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Religious Education in a Growing Europe.

Contextual Perspectives.

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1 RE: Contextual

In this lecture I would like to focus on some elementary issues of RE in schools, especially those issues in relation to Europe. RE takes place in most western countries within the context of public schools in pluralistic societies. Many nations are struggling with tremendous changing of their basic cultural and religious values. So, whatever the impact of Christian traditions and Christian heritage in European nations might be - in the 21. century we are living a post-Christian Europe. Debates about a new shape of the school curriculum in general as well as about the place and the aims of the specific school subject RE are a symptom and a result of this overall changing.

Independent to the particular national backgrounds and answers to the ongoing challenges, independent to the risks and benefits of the ongoing developments – if you describe RE in an international comparison, one of the common denominators is to be titled a contextual orientation of RE. In order to deal with RE in a meaningful and thus in a competent way it is not any longer sufficient to deliver only religious texts to pupils. It is necessary to address also con-texts. Of course there are some mayor variations about how to understand and how to practice a contextual approach in RE, if you compare an English model to a Norwegian or a German one². However today there is a broad conviction in European RE movement about “the value of a contextual understanding of identity grounded in a developing relationship with others-in-community, the natural world and transcendence”³

Also recent developments of RE debate in your country contribute in shaping a substantial contextual approach for RE. Contextual orientation of RE asks for more than just updating your rhetoric. Pille Valk gave a deeper going analysis of what it means to follow the contextual line in RE. According to her description a serious contextual model asks at least for recognition of elements like the cultural-historical background of RE, the societies religious landscape, legislation regulating religious issues, people’s attitudes towards RE, developments experiences of RE in other countries, not to forget about the role and place of RE within the National Curriculum.⁴

I fully agree to her definition and further description of this model. In line with this orientation I will now address first the specific situation in Germany in order to give some information and insight about my specific context. Second I would like to follow the contextual orientation on the European level and ask what the challenges for RE might be.

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² H.-G.Heimbrock/Chr. Scheilke/P. Schreiner (Ed.), Towards Religious Competence. Diversity as a Challenge for Education in Europe, Münster 2001.

³ Miedema et al., The European Network for Religious Education in Europe through Contextual Approaches (ENRECA) Policy and Practice in Education 2004

⁴ Pille Valk, Estonian RE - Non-Confessional versus Confessional – Some Contextual Perspectives.

2 RE in Germany: Challenges and Changing

Due to specific relations in the past between Estonia and Germany many of you might know much about German history and the Christian background of our system of public education. So I might cut this short. Schools in Germany have been a product of monasterial piety all through the Middle Ages. From the reformation on public education and university education were strongly supported by a new religio-political consensus of Protestantism. This led to a long tradition of a unity between schools and churches. One result of the conflict between the Pope, the Emperor and Wittenberg was to establish RE as confessional subject, as it was in many other European states influenced by the reformation. Formally and to some extent even today RE in Germany has to be presented as a confessional subject. The legal principles of the “Grundgesetz” article 7 (3) pretend a more or less homogenous Christian population. So RE is either protestant or catholic. Those pupils who don’t want to participate are allowed to opt out.

Social reality however, religion, youth and everyday school life have changed considerably since the days of M. Luther and especially during the last generations. Since 40 years Germany is a society of immigration. In the 60ies of the last century by economic reasons millions of foreign workers were introduced to Germany from southern European countries. Only during and after the Balkan war Germany took in more refugees than all other European countries together. All that has changed also the religious affiliation of people in Germany. 34% of the 80 Mill still are Protestants, 33 % Catholics, but already 3 Millions of German inhabitants are Muslims. In total there are 500.000 Muslim pupils in public schools.

To be even more concrete I’ll give you some figures from my own regional context. The city of Frankfurt m Main consists of 630.000 inhabitants (within the Rhein-Main-area, a region of ca. 5 Mill people!). Nearly 30 % are Protestants and another 30 % are Catholics. Large strata of the population don’t have any religious affiliation at all. 28 % of the population hold a foreign passport, they come from more than 180 nations, belong to various religions. The largest group among them are Muslims from various ethnic origins, in total about 80.000. You will find primary schools near Frankfurt central station, which consist of 250 pupils, among them only 40 German, however 63 Turkish pupils. In the inner ring schools Christian youngsters are only a minority of 20% to 30 %. The effect on school life is, that you will find many schools, with very few RE lessons, in practice many teachers try to develop a more open and non confessional approach of RE, that also is addressed to non Christians and to pupils without any religious affiliation.

Plurality of religions and worldviews in the German multicultural and multi-religious society provoke severe conflicts between competing diverse options for faith, ethical values, and life style choices. After the reunion of west and east Germany quite a lot of voices asked to take this development as a chance to adjust RE in public schools according to new social realities. In order to keep in touch with changing in the social context, so the argument, RE should be more directed to religious and ethical information and education, less to confessional based RE education. Especially in times of lower church affiliation the society in general must provide an education that makes all youngsters basically competent also in religious matters, might they be members of a religious group or not. And it is a matter of statistical facts that in eastern German provinces due to a long period of official atheistic education of the former DDR only a minority of the pupils belong to the protestant church (ca. 15 %), Catholics score even lower, round 5 %.

Particularly the educational authorities in Berlin-Brandenburg started a new type of RE for all pupils in the lower secondary schools, called “Lebensgestaltung- Religion- Ethik” in order to

have a compulsory worldview and value education for every pupil might he or she be Christian, Muslim, agnostic or whatsoever. And quite a lot of western German teachers and RE scholars looked with sympathy and expectations to the east. The curriculum they actually developed was a mix of information about prominent world religions, moral education and social education. They even invited protestant and catholic churches to participate in that 4 years experiment, in the first instance simply because there were no trained RE teachers outside church groups, second because they also wanted to have religious beliefs represented from inside.

However conservative Christian politicians as well as both Christian churches went to the constitutional court and claimed this model being offending the principle of religious neutrality of state authorities. The case has been solved for that particular province Berlin-Brandenburg with a compromise. But the overall challenge is still at hand: to perceive the social changing with empirical research and to draw the appropriate educational consequences out of a post-Christian society.

Quite many politicians and academics in Germany had a narrow perspective about the decline of Christianity in culture and an unlimited secularisation. However in a report about the current German situation that intends not to be biased by prejudices there must be space to perceive interesting new developments. Within the secular culture in Germany and particularly in school culture religion as church affiliated confessional program does lose some plausibility, but religion does not disappear entirely. It is important to notice, that religion in another, broader sense, is appearing during school life in many ways. Teachers in primary schools start the week with lighting candles, singing meditative songs. Teachers, pupils and parents in several schools ask for school feasts at the beginning and the end of the year. All this and more is part of religion within school life. Outside official RE lessons, in subjects like literature, aesthetics and social studies more and more teachers deliberately involve religion and religious expressions, on the basis of their non dogmatic personal free religion and ethic. Given a multicultural and multi-religious shape of many classes and the daily conflicts and tensions between cultural and religious groups among youngsters there is a growing need in schools not only for information about other religions and for religious celebration, but likewise for orientation how to live together with people following pre- and postmodern worldviews at the same time, one pupil believing in nothing and his or her neighbour practising fundamentalist piety (might that be of Muslim or Christian shape.)

To give you some fresh examples about how people are reacting constructively on these developments: The city of Frankfurt is involved in a European school project for immigrants, pupils and their parents from foreign countries to prepare them for living in the German culture⁵. At this very moment, invited by the authorities of the city together with secondary school teachers do the first steps to prepare also material on religion, not on the actual multi-religious situation in neighbourhoods. Another example would be that Frankfurt authorities sponsor books for teachers providing detailed information about different world religions and especially their fiests and rituals.⁶ These are didactic initiatives outside the main stream academic RE discourse. Nevertheless they are there and academic research should not neglect them, rather ask what they indicate in terms of underlying social and religious need and developments. So far to a contextual information on the national level.

⁵ EU-Projekt „Willkommen – kulturelle und soziale Orientierung für Seiteneinsteiger der Aktion ‚Sokrates Comenius

⁶ There are prominent books on this topic, f. e. Gertud Wagemann, *Feste der Religionen – Begegnung der Kulturen*, 1996; *Feste der Völker. Ein multikulturelles Lesebuch*, Frankfurt/Main 1999.

3 Europe as Context for RE

Especially during this year of 2004 when the European Union enlarged formally it might be fitting to address also in RE matters the question, if the issue of Europe next to political and economic impact of the ongoing unification provides any specific educational relevance. During the process of European integration there have been set up numerous conferences and declarations on all issues, among them also meetings and related proclamations like “A soul for Europe”⁷ or the Madrid International Consultative Conference on School Education in relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-discrimination, november 2001. Recently the Swedish colleague R. Larsson organised a large European conference. The results are just printed in a new volume.⁸ Picking up this line of attempts the question now is: Is Europe a meaningful context also for RE? And if the answer is “yes”, in what sense and on which level?

3.1

A first and not unimportant effect of the accelerated European integration is the stimulus to care for situations and developments elsewhere in Europe. Therefore to answer my question in a first attempt I would like to do a very short tour d’horizon through some European countries, to give just a few remarks on different national contexts for different situations and orientations for RE. Of course this is only a sketchy picture and an arbitrary choice. There is literature about a more systematic and complete comparative approach.⁹

To start with your neighbours, in Scandinavia there happened a more or less deep going reshaping of RE, which put an end to a long period of Christian catechetics in schools. The **Swedish** curriculum for state schools includes RE as Religious Knowledge. This is supposed to be an informative and objective subject without any intention to make believers. Religion is understood as part of the overall human world view system, and in consequence the text books stress the importance to deal with the pupils’ own philosophy of life instead of imposing any religious tradition on them.

The **Norwegian** parliament in 1997 passed a new law to establish a non-confessional and culturally based approach of the subject titled “Christian Knowledge with Religion and Life View“. This orientation intends to bridge the Christian heritage, the plural shape of modern Norwegian culture. And it is also intended to contribute by educational means to individual as well as to national cultural identity formation. By the way in this country there has been developed the first explicit contextual model for RE.¹⁰

To continue in a circle I move to **England**. RE in English state schools is a compulsory subject since 1944. This subject has been shaped dominantly in a Christian way until the 1960es. Than due to cultural and religious pluralisation in a post-colonial empire a series of multifaith syllabuses was developed starting with the famous Birmingham syllabus. All the five mayor world religions should be treated equally in RE. After a heavy debate the Education reform act 1988 marked a changing emphasizing the Christian heritage of the country. The act prescribes that any syllabus „shall reflect the fact that religious traditions in

⁷ Cf. Schreiner, Peter u. a (Hg.) Committed to Europe’s Future. Contributions from Education and Religious Education. A Reader, Münster (Comenius Institut) (2002).

⁸ R. Larsson (Ed), Towards a European Perspective on Religious Education. Lund 2004

⁹ Cf. Schreiner, Peter u. a (Hg.) (2002) Committed to Europe’s Future. Contributions from Education and Religious Education. A Reader, Münster (Comenius Institut); H.-G.Heimbrock, Religionsunterricht im Horizont Europas. Einführung in die kontextuelle Religionsdidaktik, Stuttgart 2004.

¹⁰ G.Afdal/E.Haakedal./H.Leganger-Krogstad, Tro, livstolkning og tradisjon : innføring i kontekstuell religionsdidaktikk. Oslo 1997. (Belief, lifeinterpretation and Tradition: Introduction into the contextual didactics of religion, Oslo 1997).

Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain“ (RA section 8.3). Today there is heavy debate if RE in schools should be learning about religion, or promote young Christian believers, or help developing an overall spirituality.

In the **Netherlands** there is no compulsory subject RE in state schools. However one ought to realise, that two thirds of Dutch schools are Christian, either Catholic or Protestant schools, which do have RE and moreover a religious orientation of the school on the whole. 1985 the new law for primary schools established a new non Christian RE, titled “spiritual movements“. This subject is directed to all mayor religions as well as to ethical questions. In Holland however the heaviest debates are not about RE in itself but about growing Muslim groups and their right to establish schools with Muslim identity. Recent debates as well as events on the political scene focus round the shape and limits tolerance.

To move south, **Switzerland** is a confederation of regions (“Kantone”), which have a common Christian background, but recently they took different paths in RE matters. In the region of Zurich state authorities are implementing right now a new subject that changes a former Protestant confessional RE into a more plural and open subject “Religion and Culture”.

To come to southern European countries, **France** in general until recent times lacked totally any RE in schools due to the laicistic principles of the French revolution. Public neutrality in religious questions should preserve individual freedom of religious choices. Therefore something like RE is only allowed outside the schools, as a matter of churches, which are estimated as private bodies. However a closer look upon the country shows that despite general laicistic principles a growing number of initiatives is trying to cope in school education actively with growing conflicts between immigrants, mostly Muslims from Morocco and other Northern African countries. Within these experiments there is a growing sensitivity for the need to deal with religious traditions and ethical values in order to cope with the problems of a multicultural society.

To conclude my short hand overview with **Turkey** might astonish, because this country is only on the way to Europe, at least in terms of political structures. Nevertheless I think it is instructive to mention it our European context, due to its history. This country is mainly Muslim, however it knows since the days of the state reformer Kemal Atatürk a strict setting apart of religion and state, copying the French laicistic system. RE had been totally abolished from public schools. Since 1982 however it has been reintroduced into schools step by step on the basis of a constitutional prescript. And it is instructive to know about the motives: a public RE under the control of educational authority of the state was and is estimated to prohibit better a naïve and even fundamentalist islamistic instruction. RE as a school subject seems to be more in accordance with modern educational principles.

3.2

Given this picture, and of course the necessity to complete it, - what does all this information about foreign countries in Europe lead to? Is this already insight about Europe as a context for RE? To answer this question let me briefly mention my European experiences so far. I have been concentrating in my research on this issue during the last 6 years. Due to the possibilities of the ERASMUS program my faculty developed strong bilateral exchange relations to several other European theological faculties, which allowed me to give lectures and seminars and to meet people of other countries. Together with colleagues from many European countries we even took the chance to set up a European research network called ENRECA (The European Network for Religious Education in Europe through Contextual Approaches).

Its 4. symposium will take place here in Tartu next march and be hosted by P.Valk. Given this splendid connections to other European countries and their RE theory and practice I was able to present my study about “RE in a European horizon”.

Summing up all these experiences, my second point to answer the question about Europe as relevant context for RE is about things we have in common. I am still puzzled to see how many elements we have in common, admitted many national and regional differences and peculiarities. To mention only two structural things European nations and their RE developments have in common:

1. A comparison between particular nation shows not only separate phenomena but also global forces like the economic and monetary globalisation, intense mutual exchange of cultural habits in every day life, and a strong pluralisation of world views in a post-Christian culture. Many societies are busy to shape a new model for RE or alike school subjects in order to provide sufficient collective value education in times of declining traditional Christianity. The attempts to set up Ethics as a school subject in Czech Republic, to establish a subject like “spiritual developments” in Dutch elementary schools, and to change Norwegian RE into a new subject called “Christian Knowledge with Religion and Life View“ are only a few examples of an overall trend to develop a non confessional school subject directed towards religion. One of the essential contextual challenges for institutions of public education in Europe is to perceive and to deal constructively with cultural and religious plurality. The English scholar John Hull described this task as follows: “It is possible that we in Europe, in spite of and maybe even because of the secular freedom and the religious toleration of European life, will be in a position to reclaim the European religious heritage in the interests of moral and spiritual development. In this context, the religious pluralisation of Europe is of the utmost importance, because it provides a challenge to monolithic religious education, and an opportunity for religious partnership.”¹¹

* 2. A second broader trend: If you compare recent attempts to renew the curriculum and to give a comprehensive description of the goals and educational tasks RE should serve, it is also striking to recognise a key word with growing fascination. And that key word is “life”. The concept of life, the relation between religion and life are functioning as main rhetoric means to make the specific matter “RE” plausible within a state school curriculum. This is at least due to Swedish and Norwegian syllabus, to new German curriculum like the Brandenburg model of L-E-R (Lebensgestaltung-Ethik-Religionskunde), to England and to the Netherlands where likewise RE is promised to discuss and to solve “Questions of life”. Due to this trend also a RE model drawing on pupil’s life world is accepted by and large.

Not only in Germany the traditional more confessionalist and isolated catechetical approach has lead RE to a rather marginalised position in public schools. The challenge of the present tense will be to show, that religion and RE does not only exist for its own purpose, but deals with problems and experiences of life that contributes also to shape the overall culture in a direction to make the world a life-world, a world worth to live in. Also this is part of a contextual modelling of RE.

3.3

These and other elements are general trends *in* Europe which have great impact on the conditions to teach RE in almost every European state and the schools. But to move again a qualitative step further in my inquiry on Europe: does *Europe as a whole* provide any

¹¹ John Hull, Religious Education in Democratic Plural Societies: Some General Considerations, in: New Methodical Approaches in Religious Education, Ankara, 2003, 33-42 .

perspective for RE? What does Europe contribute to the issues of religion and formation? Nothing of it is taken purely as outer surrounding. Of course Europe might be identified as geographical entity. Europe as a continent contains more than 10 mill km², meanwhile with more than 480 Million of inhabitants living in 27 states. Europe certainly signifies also an economic quantity, “Euro-Land”, despite the fact that not all European countries are or will be using the Euro. The common European currency functions already like a basic unifying value system, some fear that this replaces to a great extent a spiritual superstructure, which religion once served as. But Europe is more than the realm of capitalism and the culture of consumism.

Some years ago the Danish religious studies scholar T. Jensen from Odensee stated that the process of European unification will have a powerful negative effect on religion, leading sooner or later towards a form of “Euro-religion”.¹² He forecasted that regional or national religious orientations will be replaced by a global sort of religion. This would come down towards the smallest common denominator, beyond all specific religious and political options. In the meantime, his expectation did not show up, but we could ask also if such an overall form of religion would be wishful as the leading idea of RE. And one might argue if his prophecy is based on sufficient insight in both, Europe and religion.

As far as educational and RE theory is concerned I think it is necessary to move beyond these descriptions of Europe. Within an intellectually sufficient discourse it is necessary to take Europe not only in terms of geographic or political growth, but also as a concept of formation, as a notion of a collective formational process. Exactly at this point in past and present religion and value decisions come in. For many national RE discourses the concept of formation has turned out to be essential. I would like to address the European aspects of this notion.

As I mentioned earlier some churches in Europe presented an official declaration with the promising title „A soul for Europe“ to point at the religious dimension of the growing of Europe. „We are at crossroads of European history where the debate about meaning has become a major consideration. The building of Europe is not just an economic and political exercise but also has spiritual and ethical dimensions. The objective of this initiative is to encourage those who are aware of this to bring their specific contributions to the unification of Europe.”¹³. In this declaration they put forward their concern to participate actively in the formation process called “Europe”.

And now I am going deeper in the different meanings of the notion of “formation”. Formation aims a growing process which is connected to the growing of nations and political units like Estonia, Germany or Europe. Formation in another sense aims at a human development directed to civilisation and becoming more human. In this sense it is connected to education. “Europe” might function as a sign or a metaphor for both.

In a historical perspective, the ideal of formation dates back to specific European traditions of enlightenment and far beyond this époque, actually it reaches back to ancient Greek humanist ideals of “paidea”. Historically the name of “Europe” did not point at a continent, but

¹² Tim Jensen, Religion and Religious Education in Europe of Conflicting Trends, in: N.- Å. Tidman (Hg.), Into the third Millenium: EFTRE conference August 1998 in Copenhagen , Band 31, Malmö, (1999)142-159

¹³ European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society, A Soul for Europe. Ethics and Spirituality (download:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/policy_advisers/activities/dialogue_religions_humanisms/issues/soul_for_europe/index_en.htm.

moreover at a one of the four points of the compass, that of evening darkness, the occident (the German word “Abendland” shows this layer of meaning clearly). It is further interesting to remember the impressive ancient mythological image of “Europe”. The ancient Greek poet Homer tells about Europe as a girl, a beautiful daughter of a Phoenician king. She was kidnapped by Zeus, himself disguised as a white bull and carried off to Crete. There the robbed woman lived as stranger in a strange landscape, became mother of the famous kings Minos and Rhadamyntos. So far Europe as an old myth, visible today by the way on the back side of the Greek 2 € coin. Given the present debate about European identity it contains a threefold message. First: the origins of Europe are not lying inside but rather at the boarder, or even outside the continent, like Crete is lying outside the geographical entity of Europe. Second: Europe started with a fiction, it has been a construal. And third: this construction from its very beginning was about the relation to strangers.

Europe did not remain an impressive poetic construct. It turned out to be a powerful religious and political construction as well. The English RE scholar John Hull has shown, that Europe has been a most powerful geo-political concept giving inspiration to the formation of Christianity on this continent in a specific way.¹⁴ Already 1054 during the separation between western and eastern Rome Europe served as a religio-political concept, identifying Europe self-evidently with the western, the Latin type of Christianity. And also later on European identity would be intentionally developed (not to say: invented) according a formal strategy to base the political entity Europe upon a spiritual root, reducing actual religious plurality to a monolithic construal. The Scottish theologian Richard Roberts has collected and evaluated the historical follow of such construals of a European identity.¹⁵

His study makes it difficult to use the above mentioned metaphor of “A soul of Europe”, assuming only *one* soul. The declared will to dialogue in the 21st century cannot be developed upon a mono-religious model. There are in my eyes the limitations of the formula „A Soul for Europe“. It is presented in singular, must however be reformulated in plural. The heartbeat of Europe is not a single, because there are more than one souls. And this is not a really new fact, as Jacques Santer, the former President of the Council of Europe stated: „The whole meaning of the intercultural and interfaith dialogue between Christianity, Judaism and Islam...is to be found, then, in Europe’s culture and history. With that influx of people from various Muslim countries into the European union, it is now becoming urgent for the political reasons to multiply our efforts to improve mutual understanding and intensive exchange between Christianity and Islam, between Christian churches and Muslim communities.”¹⁶

A critical evaluation of European identity formation and the appeal to religion is especially necessary in times of controversy about a place for Muslim elements within a Christian coined model of Europe. Again historical memory informs about the underlying dynamics and implications of this issue for European identity.

To sum up: To take Europe as a concept beyond a pure geographical meaning shows up essential elements of Europe as an idea of formation, intensely connected to basic values and to religious options. Religion was and is the meeting point between collective and individual models of identity. RE was and is a coordinating point bridging collective and individual formation. A historical informed and self-critical concept of Europe as a dynamic and

¹⁴ J. M. Hull, Practical Theology in Context: The Case of Europe, in: Wilhelm Gräß/Birgit Weyel (Hg.), Praktische Theologie und protestantische Kultur, Gütersloh 2002, 494- 510.

¹⁵ Richard H. Roberts, The construal of ‚Europe‘: religion, theology and the problematics of modernity, in: Paul Heelas (Ed.), Religion, modernity and postmodernity, Mass, 1998 186-217.

¹⁶ A soul for Europe

ongoing process could contribute to handle better especially the struggles about a Christian or a multi-religious European identity.

3.4 Formation and Religion

Undoubtedly the ancient Greek formational ideal with its interest to rational approach towards the world served as a motor for European cultural formation. Specific religious ideas however, enlarged and even corrected this approach towards the world considerably. Jewish as well as early Christian spirituality introduced the moment of difference into the western world view. The ideal of human formation in Europe is based next to Greek humanist ideal upon the strange idea to have one's own identity from outside. This is the essence of biblical notion of „God“ and the traditions about humankind “created in the image of God”.

This idea, however, taken seriously means a strange root within the formation idea of “old Europe”, not only from a historical perspective. It leads to a precarious insight: The origin of the so-called “European-Christian” ideal of formation does not date back to “own traditions”. Systematically seen the Hebrew idea being created in the image of God instilled an essential moment of difference into the idea of identity formation: formed as human subject to the image of a transcendent institution, with whom nevertheless the human being never will be identical, if he or she will remain human and not forget about his or her human limitations.

If religion is said to be a disruptive factor in the formation of Europe, Christian religion and RE based on this notion of difference could introduce a productive disruption into the integration process. Religion, Jewish and Christian, but also in other traditions, does not only serve to form identity by affirming ultimate values, which would be used as boarder to fence off other people. Religion also implies a reservoir of transformative questions helping to support the formation process in terms of an open-end process towards viable human identity. As a consequence of this notion of difference, Europe as a suitable key concept for the process of formation, both religious and individual have not be shaped in terms of a uniform Europe. However, it is necessary to keep its orientation in touch with plural religious and cultural traditions. Already the ancient myth about the girl and the bull points at the fact that Europe owes itself in past and present also impulses from outside. What follows is to conceive Europe's identity as home not of the similar but of the dissimilar, as inevitable field of tension between majority and minority cultures. This is not at all a plea for cultural or religious relativism.

4 Conclusions for RE: Discovering Home and the World

What could be the conclusion for education and the place of RE in general school education? Let me draw some conclusions from my arguments so far.

In 1997 the Czech president and poet V.Havel addressed a remarkable speech to the German parliament. He talked about a European necessity to get a new understanding of „home“, beyond chauvinist and revanchist patriotism. With intensity he appealed to the elementary meaning of the word ‘home’. “Home from it's origins does not signify a separate structure, but rather the opposite: a structure, that opens – a bridge between human beings and the universe.” And he deduced an elementary educational task from that: “We should learn to perceive ‘home’ as part of the ‘world in it's wholeness’, that means as something that gives us a place in the world instead of separating us from it.”¹⁷

¹⁷ V. Havel, Speech to the German Parliament „Europa sollte zur Heimat unserer gemeinsamen Werte werden“. Bonn 1997 (printed version cf. Frankfurter Rundschau 25.4.1997).

What could be a didactical equivalent to this analysis of formation and the nature of home? Religion in schools and in RE must be presented in an appropriate way. I don't think it is appropriate to work on a uniform "Euro-Religion" like Tim Jensen had in mind. My answer does not intend to neglect the differences of particular religions and make them a chaotic mix of a sort global religion, that does not exist anywhere outside school. On the contrary, in times of a growing relativism it asks for presenting religion as a means to search for truth. Young people can make religious choices only on the basis of information about religions and if they see authentic examples of elder people to count on religion in their own lives.

But the analysis of Europe as a formation process including the cultivation of home and difference asks further for presenting religion not only as a tradition, not only as a set of teachings, but as a living entity, being shaped and cultivated also today in various ways, within ethical conflicts in a city, within cultural and ritual life of families and neighbourhoods, even within particular schools themselves. In my particular view it asks for combining universal perspectives directed to the world, to the "other" with local contexts as source for identity formation and thus for RE. It asks for relating the universal ideas about God, truth, evil and good with pupils direct surrounding, with their own life-world. In that direction I started to prepare a RE project together with teachers and students "From global to glocal. Living Religion, cultural diversity and identity formation."¹⁸ It all starts with the question "What is it to learn religion not anywhere, but deliberately at the place, in the area where you live? That is in my case within the urban centre of Frankfurt. It might and it should be connected in your case with orientation towards the perspectives on life that spring off your religious life, your interpretation of life and world given by creative artists, through pop culture, films and literature.

To conclude: RE has a task towards pupils in schools at home. This is the first context. And we are in the midst of essential changing of that task. But likewise, Europe is a powerful and a meaningful context for RE. It is up to us as academics in RE to pick up the challenges, for the benefit of the identity formation of pupils and for the benefit of an open identity formation of Europe.

¹⁸ Cf. last chapter of the book footnote no 9.