Religious Education includes a certain degree of voluntariness as there is the legally guaranteed possibility to opt out. Nevertheless, Religious Education is part of the school system and school attendance is compulsory – moreover, lessons are not simply omitted in case a pupil drops out of Religious Education; instead, the pupil must attend another subject (Ethics) as compensation. Confirmation classes, on the contrary, are based on voluntary participation, especially since the social pressures of the past are no longer so strong.[21]

Besides its mandatory character, school as a learning place is also very much shaped by the evaluation of performance. Even though Religious Education frequently takes a special role in schools, it is still, according to Article 7(3) of the German Basic Law, part of the regular curriculum and as such, also part of the educational evaluation system. There used to be a typical gap (or even hostile opposition) between both Religious Education and confirmation classes, which arose from the attempt to distance confirmation classes from school instruction. The latter was thought to be cognitively dominated and lacking subject orientation. Up until the 1990s, however, this gap became less and less significant, because since then integral learning has increasingly found its way into the school setting.[22]

Since PISA and the conclusions which have been drawn from it, this gap has gained importance again; at least insofar as it is feared that, even for Religious Education, the orientation towards competences and educational standards may again lead to a one-sided cognitive orientation and a narrow concept of learning. Whether or not the orientation towards competences and educational standards necessarily leads to a loss of focus on the subject, is at the centre of current

20 T. Rauschenberg, Konfirmandenarbeit der Zukunft. Perspektiven zur Bildung im Jugendalter – Plenum und Diskussion, in: Konfirmandenzeit auf dem Prüfstand. Neue Befunde zur Bildung im Jugendalter (epd-Dokumentation 28 – 29), Berlin 2009, 250 – 255, 253.

21 In the nationwide study, 10 % of the confirmands state that they felt "forced into participation", cf. W. Ilg / F. Schweitzer / V. Elsenbast, Konfirmandenarbeit in Deutschland, 57.

22 See also B. Dressler, Schule und Gemeinde, 133 ff.

educational controversies.[23] Regress within educational policy as well as the danger of losing focus on the subject in Religious Education in recent years, however, have to be taken into account.

The work with confirmands, on the other hand, is deliberately located outside the academic evaluation system. Even the examination for confirmands, which used to be very common, is a thing of the past now. The memorizing of catechetical contents has also been sharply reduced.[24]

1.2.2. Composition of the learning groups

In German schools, due to the structure, pupils tend to be separated based on their different social backgrounds from fifth grade onwards. Confirmation classes, however, decidedly address all young people within a certain age group. Indeed, the territorial orientation of the congregational structures leads to a concentration on certain social locations as well. But this development is counteracted by the respective congregational boundaries and it will be counteracted even more in the future, when the congregations will become bigger and set clearer priorities. The broader social mixing in confirmation classes, which is unfamiliar to many adolescents, provides opportunities and risks.[25] In any case, this mixing has to be taken into account didactically, for instance, by locating religious learning not entirely on a cognitive level, and by dealing with diversity among confirmands specifically concerning the exchange of different experiences.

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23 G. Obst, Kompetenzorientiertes Lehren und Lernen im Religionsunterricht, Göttingen 2008, 66, for instance, postulates: "Competence orientation starts out from the learning subject", whereas F. Schweitzer, Herausforderungen und Perspektiven des evangelischen Religionsunterrichts, in: SHE 1 (2004), 17–19, here 17, diagnoses for the current development: "It is far too little noticed that learning is also always a matter of the learning subjects themselves, who develop a positive attitude and devotion towards the world".

24 Cf. W. Ilg / F. Schweitzer / V. Elsenbast, Konfirmandenarbeit in Deutschland, 116 ff.

25 Cf. E. Naurath, Heterogenität und Differenzierung, in: Th. Böhme-Lischewski et al., Konfirmandenarbeit gestalten, 102–111.

2. Conceptual considerations – insights of religious education as a discipline regarding religious learning in Religious Education and confirmation classes

2.1. Commonalities

2.1.1. Belief as a never-ending path of discovery

For both Religious Education and confirmation classes the same principle holds true: the heterogeneity of the adolescents' qualifications should not lead to a difference-oriented perspective which distinguishes between 'Christian' and 'non-Christian' and between 'believing' and 'non-believing' respectively. Theologically, this is rooted in the inaccessibility of belief, which stands in opposition to the reduction of learning processes and its evaluation from the outside in particular. Pedagogically, respect for the person as a subject prohibits a schematic perception. Thus, for theological as well as pedagogical reasons, a conception of Christian faith as an open path of discovery is appropriate. There is no such thing as a substantial 'advantage' to which others still have to catch up to. In Religious Education as well as in confirmation classes one has to initiate encounters with Christianity, which may lead towards individual experiences.[26] Therefore one has to look for didactic approaches which are equally productive in enabling religious learning processes and individual experiences regardless of the adolescents' different presuppositions.[27]

2.1.2. Religious learning as an educational process

Learning in school as well as learning in the congregation is to be centred on a notion of education, which in both cases can be specified as religious *Bildung* (a term that cannot really be translated and which is sometimes rendered as *paideia*).[28] Accordingly, primacy of the person as a subject is crucial for the learning process,[29] and is not only the aim but also a criterion for the adolescents' pathway of learning. While designing, planning and performing the lessons, the

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26 Cf. U. Pohl-Patalong, Räume für Religion, 186 – 205; see also Peter Cornehl, who claims that a "hermeneutics of discovery" is most important for the conception of Protestant service: P. Cornehl, Der Evangelische Gottesdienst – Biblische Kontur und neuzeitliche Wirklichkeit 1. Theologischer Rahmen und biblische Grundlagen, Stuttgart 2006, 293 ff.

27 Cf. F. Schweitzer, Schule und Religion, 162, who calls for an "individualisation of didactics", not only due to the different ages and stages of development but also because of the varying individual-biographic and cultural-societal characterisations.

28 Cf. F. Schweitzer, Religious education as a task of the school in this volume.

29 Cf. G. Lämmermann / E. Naurath / U. Pohl-Patalong, Arbeitsbuch Religionspädagogik. Ein Begleitbuch für Studium und Praxis, Gütersloh 2005, 45.

Pupils and confirmands have to be appreciated as the subjects of learning.[30] Imparting mere knowledge at the adolescents' expense is thereby excluded. Instead, the adolescents shall be able to discover how to 'enrich their lives' by means of the Christian message.[31] In the past 20 years, a "turn towards the life-world" has occurred, according to which "objective religion" is replaced by "subjective religion" as the "primary reference point of religious learning"[32]. Here, at least theoretically, the person as a subject has been considered as the norm as well as the target of religious learning in both church and in school.

Subject-oriented learning serves as a "characteristic feature of the newest reform epoch since the 1990s"[33]. For societal as well as theological reasons, this tradition should be continued when working with confirmands, especially since PISA. The concept of competence, which is currently central in the school system, does not necessarily mean that the subject is neglected in favour of abstract educational standards. However, there is a tension which has not yet been resolved for school teaching as such and Religious Education in particular. Accordingly, there are fierce discussions about this topic at the moment. The work with confirmands, on the other hand, is not exposed to these influences in the same way. When compared to the school setting, confirmation classes provide the opportunity to focus on aims such as responsibility, participation, dialogue, reflectiveness and inner processes. Confirmation classes offer a unique and protected location for exploration of these values. Furthermore, they are less influenced by the school system than is Religious Education in school. The old question about the distinctive character of Religious Education – though there is awareness of the fact that Religious Education deals with people who are clearly influenced by the school system – arises in a new form. Should Religious Education incorporate the orientation towards competences and, if so, in which way? Does it have the task to correct and to offset the one-sidedness of learning in school (even of the religious learning)? Can it take up competence orientation in a meaningful way?[34] These questions currently remain completely open.

It is indisputable, on the other hand that each educational process requires external impulses which give impulses to the subjects which can be challenging,

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30 See, for example, Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (ed.), Identität und Verständigung. Standort und Perspektiven des Religionsunterrichts in der Pluralität. Eine Denkschrift (second edition), Gütersloh 1995, 50.
31 U. Pohl-Patalong, "Möglichen Lebensgewinn zeigen". Überlegungen zur Didaktik des Konfirmationsunterrichts, in: ZPT 58 (2006), 327–340.
32 R. Englert, Religionspädagogische Grundfragen, 236, cf. 302 ff.
33 F. Schweitzer, Konfirmandenarbeit im Umbruch, 16.
34 First attempts to apply the concept of competence to confirmation classes as well can be observed, cf. S. Kruse et al., Erhebung religiöser Kompetenz im Konfirmandenunterricht. Erste Ergebnisse einer Studie in einem Berliner Kirchenkreis, in: PTh 98 (2009), 430–446.

deepening or confirming.[35] As much as education is always self-education, it is not solipsistic, but requires stimuli with which the subject can engage in order to promote cognitive as well as emotional development.

2.2.   Differences

2.2.1.   Reflection versus identification?

Friedrich Niebergall differentiated between confirmation classes which put more emphasis on the soul, and Religious Education which primarily focuses on reason, and to this day, his distinction continues to define the character and aims of both learning locations. The comparison of the aims of Religious Education and confirmation classes may serve as an example. The statement on the core-curriculum for Religious Education published by the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) says regarding religious education:

> "Religious Education provides pupils with religious skills and knowledge and teaches them to distinguish between different religious phenomena. It prepares young people for making an autonomous use of their fundamental right to freedom of religion. Within the scope of its educational mandate, Religious Education is concerned with the religious dimension of life. Therefore, it has a certain way of dealing with the world as such, which has to be understood as an integral component of general education. [...] Central to Religious Education are existential questions about one's own concept of life as well as one's individual interpretation of reality and the resultant options for action. Religious Education in school not only deals with these fundamental questions but also with the plurality of answers given by our society. Hence, Religious Education broadens the horizon when it comes to our understanding of the world. This is vital for the development of a unique identity as well as for communication about basic orientations in society. In the lessons, the pupils acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes which are necessary for a proper handling of their own religiosity, of Christian faith as well as of other religions and beliefs."[36]

The focus here is on knowledge in the field of religion where it is important that pupils have the ability to differentiate and to interpret reality. Furthermore, they have to be open to dialogue and be able to deal with their own religiosity as well as with the religiosity of others. All this has to take place within the scope of the school's general educational mandate. Currently, these aspects are often summarised under the heading "development of 'religious competence'" which is

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35 Cf. U. Pohl-Patalong, Räume für Religion. Kirche und Schule im Kontext religiöser Pluralität, in: PTh 97 (2008), 186–205.

36 Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (ed.), Kerncurriculum für das Fach Evangelische Religion in der gymnasialen Oberstufe. Themen und Inhalte für die Entwicklung von Kompetenzen religiöser Bildung (EKD Texte 109), Hannover 2010, 5 and 9 respectively.

considered to be the overall aim of Religious Education. This "religious competence" is then again subdivided into specific individual competences.[37]

As for confirmation classes, the Northelbian Evangelical Lutheran Church has published principles for confirmation work in which it says:

> "The Christian community invites children and adolescents to come together and ask, experience and realise what the Gospel of Jesus Christ nowadays can mean for their own lives as well as for communal life with others. It accompanies young people in a phase of life in which they are asking questions about meaning and orientation. Together with young people, the Christian community looks for answers in faith. Thus, young people are expected to find their own faith. Furthermore, they shall lead responsible lives as Christians and be able to find their place in the congregation as well as in the family, in their professions as well as in public life."[38]

Here, the relevance of the Christian message for the lives of individuals and society has come to the fore. Moreover, it is important to accompany the adolescents and to help them find their own faith in order to lead a responsible Christian life. In this comparison, confirmation classes aim more at the identification with the Gospel as well as their acquisition and realisation in one's own life, whereas Religious Education has a rather distanced perspective on knowledge, reflection and a communicative approach to religion and religiosity. This might lead to the false conclusion that Religious Education teaches and considers religion solely in a distant manner, whereas confirmation classes presuppose Christian faith and take it to a deeper level with the goal of life change.

However, there are voices which speak against such a strict division, especially in light of the present situation and with regard to content.[39]

On the one hand, it cannot be presumed that pupils have had a religious socialisation. This does not only apply to Religious Education but also applies to work with confirmands. Even the latter has to formulate its contents rather openly, i. e. it can presume a certain interest on the adolescents' part but not a

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[37] Cf. D. Fischer / V. Elsenbast, Grundlegende Kompetenzen religiöser Bildung, 17, who follow Ulrich Hemel and distinguish between a religious sensitivity, a religious way of expressing, a religious communication and a religiously motivated way of life.

[38] Framework for the work with confirmands in the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1.

[39] Concerning the impossibility of such a distribution of different tasks see also B. Dressler, Religion im Vollzug erschließen! Performanz und religiöse Bildung in der Gemeinde, in: Th. Klie / S. Leonhard (eds.), Performative Religionsdidaktik. Religionsästhetik – Lernorte – Unterrichtspraxis (PTHe 97), Stuttgart 2008, 88–97, 91 as well as R. Englert, Religionspädagogische Grundfragen, 285, who speaks of the danger that "forms which are oriented towards understanding" and "forms which are oriented towards identity" are drifting apart, so that Religious Education might become the "science of religion" and "forms primarily oriented towards identity [...] might solely become the business of competing religious organisations and their recruitment efforts".

decision that has already been made. Religious Education, however, is often required to offer an elementary introduction to 'religion' as such.[40] As especially performative religious didactics have shown in recent years, this introduction cannot take place on an abstract and solely informative level. Instead, pupils have to be able to gain their own religious experiences and 'test' them. Through this they can discover and experience different forms of expression of Christian faith. Moreover, since each form of education – but especially Religious Education – focuses on the person as a subject, the consequences of getting in touch with the Christian religion have to be continuously addressed during lessons.[41] Therefore, Religious Education necessarily focuses on experiences and on the persons as subjects.[42] Confirmation classes, however, do not only have to regard religious plurality nowadays but also the freedom of the subject, i.e. every encounter with Christianity can only be proffered for the subject's own engagement. Thus, working with confirmands must include critical reflection about central Christian beliefs.

2.2.2. Individual and societal vs. ecclesiastical Christianity

According to Dietrich Rössler's classical distinction, confirmation classes traditionally put emphasis on 'ecclesiastical Christianity', whereas Religious Education mainly focuses on 'individual' and 'societal' Christianity.[43] This differentiation seems to be likely, because in confirmation classes the Church has a legitimate interest in reflecting itself and in making young people familiar with its structures and actions. Religious Education, on the other hand, takes into account that Christian religion can in fact take place outside of the Church and that (theologically) faith does not have to be mediated by the Church as an institution, especially in a Reformed context, but is something which happens directly between God and human beings. This conviction, however, also means that confirmation classes cannot limit themselves to ecclesiastical Christianity. Instead, they have to consider the individual perspective of faith as well since the church is not an end in itself, but serves as the basis for individual faith devel-

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40 Therefore, the formation of religion tends to move "from processes of socialisation and upbringing [...] towards institutionalised educational processes", B. Dressler, Religion im Vollzug, 91.

41 See also Identität und Verständigung, ed. by Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 27: "Identity and Dialogue": "Religion cannot be limited to knowledge. With this in mind one has to promote the principle of independent and experiential acquisition and involvement".

42 Cf. Identität und Verständigung, ed. by Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 27, which explicitly opposes the misunderstanding that "Religious Education has to confine itself solely to cognitive teaching procedures and that [...] services offered by the church should solely be defined by a non-instructional orientation towards activeness and experiences".

43 Cf. D. Rössler, Grundriss der Praktischen Theologie (second edition), Berlin 1994, 90 ff.

opment. Furthermore, the societal perspective cannot be ignored since it can have crucial effects on an individual's faith. Conversely, as has been emphasised in recent years, Religious Education cannot dismiss ecclesiastical Christianity for

> "a religious education which does not only focus on texts but also on individuals and the formation of faith, has to be [...] as open as possible towards the Christian *community* and the everyday life of *Christians in society*."[44]

Didactically, this can be seen especially in the performative approach which is based on the following conviction:

> "A religious education which tries to handle religion as a set of facts ignores the identity of religion and makes it vanish even before this can be conveyed. Religion is a practical experience in which one has to evaluate one's conduct of life in terms of self-interpretation and world-interpretation. From an observer's perspective outside of this practice its inner meaning remains obscure. It is not until religion is discovered in a practical way that its true content becomes visible. In Christian religion, theological doctrine is secondary to this kind of practice. Theological doctrines, therefore, lose their meaning when they bear no relation to religious practice."[45] However, it is most important to "distinguish between the experimental usage of religious performances and authentic religious practice"[46].

One has to consider, however, that most practical forms of religion are mainly rooted in 'ecclesiastical Christianity'. Religious Education has to keep this in mind and put it into practice: "In Religious Education the retrieval of didactic approaches to 'performative action' of the church is reflected."[47] Conversely, for the performative approach it can be said:

> "Of course a religious education cannot and should not abandon either cognitive approaches to religion or a transmission of religious knowledge. After all, religious educational processes are supposed to enable competence of expression as well as critical reflection. This is necessary to avoid misunderstandings when it comes to one's own faith tradition and to keep this tradition from being ignorant towards the conditions of modern life [...]. If we dismiss the cognitive dimension of religion, religion itself becomes speechless towards non-religious people. Furthermore, religion is in

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44 EKD, Identität und Verständigung, 29. See also B. Schröder, Vom notwendigen Kirchenbezug der Religionspädagogik – Plädoyer für 'Kirchentheorie' als Prolegomenon einer Theorie religiöser und christlicher Bildung, Erziehung und Sozialisation, in: F. Schweitzer / Th. Schlag 107–119, 117: "Every religious education has to approach church in a constructive-critical way", as well as it naturally has to keep an open mind "about forms other than ecclesiastical forms of modern Christianity and also about relevant forms, developments and educational processes of religion".
45 B. Dressler, Religion im Vollzug, 90.
46 Ibid., 92.
47 B. Dressler, Schule und Gemeinde, 135.

danger of being reduced to affirmation and of being functionalised for non-religious purposes."[48]

Considering the performative approach but also the societal situation in general, one could say: "The didactic differences between Religious Education, which is based on the educational mandate of the school system, and confirmation classes, which are focused on participation in religious practice, could become less selective. Therefore, a more precise adjustment could be necessary."[49] Bernhard Dressler suggests that Religious Education should take all different forms of religious practice into account, whereas confirmation classes should be restricted to church settings. When the "learning location is at the same time part of the subject matter" of confirmation classes, the focus lies on liturgical and diaconal as well as educational, social and congregational practice. Considering the celebration of confirmation, a "focus on church service and sacraments"[50] seems plausible.

This, however, would raise two difficulties. On the one hand, 'church' as the subject matter of confirmation classes would be changed into 'congregation', i. e. the specific and historically contingent local congregation.[51] Even so, with confirmation one does not confess to a certain social form of church but rather to faith and a church, which goes beyond the local congregation. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that the ecclesiastical structure functions as a medium and is not an end in itself. Each ecclesiastical social form, each liturgical form, etc., contributes to the individual's faith and to Christian behaviour in society. This should be made clear, especially in confirmation classes which eventually lead to a declared confession to church.

2.2.3. Religious openness versus church affiliation

Religious Education has come a long way in the past 50 years since those decades which were dominated by the concept of evangelical instruction (*Evangelische Unterweisung*) – from a clear denominational orientation, aiming at personal confession, towards an attitude in which religious positions are communicated more openly. Such an openness is also structurally implemented due to the so-called "two-part homogeneity"[52], which explicitly refrains from addressing only (or primarily) Protestant pupils. Indeed, Religious Education in Germany

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 136.
50 Ibid., 145.
51 As for the development of the local congregation and its historical contingency, see U. Pohl-Patalong, Von der Ortskirche zu kirchlichen Orten. Ein Zukunftsmodell (second edition), Göttingen 2005, 36 ff.
52 Cf. G. Lämmermann / E. Naurath / U. Pohl-Patalong, Arbeitsbuch Religionspädagogik, 201.

usually is denomination-based but it does not assume that the pupils are denominationally socialised or that its aim is for pupils to adopt denominational positions.

As confirmation classes are directed towards confirmation and thus at a Christian confession and the intentional decision for church membership, it can hardly proceed with the same attitude of religious openness. At the same time, for theological as well as for pedagogical reasons, the presented Christian faith and a church membership can only be an offer which has to be made plausible in confirmation classes because the subjects must decide for themselves on these particular points.[53]

Bernhard Dressler suggests for confirmation classes to "concentrate on learning processes that make ecclesiastical religion accessible". He explicitly mentions the aim of "participation in congregational religious practice"[54]. Indeed, Dressler admits that the "subjective-individual aspects of Christian religion" are not to be excluded but he regards them mainly as "individual *appropriation*"[55]. Religious Education has to "systematically include the possibility to exercise one's fundamental right to freedom of religion even the other way around, e.g. when someone makes a reflected decision against a religious affiliation or against a certain interpretation of the world. Confirmation classes, however, would have to consider such a decision *against* as failure (without discrediting it in the individual case)"[56]. On this basis, confirmation classes could offer an identification which goes beyond that of Religious Education: "The merging of (experimental participation in) religious actions and the (reflected and distanced) didactic staging of those actions – which in school cannot go beyond a 'participant observation' – can be arranged as an 'observing participation' in church."[57]

On the one hand, such a distinction between what is really going on and the regulative idea will most probably lead to the effect that in practice the subject's free religious decision is not as free as it is claimed. On the other hand, such a

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[53] The dilemma which arises from these points is shown in the opposition of 'de facto' and 'regulative' as it is formulated: Confirmation classes stand closer to ecclesiastical religion because it can be assumed "that those who participate in the ecclesiastical educational process are no strangers to a Christian attitude and conduct of life (to put it mildly). Furthermore, not only do they not perceive an encounter with such a perspective as an unreasonable demand but they almost expect it. Other than in Religious Education, one apparently cannot assume the need to keep open an option against the Christian religion. This holds true, even if not always de facto, at least as a regulative principle." (B. Dressler, Religion im Vollzug, 93).
[54] B. Dressler, Schule und Gemeinde, 140.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 141.
[57] Ibid.

clear definition of goals is difficult for theological reasons as faith depends on the Holy Spirit. The institution can support this faith but is not ultimately responsible for it. Moreover, an orientation towards the person as subject means more than an individual 'acquisition'; it has to be about the subject's real involvement in accordance with the concept of education. The outcome of such involvement is always open – regardless of the setting of the educational process.

3.   Religious learning in church and in school

This juxtaposition of the aims and orientations of both learning locations presents us with an ambivalent picture. Apart from similarities there are also obvious differences which ought not be taken as absolute. Instead, Religious Education and confirmation classes set different priorities and have different emphases. Therefore it seems useful to interpret religious learning in school and in church as having gradual differences, as Friedrich Niebergall did 90 years ago.[58] The complex subject of 'religion' is multidimensional. While different dimensions cannot be separated from each other, they can have different priorities. In particular, this means:

1. Religious learning processes always vary between identification and reflection, which includes a certain distance. For Religious Education, it seems appropriate to put more emphasis on reflexivity, whereas confirmation classes offer greater identification with Christian contents and expressions – but without presupposing them or defining them as an absolute aim. Both modes have their particular strengths in dealing with religion but only when their juxtaposition is understood to be gradual can those strengths be clearly developed.[59]

2. Christian religion has individual as well as societal and ecclesiastical manifestations which cannot be separated from each other but which allow for gradual accentuations. It is useful to address the aspects of ecclesiastical Christianity more in confirmation classes and to deal with the contents of societal Christianity more in Religious Education. Individual Christianity,

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58 Similar to this, the memorandum "Identity and Dialogue" offers a view of gradual differences but focuses on church as a learning place with more room for creativity. It suggests that "Religious Education [...] has to focus primarily on its method of instruction as it is bound to the structures of school, which is performance-oriented. The churches, however, have more room for creativity as they can offer a broader variety in terms of space and time. This should enable them (more than schools) to modify their aims in response to different types of socialisation." (Identität und Verständigung, ed. by Ev. Kirche in Deutschland, 47).

59 I recognise a similar concern of Bernhard Dressler when he says, "Bolder comparisons of confirmation classes and Religious Education [...] are nowadays obsolete." B. Dressler, Schule und Gemeinde, 148.

however, is part of the development of one's own personal religiosity and therefore has to be dealt with in both learning locations in an equally thorough manner.

3. In both learning locations the relevance of ecclesiastical forms of religion for the subjects' lives and beliefs has to be shown and made plausible. The church as a learning place especially creates opportunities to have this experience 'on site', whereas for Religious Education this remains an exception. In both cases, one has to be careful not to reduce 'church' to the social structure of the local congregation. Church affiliation has to be experienced as meaningful and helpful. The subjects have to be able to discover this and to deal with their discoveries. As a basic principle, this process is open in its development and results.

The same openness, of course, has to be applied to Christian faith as such which must be presented as conducive and beneficial for one's own life.[60] Neither Christian faith nor church affiliation ought to come across in a forcing mode of demand. Instead, both have to be made plausible to adolescents as offers which are relevant and beneficial for their lives.

4. For both Religious Education and confirmation classes, the subject orientation of religious learning processes has to be the normative starting point. It seems to me that in various ways this is at risk for both learning locations. In school as a learning place, it is not sufficient simply to regard subject orientation as a method of imparting knowledge to the individual pupils in a most effective way. As with confirmation classes, subject orientation has to involve more than an 'individual appropriation' of prescribed traditions which, in the end, is reduced to a decision in favour of one side or the other. What religious learning seeks to achieve is for adolescents to discover the subjective relevance of Christian beliefs, to deal with those beliefs and to critically check whether they might enrich their lives.[61] Confirmation classes as well as Religious Education ultimately are directed towards this goal. On their way towards it, however, they follow different approaches, each of which has its own opportunities and limitations.

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[60] U. Pohl-Patalong, "... sed vitae discimus". Religionsunterricht zwischen Religiosität und christlicher Tradition – didaktische Orientierungen, in: IJPT 11 (2007 / 2), 173 – 192.
[61] Cf. U. Pohl-Patalong, "Möglichen Lebensgewinn zeigen".

For further reading

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U. Pohl-Patalong, Räume für Religion. Kirche und Schule im Kontext religiöser Pluralität,
   in: PTh 97 (2008), 186 – 205.