Zekirija Sejdini
School of Education/University of Innsbruck
zekirija.sejdini@uibk.ac.at

Contingency Sensitivity as Basis
of Religious Education in Plural Societies

1. Introduction

In recent years, the situation and role of religious education in European countries has rapidly changed. Above all, migration and globalization has contributed to increasing religious plurality and diversity of worldviews in Europe. In Austria, the number of people who feel overwhelmed by these changes has been on the rise, and uncertainty is continuously gaining larger parts of the society. This development also poses new challenges for religious education, the management of which is of enormous importance for the preservation of a pluralistic democratic society. Above all, it requires innovative conceptions of and approaches to religious education, which are able to deal constructively with religious pluralism.

An example of such an approach is the concept of a contingency-sensitive religious education, which will be illustrated in the present paper. Building on previous research, I will outline the content-related and methodological prerequisites that are indispensable for developing an inter-religious pedagogy that values and promotes religious diversity and plurality of worldviews. With this approach, diversity should not be understood as a threat, but instead recognized as an enrichment and the foundation of an open democratic society.

Religious education constitutes an important component of education in the sense of the German term 'Bildung'. Despite existing differences regarding perspectives and approaches (about, from, in), schools and religious institutions in various countries offer religious education as a subject in most cases. In Austria and Germany, the principle of denominational religious education at school prevails. For this reason, religious education in these countries had been offered for a long time only by the two major Christian churches. As a result, religious education had been almost entirely Christian dominated and focusing on the inner perspective. Ecumenism was only occasionally discussed in order to bring the Christian denominations closer together and to strengthen denominational religious education in public schools, which had been increasingly questioned in light of the social changes initiated in the 1960s.

More recently, however, this situation has been rapidly changing in some European countries. Above all, migration and globalization have contributed to the increase in religious plurality and diversity of worldviews in Europe. This new situation has overwhelmed many people and led to uncertainties in society. Additionally, the many religiously motivated terrorist attacks in recent years have intensified already existing fears and skepticism towards plurality and otherness.

This development also poses new challenges for religious education. Managing and overcoming the fears and skepticism towards plurality is of enormous importance for the preservation of a democratic society. Above all, it requires innovative conceptions of religious education, which – despite, or perhaps because of, their religious affiliation – not only tolerate plurality, but also consider it to be important prerequisites for or constitutive elements of possible trans-religious education and cultivate them from their own sources.

An example of such an approach is the concept of contingency-sensitive religious education, on which I shall in the present paper. It is an approach that is fundamentally committed to denominational religious education at school. It stands out for its openness to dialogue with other traditions, religious beliefs and worldviews.

My paper is based on the joint interreligious research and teaching that we have accomplished at the Institute for Islamic Theology and Religious Education together with our colleagues from the Department of Catholic Religious Education at the University of Innsbruck over the past couple of years. As a first step, I shall start by outlining the main features of religious education at school in Austria. Following that, as a second step, I will deal with the epistemological foundations of a plural religious education. This is because interreligious cooperation requires reaching an understanding with the religious counterpart regarding mutual starting points in anthropology, theology, and education. In this context, I will discuss similarities and differences between Christian (Catholic) and Muslim perspectives. Special attention will be paid to the image of mankind, createdness, human dignity, reason, theology and education.

In a third step, principles of contingency-sensitive religious education will be presented. In this context, the task of religious education is to deal with contingency in such a way that the consciousness of one's own limitations is not judged as deficient, but is instead rendered productive. Unlike an understanding of religion that is focused on coping with contingency, contingency acknowledgement and contingency encounter open up new religious philosophical and theological points of view and perspectives.[1] Recognition of contingencies and initiation of encounters can be labeled as contingency sensitivity or possibility sensitivity.

Of particular importance for contingency sensitivity is the understanding of truth. Particularly in the interreligious context, the concept of truth, as well as the claims associated with it, are continually present and are employed in argumentation, or (tacitly) presupposed.[2] In this context, many questions arise, such as, among others, the following: Is every religion 'true'? Do the 'truths' of different religions include or exclude one another? How can different 'truths' and truth claims

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[1] Cf. Wuchterl, Kurt 2011: Kontingenz oder das Andere der Vernunft. Zum Verhältnis von Philosophie, Naturwissenschaft und Religion. Stuttgart, 40; Kraml, Martina 2013: Dissertation gestalten im Raum der Möglichkeiten. Eine theologiedidaktische Studie zu Dissertationsprozessen mit besonderer Aufmerksamkeit auf die Entwicklung empirischer Forschung (unpublished postdoctoral thesis). Innsbruck, 499.

[2] Cf. Sejdini, Zekirija / Kraml, Martina / Scharer, Matthias 2017: Mensch werden. Grundlagen einer interreligiösen Religionspädagogik und –didaktik aus muslimisch-christlicher Perspektive. Stuttgart, 116.

coexist or exist alongside one another? Whether interreligious collaboration can be made fruitful for all depends on our understanding of truth and how we deal with truth claims.[3] Therefore, an examination of this topic in the context of a possibility sensitive interreligious religious pedagogy and religious didactics is essential.

2. Primary Features and Basic Conditions of Religious Education in Schools in Austria

The foundation stone of religious education in Austria was laid with the signing of the Concordat by the Holy See and the State in the year 1933. The Catholic Church was thus guaranteed the right to offer denominational religious instruction in all public primary and secondary schools in Austria, to impose religious exercises on Catholic students, to supervise and guide religious instruction and to appoint teachers of religious education.[4] Until today, the Concordat has served as a benchmark for the relationship between the Austrian State and all state-recognized religious communities.

In Austria, sixteen churches and religious societies are currently recognized, according to their legal names, including the Islamic Religious Community in Austria (IGGÖ). As a result of this recognition, the Islamic religious society has also been endowed with the right to offer its own denominational religious education. It has been offered in Austria since the school year 1982/83.[5]

Denominational religious education is offered in public schools throughout Austria. It takes place as a compulsory subject in the context of public school education and is funded by the state. Students can opt out of religious education, or can be withdrawn from it by their parents, if they are under the age of fourteen. The religious community is responsible for appointing teachers and issuing curricula, as well as the inspection, supervision, content and methodology of religious education. Religious education is supervised by the state exclusively when it comes to school organizational and disciplinary aspects.[6] Religious education teachers are trained in confessional pedagogical colleges (KPH) or universities. New Teacher Education – PädagoginnenbildungNeu — has strengthened cooperation among pedagogical colleges, which are responsible for primary education, and universities, which are responsible for secondary education.

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[3] Cf. Sejdini, Zekirija 2016a: Zwischen Gewissheit und Kontingenz. Auf dem Weg zu einem neuen Verständnis von islamischer Theologie und Religionspädagogik im europäischen Kontext. In: id. (ed.): Islamische Theologie und Religionspädagogik in Bewegung. Neue Ansätze in Europa. Bielefeld, 15-31.
[4] Cf. Khorchide, Mouhanad 2009a: Der islamische Religionsunterricht in Österreich (ÖIF-Dossier No. 5). Vienna, 16.
[5] Cf. Strobl, Anna 2005: Der österreichische Islam. Entwicklung, Tendenzen, Möglichkeiten. In: SWS-Rundschau (Vol. 45, No. 4), 520-543, here 524.
[6] Cf. Khorchide, Mouhanad 2009b: Der islamische Religionsunterricht zwischen Integration und Parallelgesellschaft. Einstellungen der islamischen ReligionslehrerInnen an öffentlichen Schulen. Wiesbaden, 43-49.

Interreligious forms of education do not exist due to the principle of religious denomination. The extent to which interfaith learning plays a role in curricula and in religious education depends on the faith community and the individual teacher. Due to the expanding need for interreligious collaboration, particularly in the field of education, and the related demands of a religiously plural society, interreligious collaboration has been taking place at the University of Innsbruck for several years, with components of the curricula of Catholic and Muslim religious education being held together.

It has been determined that interreligious collaboration takes place at different levels and includes various areas. On the one hand, it covers two internships in religious pedagogical education, each of which includes accompanying training courses both in schools and at universities. On the other hand, there is an interreligious cooperation in numerous religious didactic courses.[7] Additionally, both Catholic and Muslim students have the opportunity to attend courses that teach authentically about the theological foundations of the other religion.

In addition to many other factors that shape this collaboration in teaching and research, a contingency-sensitive and opportunity oriented approach to educational processes is a central principle that is particularly relevant in terms of religious education and didactics. The basis and the characteristics of this principle, will be explained in the following sections.

3. Common Starting Points for Interreligious Cooperation from a Muslim and Christian Perspective

The legal situation in Austria, as already indicated, led to the fact that the denominational form of religious education established itself and religious education is understood and operated denominationally. In view of the already described increase in religious and ideological plurality, the question arises regarding how the associated organizational and content challenges can be overcome. On the one hand, given the ever-increasing number of recognized faith communities, it is becoming more and more difficult for schools to offer adequate space to different denominations. On the other hand, confessionality, which is required by law, must be re-understood and re-interpreted under the current conditions, so that, despite its attachment to religious authorities, it provides a solid basis.

Our previous research in this area has shown above all that, for an interreligious perspective in denominational religious education, like ours, it is first necessary to achieve an understanding of, or a minimum consensus on certain key issues, which can be expanded or refined as a result of the

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[7] Cf. Kraml, Martina / Sejdini, Zekirija (eds.) 2018: Interreligiöse Bildungsprozesse. Empirische Einblicke in Schul- und Hochschulkontexte. Stuttgart.

process. This is not an easy task. Although interreligious work is now also booming in education, it requires a preliminary understanding of certain topics and terms in order to enable meaningful interreligious learning. The urgency of this step soon became clear in the course of our interreligious collaboration between Catholic and Islamic religious education.

In order to limit the sheer variety of concepts that could be dealt with in this context, we have looked at certain topics that, from our point of view, have a fundamental character for a pluralistic religious education and are therefore indispensable. They include anthropological and theological questions. It is crucial to clarify which human image and understanding of createdness, human dignity and reason, as well as which theological and educational understanding are necessary, so that interreligious educational processes have a chance to succeed. In what follows, common starting points of interreligious cooperation from a Muslim and Christian perspective are presented.

Image of Mankind

An important topic area in this context is anthropology and the underlying image of mankind. Since the image of mankind implicitly or explicitly forms the basis of every intended and unintended educational process, how to educate a person is very closely related to what people understand. The question of the essence of man arises in different scientific disciplines and can therefore be examined from different perspectives. Since this article is about interreligious education, the focus is on theological anthropology. In this context, the question arises as to which images of mankind should be assumed, so that a framework can be created that enables the initiation and cultivation of interreligious educational processes. Following the basic tenets of Catholic and Islamic theology, we have agreed that, above all, createdness, human dignity, and reason are central aspects that play an important role in both religious traditions and need therefore a common framework to make the interreligious education processes successful.

Createdness

A basic anthropological experience that is shared by the Christian and Islamic traditions is the createdness of humankind and the world. In contrast to a naturalistic understanding of the world and humankind, religious people derive their insight from the belief that they are not living on their own, but rather are based in a reality that transcends the human being and the world. In different religions, a human being's existence is associated with the recognition of a divine reality in various ways. The transcendent reality is related to the human being and, at the same time, it is deprived of its access and remains the ultimate secret of life.

This is evident in the Qur'anic[8] and Biblical texts. They tell of the creation of humankind and the world through the one and only God of free divine decision.[9] Regardless of how differently the source texts on God's creation have been and will be interpreted within these religions and between them, the recognition of a good creation of man and of the world is a fundamental connection between them.

The biblical texts, from different times and places and in different literary forms, tell of the free and good creation of God. The core of the biblical understanding of human beings, which is metaphorically expressed in the texts of creation, is the image of the breath of God (*ruach*) in the human being. God breathes his breath into the 'earthling', making him a living human being (see Gen. 2:7). The relatedness of man cannot be expressed more primordially: God breathes and lives in him.

Human being's createdness is also of central importance in Islamic anthropology. In a world in which everything (apart from God) is contingent, that is, possible and not necessary, and thus fundamentally different from God as a necessary being, the connection to the Creator constitutes an important anthropological basis from the Islamic point of view. God created human beings from different elements and the creation had to go through several development stages[10] before it became a being by breathing in the Divine Spirit.[11] Thus, the creation transformed, from a pure, wet clay mass, or from a physical into a spiritual being, in other words, into a 'new human being', who is endowed with Divine Spirit and mental and spiritual faculties and to which nothing needs to be added.[12] The breath of the Divine Spirit filled the mere form with life and gave it the potential to be used as a governor (*khalifa*)[13] of God. This is also the basis of the special position of human beings within all of creation.

Human Dignity

From the theological-anthropological perspective, createdness is based on the relationship between the creator and the creature. This also establishes the dignity of man. From Muslim and Christian perspectives alike, human dignity as an anthropological basis is beyond question.[14] Thus, in the Christian as well as in the Muslim sources, numerous passages are found in which the dignity of

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[8] For citations from the Qur'an, the translation and commentaries of Muhammad Asad (Asad, Muhammad 2011: Die Botschaft des Koran. Übersetzung und Kommentar [2nd ed.] Ostfildern) were consulted.

[9] Cf. Qur'an, 2:30-35; cf., among others, both creation texts, Gen. 1:1-2, 4 and Gen. 2:4-25, and the so-called Creation Psalm 104.

[10] Cf. Qur'an, 15:26; 32:7; 76:1-2; 96:2.

[11] Cf. Qur'an, 38:72; 32:9; 15:29.

[12] Cf. Hajatpour, Reza 2014: Mensch und Gott. Von islamisch-philosophischen Menschenbildern. In: Behr, Harry Harun / Ulfat, Fahimah (eds.): Zwischen Himmel und Erde. Bildungsphilosophische Verhältnisbestimmungen von Heiligem Text und Geist. Münster, 77-90, here 79.

[13] Cf. Qur'an, 2:30.

[14] Cf. Bielefeldt, Heiner 2015: Menschenrechte in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft. Plädoyer für einen aufgeklärten Multikulturalismus. Bielefeld, 41.

man – and the equal dignity of man and woman – are highlighted. Some of them specifically address the topic of dignity, while others can be interpreted as such. The central passage of the Qur'an, which can be understood as a direct indication of the divinely given dignity of all people, is found in Sura 17:70.

In addition to this central point, there are many other references in the Qur'an that point to the dignity of man, including the creation of man in the best possible form (32:7), the breathing in of the divine spirit (32:9) and the appointment of man as God's governor on earth (2:30) (see Sejdini 2019).

The Bible also contains a rich body of statements about human dignity. Genesis 1:27 states that man is God's image. This depiction contains the inalienable dignity of man. According to Psalm 8, man is endowed by God with "glory and honor": "You have made him little less than God" (Ps. 8:6). In the New Testament and in the Christian tradition in general, it is the attitude adopted by Jesus to encounter and identify people, especially the disadvantaged and the persecuted ones. It is he who restores the trampled dignity of men and women (Lk. 7:36-50, Lk. 19:1-10, John 8:1-11, and others). The double commandment of love (Mt. 22:36-40) also expresses the value of a human being. This concerns the dignity of women and men in the same way.

To summarize, it can be said that the respect for human dignity and the recognition of human rights are inseparable. They are a fundamental requirement for the equal rights of all people and thus also form the basis of any (interreligious) education.

Reason

In the same manner as the createdness and dignity of a human being, reason also plays a central role in theological anthropology and thus represents an important prerequisite for interreligious religious pedagogical and didactic concepts. The scriptures of both religions show that reason is an essential human characteristic that determines relationship and constructs and expresses relatedness. Therefore, reason is above all a prerequisite for communication. Theologically, it enables people to communicate with God, fellow human beings and the natural environment. This empowerment enables people not only to receive the divine message passively, but also to be addressed, to respond and to participate. This communication is not limited to individuals' relationship to God, but it also applies to the human community as a whole. Thus, humans are challenged to communicate with each other, to gain new insights and, in turn, to use their newly acquired knowledge to improve their living together. The Qur'an encourages therefore people to use reason.[15]

The Bible refers less explicitly to reason and instead more directly to understanding, insight, etc. By analogy, one could view the creation of man in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and man's duty

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[15] Cf. Qur'an, 2:164, 39:9, 2:44, 59:2.

to take care of life and the world (Gen. 1:28) as a mission to use his reason to give all creatures a good life. By reason, or rational action, the Bible understands, above all, the orientation of life towards God, or actions that are directed towards God. Therefore, the biblical text rarely makes a distinction between reason and faith.

According to the Qur'an, God, the Creator, created man in the best of forms, breathed His own spirit into him, endowed him with dignity and appointed him governor of the earth. In addition, man, according to the Qur'an, was given the most varied capacities for the administration of and proper dealings with his environment, to which, in particular, the mind belongs.[16] The core of Islamic anthropology with religious pedagogical relevance are the verses in the second Sura (2:30-34), which deal with the creation of Adam and God's conversation with the angels about his purpose.[17] Man is portrayed in these Qur'an verses as a peculiar being who – despite his potential to cause mischief which has also been recognized by the angels – is entrusted by God, on account of the peculiarities given to him by God, with the honorable task of serving as God's governor on earth. Although there are differing ideas about what characterizes human dignity, it is important to note in our context that human dignity, regardless of man's potential for mischief mentioned above, is something substantial and inviolable to every human being.[18]

Moreover, man is described in the above-mentioned verses of the Qur'an as a being capable of learning. According to Muhammad Asad, "knowledge of all names" referred to in them, denotes man's capacity for "logical definition and thus conceptual thinking"[19]. Kenneth Cragg also sees in the Qur'anic account mentioned above signs of human being's superiority over angels, since, according to him, naming is a classic Semitic representation that is characteristic of sovereignty.[20]

The special position of humans within the creation constitutes an appreciation of humans, but it is also associated with a great responsibility towards God, since creation has been entrusted to humans and they are held accountable for their dealings with creation in the Hereafter. Cragg expresses it clearly when referring to the Qur'an as "privilege", "trust", and "gift", rather than "possession", "prerogative", or "right"[21].

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[16] Cf. Sura 39:9.
[17] More on the topic of Islamic Anthropologie can be found in the following publications: Hajatpour, Reza 2013: Vom Gottesentwurf zum Selbstentwurf. Die Idee der Perfektibilität in der islamischen Existenzphilosophie. Freiburg; Renz, Andreas 2002: Der Mensch unter dem An-Spruch Gottes. Offenbarungsverständnis und Menschenbild des Islam im Urteil gegenwärtiger christlicher Theologie. Würzburg; Wielandt, Rotraud 1994: Der Mensch und seine Stellung in der Schöpfung. Zum Grundverständnis islamischer Anthropologie. In: Bsteh, Andreas / Hagemann, Ludwig (eds.): Der Islam als Anfrage an christliche Theologie und Philosophie. Referate – Anfragen - Diskussionen, Mödling, 97–105; Bouman, Johan 1989: Gott und Mensch im Koran. Eine Strukturform religiöser Anthropologie anhand des Beispiels Allah und Muhammad (2nd ed.). Darmstadt; Habibi, Muhammad ʿAziz Al 2010: Der Mensch: Zeuge Gottes. Entwurf einer islamischen Anthropologie, Freiburg i.Br.
[18] Cf. Sura 17:70.
[19] Cf. Asad 2011, 34-35.
[20] Cf. Cragg, Kenneth 1968: The Privilege of Man. A Theme in Judaism, Islam and Christianity. London, 28.
[21] Cf. Cragg, Kenneth 1999: Readings in the Qur'an. Brighton, 73.

Theology

The foregoing section has repeatedly referred to the reason why the understanding of theology is necessary for interreligious educational processes to be successful. The first question is the specificity of the theological. In many cases, a purely substantive material understanding is associated with it. That is, the theological is understood as a clearly circumscribable and explicitly religious subject area, such as, for example, beliefs, explicit theological concepts, religious rites, actions of the church or religious community, etc. Such an understanding is too brief from the point of view of an experiential religious education, as the interreligious cooperation at the University of Innsbruck defines itself. In this point of view, the theological is found more in the perspective of taking a look at something.

When it comes to content orientation, the question of God is at the center of theological attention. It is in the background of any theological and thus also of any religious educational debate. The question of God may take different forms, depending on how God is addressed, or how we think he can be addressed. The way in which the question of God is determined in terms of content always has to do with the question of man and his situation. It is therefore about a theology, which is linked to humanity and not exclusively to what the teachings on faith, doctrine or tradition envision, but instead to the human being with his needs, longings and hopes. One consequence of this is that the goal of theology should be a good life for all people.

Basically, theology is to be understood as a science that cannot count on 'safe ground' and 'solid houses'. It must not take the place of the truths of faith and should always only understand knowledge as such. In this sense, theology could be characterized more by a questioning of scientific nature and – as Fritz Simon formulated it – by being aware that knowledge limits the sense of possibility.[22] In spite of all these peculiarities, subjectivity, and provisional nature, theology is nonetheless challenged: its scientific character in the sense of traceability and intersubjective verifiability of findings and results has to be maintained.[23]

Education

In addition to anthropological and theological approaches, the understanding of education also forms one of the foundations of interreligious religious education or religious didactics. It raises the question as to how we understand the term 'education' and how it relates to what we have previously discussed.

Thus, we begin fundamentally from a broad, complex and process-oriented understanding of education, which includes one's own self, the relationship with others, the examination of the

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[22] Cf. Simon, Fritz 1999: Die Kunst, nicht zu lernen. Und andere Paradoxien in Psychotherapie, Management, Politik. Heidelberg, 133, 157.
[23] Cf. Schärtl, Thomas 2004: Wahrheit und Gewissheit. Zur Eigenart religiösen Glaubens. Kevelaer, 164.

purpose, the objective content and the surrounding context.[24] According to Reinhold Boschki, religious education is both a way and a goal:

> "A way since the creative and existential engagement with traditional religious forms and content is a process that affects the human person as a whole. The goal is religious education insofar as it is oriented towards religious maturity, self-determination and self-responsibility of the learning subjects." (Boschki 2017: 78)

Crucial for the interreligious character of education is an educational understanding that is relationship-oriented and deals with the other. Rainer Kokemohr views education as "a process [...] that is challenged by a foreign claim."[25] Similarly, the idea of the 'boundary' in the context of education includes: education happens in stepping out, in opening, in risk-taking, in encounter and relationship with the other person and in allowing oneself to be subjected to the self-assertion of the other. Wherever we reach our limits, we are confronted with the unfamiliar, the unknown, the unavailable and the uncertain.[26] It increases the contradiction and resistance that renders one's own blind spots visible. Just confrontation with it opens up the possibility of "creative experiences"[27]. Henning Luther, quoting Paul Tillich, speaks of the fact that the border is "the truly fertile place of recognition"[28]. By contrast, an uneducated person, who does not expose him- or herself to encounters and confrontations on the edge/at the border, or who has not been exposed to them, can easily be 'coded' and manipulated in such a way that independent thinking and the rationalization of one's own interactions disintegrate or are never constructed.[29]

4. Principles of a Contingency-Sensitive Religious Education

Following the anthropological foundations and the understandings of theology and education, fundamental principles of a contingency-sensitive religious education characterizing interreligious collaboration at the University of Innsbruck will be presented. For this purpose, I will set forth three central aspects: firstly, the difference between coping with contingency and…; secondly,

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[24] Cf. Lederer, Bernd 2012: Kompetenz oder Bildung? Eine Analyse jüngerer Konnotationsverschiebungen des Bildungsbegriffs und Plädoyer für eine Rück- und Neubesinnung auf ein transinstrumentelles Bildungsverständnis. Innsbruck, 309-311.

[25] Kokemohr, Rainer 2007: Bildung als Welt- und Selbstentwurf im Anspruch des Fremden. In: Koller, Hans-Christoph / Marotzki, Winfried / Sanders, Olaf (eds.): Bildungsprozesse und Fremdheitserfahrung. Beiträge zu einer Theorie transformatorischer Bildungsprozesse. Bielefeld, 13-68, here 14.

[26] Cf. Kraml, Martina 2003: Grenzgänge. In: Scharer, Matthias / Kraml, Martina (eds.): Vom Leben herausgefordert. Praktisch-theologisches Forschen als kommunikativer Prozess. Mainz, 159-179.

[27] Schratz, Michael / Schwarz, Johanna / Westfall-Greiter, Tanja (eds.) 2012: Lernen als bildende Erfahrung. Vignetten in der Praxisforschung. Innsbruck.

[28] Luther, Henning 1992: Religion und Alltag. Bausteine einer Praktischen Theologie des Subjekts. Stuttgart, 60.

[29] Cf. Arendt, Hannah 2011: Eichmann in Jerusalem. Ein Bericht von der Banalität des Bösen. Munich, 56.

dealing with truth and truth claims; and thirdly, contingency-sensitive approaches to religious education processes.

Coping with Contingency and Contingency Encounter

There are different understandings of contingency. First of all, it is possible to characterize two aspects of contingency. Quite often, especially in the classical logical sense, contingency is understood as a counterpart to the concept of necessity: contingent is that which is not necessary or could happen. This potential is linked to the real in many philosophical and theological directions: Something can be possible only if it can really be. In our understanding, we delimit ourselves and understand what is possible, regardless of what is real.

In the context of interreligious religious education and religious didactics, a further distinction must be addressed, which refers to dealing with contingency. With the boom of the concept of contingency in the second half of the 20th century, the notion of coping with contingency was particularly shaped with regard to the function of religion. According to Kurt Wuchterl, an attitude towards the fundamental recognition of the contingent and contingency for a life appropriate to man and his contexts is inevitable. However, he argues further, it should not remain at the mere appreciation level. Rather, people are challenged to encounter and enter into confrontation with contingency. Thus, in terms of religious philosophy, Kurt Wuchterl is interested in contingency encounter and not in coping with contingency.[30]

Unlike an understanding of religion that is focused on coping with contingency and sees it as a central function of religion in society, appreciation of contingency and contingency encounter open up new religious-philosophical and theological perspectives. This religious-philosophical view of contingency leads directly to theology: in this sense, God is no longer the guarantor that contingencies will be removed, but instead would be the reason for human appreciation of contingency and human encounter with contingency. I refer to the appreciation of contingency and the encounter with contingency as contingency sensitivity or possibility sensitivity.

Truth and Truth Claims

Dealing with contingency in the sense of appreciativeness of contingency and contingency encounter touches on central questions of interreligious religious education and didactics. The position you take to answer these questions shows which option you chose: contingency denial or constructive contingency encounter.

In the interreligious context, the concept of truth and truth claims associated with it are constantly present and are used in argumentation or (tacitly) presupposed. The concept of truth or truths in plural raise many questions, such as, among others, the following: Is every religion 'true'? Do the

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[30] Cf. Wuchterl 2011, 40-42.

'truths' of different religions include or exclude those of the other religions? How can different 'truths' and truth claims exist in unison with or next to one another?

Whether interreligious cooperation can be made fruitful depends first and foremost on what understanding of truth is used and how truth claims are handled. Therefore, an examination of this topic in the context of a possibility-sensitive interreligious religious pedagogy and didactics is essential. In this context, 'truth' plays a crucial role: is one's understanding of the truth absolutized, or are other approaches to the truth acknowledged?

First of all, it must be acknowledged that 'truth' is an ambivalent and ambiguously used word: we can speak of the truth from different scientific perspectives, such as, for example, the scientific, the philosophical or the theological truth. Even within the philosophical and theological perspectives, there are different theories and approaches to truth. In fact, individual thinkers and scientists are characterized by different or sometimes contradictory approaches. Thus, objectivist approaches assume that the truth can be seen by looking at the objective world and truth is found to be static, while others, such as for example constructivist understandings deny this, and conceive truth as a construct that depends on perspectives, locations, and contexts.

Our central concern in the development of interreligious religious education is not the definition of truth in terms of content, but the debate about the ways in which truth is claimed and represented in relation to the other. This makes questions of ethics and theology relevant.

From a theological point of view, we are less concerned with giving up or annulling truth claims. For example, Klaus von Stosch points out that the contingency of religious beliefs does not automatically mean that they are arbitrary.[31] Consequently, the focus is less on relativizing one's own claims to truth, but rather on relativizing one's own claims to absoluteness. In this context, the emphasis on contingency should make the limitations, fragmentedness and provisional nature of human thought and action visible against the background of the question of truth.

From what has been said, it becomes clear that it is crucial to distinguish between truth and truth claims, and that truth claims are always perspectival and guided by certain interests. This implies that human ways of thinking, speaking and acting in relation to truth are power-laden. This 'occupation with power' is also carried out with the distinctions, classifications and categorizations, which in our view are unproblematic, if they are introduced and used unilaterally and with an essentialist and objectivist claim.

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[31] Vgl. von Stosch, Klaus 2003: Was sind religiöse Überzeugungen? In: Joas, Hans (ed.): Was sind religiöse Überzeugungen? Göttingen, 103-146, here 139.

When we look at the ambiguous sides of truth claims with the concerns of interreligious religious education, we must ask ourselves which truth concept is a prerequisite or which truth concept we must base our truth claims on, so that we can live and work together in an interreligious manner.

A characteristic of an interreligious, sensitive existential-theological concept of truth is the conviction that truth and certainty remain ultimately withdrawn from us. Milad Karimi describes this with the words "truth as longing"[32]. It means that speaking and thinking about existential truth always leaves a remnant that can never be captured and is unavailable. This conviction of the unavailability of the truth is not only a theoretical matter or a matter of consciousness, but also a matter of performative action. This addresses a central moment, namely the correspondence of content and form, which goes hand in hand with an attitude of credibility. 'Truth' can be said in a way and with an attitude that makes it unbelievable. All forms of indoctrination fall into this area. Anyone who preaches or explains God or the truth in a way that makes the search process for truth no longer visible and perceptible, avoids the truth. He or she lacks therefore humility towards the truth that we never have nor possess. This humility promotes the attitude of the constant seeker and makes the indispensable provisional nature of truth claims bearable.

Contingency-Sensitive Approaches to Religious Education Processes. Or: Living in the Borderland

One of the most important attitudes in the field of interreligious religious education and didactics is certainly the openness to the other, the unknown and the supposedly foreign. The conditions of learning undoubtedly include the courage to look beyond one's own nose. This view requires courage, because it can create insecurity, uncertainty, and unpredictability regarding that which is one's own. Even if this vacillation in one's own belief or perspectives is indispensable for education in a pluralistic context, it is often seen as deficient. Especially in some religious and philosophical-theological contexts, which promote a 'firm ground' for undeniable personal competence, as well as one's own undeniably secure body of knowledge, which distinguishes itself from others in every respect, including implicitly devaluing others.

However, in interreligious religious education and didactics the willingness to leave one's own shore is a basic prerequisite for fruitful common work. On the one hand, this attitude makes it possible to get to know and understand the other, but on the other to be able to see one's own from the perspective of new experiences and thus to recognize the potential or the limitations of one's own perspective. For only when 'other continents' are discovered can 'one's own shore' be adequately considered and categorized at a 'global' level: Those who have left their shores and found new opportunities to live in the midst of religious plurality and diversity of worldviews will appreciate the plurality of conceptions of life and religious approaches as expressions of liveliness

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[32] Karimi, Ahmad Milad 2016: Wahrheit ist Sehnsucht. „So wetteifert um die guten Dinge." In: Langthaler, Rudolf / Tück, Jan Heiner (eds.): „Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette". Lessings Ringparabel – ein Paradigma für die Verständigung der Religionen heute? Freiburg i. Br., 278-292.

and enjoy it as a special gift from God. At the same time, one sometimes has the feeling of leaving an old homeland to enter a new territory. It can be frightening and lead to loneliness. Because there is a considerable difference between on the one hand those who think they know everything about religions and worldviews, but they stay in the 'safe haven' of their own beliefs, and on the other, those who are actually looking for new experiences in direct encounters with people of other religions and with other beliefs. The attitude of knowing everything (about the other) in the interreligious encounter and keeping it as clear as possible and under control should be opposed to an attitude that finds suitable expression and equilibrium based on Michael Nausner with the metaphor "living in the borderlands"[33].

Borderland is, however, not a closed territory or spiritual space. Rather, it is a network of the tracks and footprints all around it, including those of the ancestors. The fact that, in the present, a community can no longer presume "that cultures, ideologies or territories are homogenous entities that must be clearly divided"[34] is hereby taken into account.

Borders, even boundaries between denominations and religions, do not have to be understood as rigidly delimiting. Rather, they can be understood dynamically, opening up new spaces and possibilities. To move in the borderland, to consider the borderland as the actual homeland, transgress the boundaries of the other and undermines the superiority complex, which puts the self above the other. Such an attitude, in which new spaces open up in the borderland, is by no means free of fear. The encounter with the other is always a risk, especially in the interreligious realm. Despite all good will, excessive truth and control claims could hurt or muzzle the other. The sense of being able to be quite different in our own religion and among ourselves, while being at home in different religions, can overwhelm me and others more than most people, and perhaps I myself, think. Living in the borderland is therefore a risk, the outcome of which is highly uncertain. A contingent-sensitive attitude, which is associated with life in the borderland as a 'new ground', does not shy away from the risk of courageously approaching the unknown anew, which opens up the encounter of religions, despite all the fears associated with it.

5. Concluding Remarks

The plea for contingency-sensitive treatment as a prerequisite for interreligious work is novel. Especially in religious contexts, where the question of the truth dominates, there is a danger that this approach will be seen as a kind of dilution of one's religion and will be rejected without further ado. In the following, one example is given to show difficulties but also some possibilities that

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[33] Nausner, Michael 2013: Heimat als Grenzland. Territorien christlicher Subjektivität. In: Nehring, Andreas / Tielesch, Simon (eds.): Postkoloniale Theologien. Bibelhermeneutische und kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge. Stuttgart, 187-202.
[34] Nausner 2013, 202.

arise when a contingent-sensitive posture is adopted. Although a contingency-sensitive attitude at first glance appears to be extraordinary (especially in the religious field), it nevertheless represents a maxim of every theological and religious pedagogical reflection that sees its primary task in understanding one's own religion as a special way of being human. In this sense, Islam should also be understood as one of the outstanding possibilities and ways of "being human"[35]. The fact that the development of contingency sensitivity, despite all the difficulties, is feasible, is demonstrated in an impressive way by the thoughts of a shaman. I would like to quote his words at the end of my contribution:

> "Question: Why should one follow a spiritual path if one ends up with the knowledge that one knows nothing?
> Shaman: There is a beauty in this kind of lack of knowledge. It is a conscious lack of knowledge and not an ignorant one. And, over time, you get to a point where you make friends with the idea that you do not know anything. You have evolved so far that this lack of knowledge is actually a pleasure since it leaves you open to constantly expanding your perception. It's like a dance to be steady and open at the same time. It is a really interesting dance, since it is a skill. Everyone can learn a skill, but this type of skill is very hard to learn because it is so contrary to our usual way of thinking. You have to accept that you basically know nothing and are satisfied with it. In this way, you always remain open to mystery. In my view, that's what every good spiritual path should teach."[36]

6. References

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[35] Smith, Wilfred C. 1981: On understanding Islam. The Hague, 12.

[36] Kalisch, Sven 2010: Religion und Gewissheit – Anmerkungen zu einem epistemologischen Problem und eine schamanische Lösung. In: Werbick, Jürgen / id. / von Stosch, Klaus (eds.): Verwundete Gewissheit. Strategien zum Umgang mit Verunsicherung in Islam und Christentum. Paderborn, 31-52, here 51.

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