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CHILDREN'S VOICES
Theological, philosophical and spiritual perspectives

kassel university press

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Band 32

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Introduction

The third meeting of the European network of children's theology took place in April 2013 in Trondheim, Norway. As in earlier meetings, the conference consisted of both presentations for a group of Norwegian pedagogues as well as an internal paper presentation. Sturla Sagberg organised this meeting with great care and commitment, and intended to publish the contributions to the conference in a book to make them accessible to the wider public. Focusing on Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, theory and practice of children's theology mainly concentrate on religious education in schools. Accordingly, the approach of children's theology has been specified and differentiated over the course of the last ten years. However, the contributions of Norway and francophone Canada clearly indicate the impact of the increasing shift concerning the task of religious education moving away from school to church. Therefore, alongside the question of professionalism, the question of voluntary work is becoming increasingly important. The question happens to be different in the Czech Republic, where a profound constraint in religious matters in education can be observed. Both here and in other contexts, the question of spirituality of children plays a crucial role. As the practice of children's theology is linked to the "great questions", which are equally raised by children's philosophy, the range of topics of both the conference and this book are marked by the terms *children's theology*, *children's philosophy* and *spirituality*. This leads to the following contributions:

In his contribution, *Sturla Sagberg* emphasizes the importance of the declarations of the rights of children. He makes it clear that their right to a spiritual development represents a major challenge for educational and particularly ecclesiastical institutions.

Elaine Champagne shows that the development in francophone Canada poses a great challenge for religious education. New challenges arise in the form of the shift taking place in religious education which is more frequently covered by church institutions than by school. The creative spirituality of

children is not always countered by an appropriate professionalism in religious education, which is often taught by volunteers.

Using the example of two children in two Norwegian parishes, *Elisabeth Haakedal* shows how they respond to church programmes designed for children. The question arises as to whether the programmes run by the churches meet the individual requirements of children.

Noemi Bravená also proceeds from the spirituality of children, which she interprets as an awareness of transcendence in the context of the pedagogical discourse in the Czech Republic. In this context she shows the opportunities for school and church to meet implicit and explicit religious requirements of children.

Elisabeth Schwarz provides insight into her work on philosophising with children which is based on the "great questions". At the end of her contribution, she raises the question as to whether and how this philosophising is different from theologising.

Miriam Zimmermann gives insight into her research on questions of pupils in religious education, and supplies concrete advice on how theologising can benefit from her results.

Gerhard Büttner highlights the importance of the "supernatural" for theological conversations with children. Adults should react sensitively and should not restrict children's speculations through rational interpretations.

Hanna Roose offers insight into two lesson scenarios on the story of Moses. She shows in detail the complex interaction of theological concepts of children, science and teachers.

Katharina Kammeyer treats the topic of theologising in the context of the discourse on heterogeneity. She shows successful examples as well as limitations of the approach.

The volume closes with the introductory lecture held by *Petra Freudenberger-Lötz* in Trondheim. She offers insights into the results of research workshops conducted by the department of religious education at the University of Kassel and aimed at the qualification of future teachers of religious education. Using the example of self-reflection of children, she

shows how their concepts of particular subjects, such as God, change in the course of growing up.

All contributions in this book underwent a review which was organized by Gerhard Büttner, Petra Freudenberger-Lötz, Hanna Roose and Mirjam Zimmermann.

This book was financed by the department of religious education at the University of Kassel.

Petra Freudenberger-Lötz und Gerhard Büttner

Sturla Sagberg

Taking a children's rights perspective on children's spirituality and on church work with children

Introduction

The topic is wide and has many elements. This paper is a modest contribution towards pointing out central motifs in the thinking of children's rights to a spiritual life and some questions these motifs are raised in general as well as in church work with children. This is done by first sketching some historic lines leading up to the concept of children's rights, then discussing responses and interpretations of central documents. The discussion points towards some issues in the documents that are easily neglected in late modern society and should be of special concern to education and to faith communities.

"Children's rights perspective"

Recently, this perspective has been closely related to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989. This convention was accepted as normative for Norwegian legislature in 2003. The perspective is, however, both age old and hardly realized in its full meaning. Jesus presented his adult followers with children's right to enter the kingdom of God, thus introducing a revolution in the view of the child. This led – slowly – to social reforms in the ancient world (Cunningham, 1996). At the beginning of modernity Jesus' view of the child inspired pioneers in education like Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Friedrich Fröbel. Pestalozzi, the father of the concept of "human dignity", worked with street children during the Napoleonic wars. His vision was to give children words and concepts of human dignity so that they could understand themselves in relation to all circles of life, the relation

to God being at the centre of this worldview. In modern language of spirituality we would call this the *ability to find meaning in transcendence*.

My use of the concept of "right" in connection with Jesus is, of course, not to be confused with "right" in the sense of Human Rights. My point is that the new concept of children's rights in its moral sense has been related to the view of children in a Christian framework. Fröbel, the father of "kindergartens", understood his mission as "making the human being aware of himself, at peace with nature and in union with God" (Myhre, 1981: 288, my translation). Learning from these pioneers, educational philosophers like Maria Montessori and Janusz Korczak became advocates of all children's right to be regarded with dignity, regardless of mental abilities, race or religion. Janusz Korczak wrote already in 1919 his *Magna Charta Libertatis* – a statement of children's rights, based on three basic rights (Mathiasson, 2004):

> The right of the child to its own death
> The right of the child to the day of today
> The right of the child to be what it is

Children's right to their own death is a paradox. Korczak says that it has to do with adults' tendency to let children become symbols of good, of life, of everything we hope for, instead of letting them live their lives. This attitude of making children into something for the sake of the adult is a lack of respect. Genuine respect requires a willingness to see the child as it is, today, and be there with the guidance and support necessary for the child to develop its willpower and identity. This means, by necessity, that they must face forces that threaten life as well as those that support life. It requires a way of living that neither forbids everything risky nor lets a child do whatever it prefers. It is recognising the child as another human being and spending time with it in that perspective. Korczak says: "When I play or talk with a child, a moment of my life unites with a moment of the life of the child, and both these moments have the same degree of maturity" (in Gustafsson, 2004: 119, my translation).

My point in drawing these historic lines is to emphasise two aspects of a children's rights perspective: *The moral and the judicial*. The nations of the world have ratified conventions of human rights, including that of children's special rights, but if one takes a look at children's situation, there is an alarming difference between moral ideals and reality. In many countries children are still treated as the property of their parents. The old Roman law of *patria potestas* – the absolute legal control of the father over the lives of children – is still present in refined or more vulgar forms. Adults still abuse their power position; just take a look on the web pages of UNICEF and other organisations working to improve lives of children. Another side of children's vulnerability is the fact that millions of children seem not to be needed. Abuse and neglect continue to mark the lives of many children. The documents of children's rights serve both to illustrate the problem and to make its challenge felt.

Children's rights and children's spirituality

Children are always the most vulnerable in times of social and spiritual unrest and conflicts. When social bonds are broken, children's spiritual life suffers as well: Their world of meaning comes to pieces. There is a growing awareness among professionals working with children at risk of the significance of spiritual resources to rekindle children's hope and meaning in life (De Souza, 2003; Garbarino & Bedard, 1996).

As always, the concept of spirituality calls for some clarification, and I can only refer to other publications for a deeper discussion (Sagberg, 2006, 2007, 2008). Suffice it to say that in this paper I use it as a name for the children's process of making meaning. Spirituality has turned out to be a concept for what it means to be human in terms of moral ideals and meaningful relations, thus creating an arena where Christians, secular humanists and adherents to different religions can communicate. The British humanist Robert Ashby describes spirituality as "moments of being, created by feelings, imagination and memories, which in some way or another unite

and lead us away from everyday life to an amplified experience of reality" (Ashby 1999:79). Ashby is a secular humanist. Being a Christian, I have no problem in accepting such a description. But I will understand these moments which lead me to an amplified experience of reality as something which eventually implies a reality of God as the ultimate point of reference for how I understand myself.

This "amplified experience of reality" is, I think, another way of expressing "meaning", or what I would call the "why" of life. James Garbarino, mentioned above, says (Garbarino and Bedard 1996:467): "By 'spiritual', we refer to the inner life of children and adolescents as the cradle for a construction of meaning." The inner life of a child is the child's ability to say who he or she is, where he or she belongs, and what his or her hopes are – the cradle of meaning.

Garbarino's research has focused on how spiritual development proves salient in children's ability to cope with traumas. Being able to express meaning in one's life is the most important foundation for resilience, and the sense of meaning is more important the younger you are. The way we deal with traumas and suffering is where religion and spirituality meet, Garbarino claims. Most of the world's major religions contain an awareness of the traumatic aspects of life, together with stories and hopes for a good life. That is why there is such a strong link between spiritual development and freedom of religion.

So what is supposed to be protected in children's spiritual rights? One answer would certainly be: *Children's right to develop a sense of meaning and belonging and believing and hoping.* There is an important lesson to learn from the development of children's rights documents.

Documents of children's rights

The first declaration of children's rights had only five articles:

Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the League of Nations 26 September 1924:

By the present Declaration of the Rights of the Child, commonly known as "Declaration of Geneva," men and women of all nations, recognizing that mankind owes to the Child the best that it has to give, declare and accept it as their duty that, beyond and above all considerations of race, nationality or creed:

> 1 The child must be given the means requisite for its *normal development, both materially and spiritually;*
> 2 The child that is hungry must be fed; the child that is sick must be nursed; the child that is backward must be helped; the delinquent child must be reclaimed; and the orphan and the waif must be sheltered and succored;
> 3 The child must be the first to receive relief in times of distress;
> 4 The child must be put in a position to earn a livelihood, and must be protected against every form of exploitation;
> 5 The child must be brought up in the consciousness that its talents must be devoted to the service of fellow men.

This declaration describes a view of the child who needs material and spiritual support in order to develop its talents and serve its fellow human beings. There is a sense of collective belonging in this declaration that feels good and meaningful. However, the 1930's and 1940's proved that a declaration is of little use if it is not underpinned by shared values and supported by state authorities.

It is important to remember that the *Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948 came into being not to introduce new values or rights. The idea of Human Rights is based on a deep conviction that there are some rights which are evident to all people. Rights and values that were taken more or less for granted, if not always followed, were so severely violated and threatened during the Nazi regime that it seemed necessary to state for all times what had been at stake. *Safeguarding children's spiritual right is, accordingly, a way of confronting the destructive aspects of modernity*. The declaration of 1924 was expanded for that purpose in 1959, and I quote excerpts from the preamble and the first two articles:

> Whereas the need for such special safeguards has been stated in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924, and recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the statutes of specialized agencies and international organizations concerned with the welfare of children, WHEREAS mankind owes to the child the best it has to give, Now, therefore, The General Assembly Proclaims THIS DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD to the end that he [sic!] may have a happy

> childhood and enjoy for his own good and for the good of society the rights and freedoms herein set forth, and calls upon parents, upon men and women as individuals, and upon voluntary organizations, local authorities and national Governments to recognize these rights and strive for their observance by legislative and other measures progressively taken in accordance with the following principles:
> The child shall enjoy all the rights set forth in this Declaration. Every child, without any exception whatsoever, shall be entitled to these rights, without distinction or discrimination on account of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, whether of himself or of his family.
> The child shall enjoy special protection, and shall be given opportunities and facilities, by law and by other means, to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity. In the enactment of laws for this purpose, the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration.

First, I think this declaration admits the failure of modern society to recognize the child as a human being in its own right. It has become necessary to point out that there should be no discrimination on any account, and to address those *responsible* for safeguarding children's rights. Second, the preamble the Declaration "calls upon parents, upon men and women as individuals, and upon voluntary organizations, local authorities and national Governments to recognize these rights". This shows the character of this declaration as a moral document, not a legal one. Morally speaking, the church is addressed together with all institutions of the civil society.

Third, the child's need to *develop as a human being is given a position as a guiding perspective.* This is described not only with the words "material and spiritual", but several aspects of life are mentioned. This point indicates that by recognizing children's rights, the church cannot separate the spiritual from the physical, mental, social or moral.

Fourth, "spiritual" should not be reduced in meaning. *It is one aspect of a child's life together with other aspects, and therefore not the same as these, be it moral or mental*. By mentioning the spiritual aspect of life as something specific the declaration recognizes the significance of religion as well as of philosophical worldviews for a child's wellbeing and growth.

From moral declaration to binding convention

The Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 is different in its address. It makes the state parties not only morally, but legally responsible for how rights, values and norms stated in the earlier declarations are safeguarded. There are some other differences as well that have had major impact on state policies concerning spirituality and religion.

First, earlier declarations expressed a universal view of the child. The convention reflects as well the increasing complexity of modern societies and the different responses to the idea of children's rights by different nations and religious bodies, as indicated by the preamble:

> Recognizing that, in all countries in the world, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, and that such children need special consideration,
> Taking due account of the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child,
> Recognizing the importance of international co-operation for improving the living conditions of children in every country, in particular in the developing countries,
> Have agreed as follows:…

Second, the guiding perspective of material and spiritual growth is not expressed in the same manner as before. It is there, but not in the position of a guiding perspective. The perspective of material and spiritual growth, or spiritual growth as part of a child's development, has been moved from articles 1 and 2 in the former declarations to article 27 in the Convention under the heading of *standard of living.*

States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

Central articles are 12, 13 and 14. Article 12 states:

> 1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
> Article 13 states the right to freedom of expression. Article 14 declares the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion:
> 1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

> 2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.

This change may not look significant, and there is still reason to emphasize that spiritual development should neither be confused with mental or moral or social development, nor be separated from those aspects of a child's life. In Norwegian context this is reflected in policy documents for school and kindergarten: "It is recognized that religions and worldviews are at home in public space, and that there should be room for a spiritual dimension in kindergarten" (KD, 2011, my translation). However, other public statements are not so clear. In order to be realistic about the task of church work, I think it is necessary to take a look at political statements where children's rights are interpreted.

Children's spiritual rights as a challenge to faith communities

Article 14 in the Convention is objected to by many countries for different reasons. Islamic states object to it because children are not allowed to change religion. However, in some states, under given circumstances and having come to age, young people may be allowed to change religion. Some countries hold that change of religion is banned altogether, and therefore article 14, paragraph 1, cannot be accepted. Some have made a general reservation to the convention as to all provisions found incompatible with Islamic law (Qatar, Oman, Brunei Darussalam, Saudi Arabia).

Article 27 is not affected as such, because spiritual development is important in all Islamic states – within the ramifications of Islam.

In Norway's first reports as to how the Convention is implemented (BFD, 1993, 1998), children's spiritual development is mentioned only in a comment to article 29, where "spiritual" is used with the same meaning as "mental". Article 27 is commented only in terms of living standard without commenting on the different aspects of a child's development. Later reports

follow the same trend. Article 14 is mentioned in terms of the right to withdraw pupils from elements in religious education, with little emphasis on what has been done to help parents in the task of guiding children.

Norway was the first country to appoint a Children's Ombudsman (Barneombudet) to advocate children's right towards state agencies. Barneombudet has laid important premises for the public report on politics of religion and spirituality in Norway, "Det livssynsåpne samfunn – en helhetlig tros- og livssynspolitikk" (NOU 2013:1). Barneombudet points to article 14 as a new expression of the child' s right to religious freedom as separate from parental rights, and as such to be protected by the state. It also points to parents' right and duty to guide children in their practice of religion, recognizing religious practice as an important aspect of growing up for many children.

Barneombudet's focus is, however, on *problematic manifestations of religion*: parents forcing children into or away from specific practices, children and young people being put into positions of religious preaching which go far beyond their responsibility and maturity, violence against children in the name of religion, religious education within faith communities that does not comply with national curricula, and so called "isolated faith communities" that exert an unhealthy influence on children's life (Barneombudet, 2011).

Without denying that purpose of the rights of children I would claim that there is more to the right to "a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development" (§ 27 in the Convention) than has come to the attention of the policy makers. Studies from England indicate a similar lack of perspective in government policy. The 2004 Children Act and the programme called Every Child Matters may illustrate this lack. Children's well-being is described in five domains without mentioning the right to spiritual development. That is to say, values mentioned in the policy documents may be equated with children's spirituality (Watson, 2006), but as Watson points out, the richness of what can be meant by spirituality in terms of transcendent beliefs and values of

existential meaning is marginalised (ibid.). This should be of concern not only to religious bodies, but to education in general.

Jack Priestly emphasizes the latter concern. He points to the development of the Education Act in England (1918, 1944 and 1988) that has kept a notion of the spiritual linked to civilization and character (Priestly, 2005). This is parallel to the continuity between the Geneva declaration of 1924, the Declaration on the Rights of the Child of 1959 and § 27 in the Convention of 1989. Priestly argues for a holistic approach to children's spirituality, like it was intended in the documents mentioned. This will, however, require varied descriptions and narratives, not definitions that separate spirituality from other aspects on the life of children.

Public responses to children's rights demand close attention from faith communities and church work with children. Some states reject children's rights for religious reasons. Other states use children's rights to curb the power and authority of religious bodies over children. In a Christian context some issues call for specific attention. Some concern the way churches deal with the judicial aspects of children's rights, most clearly stated in the Convention, while others concern the deeper structure of moral obligation that is explicitly stated in the declarations.

A children's rights perspective on church work is not only about the right to religion. It is also a critical perspective of how the church views the child as a subject.

A children's rights perspective on church work requires, therefore, serious work with how life in a community of faith relates to problems in society.

That is also where spirituality and religion meet. A spiritual life is marked by a moral sense of what it is to be human. This is expressed in the Bible (Paul's letter to the Galatians) as "fruits" – as results of a life in faith. These fruits are not specific to Christian spirituality, but they are motivated and nourished by faith in Jesus.

A spiritual life is marked by wonder and meaning. A spiritual life involves search for meaningful relations.

The state is responsible for allowing individuals and communities (including faith communities) to serve people within the ramifications of children's rights. That is not done just by political ratifications and public statements. This brings this paper to its final point.

What a children's rights perspective does not say

There is a widespread misunderstanding that human rights can serve as some kind of alternative to religion or spiritual values. Tore Lindholm, expert on human rights, states (Lindholm, 1997):

Human rights are not the spearheads of social compartmentalization, cultural plurality, and secularization; but they are institutional responses to these achievements and predicaments of modernity, safeguarding religious freedoms and cultural plurality... (...).

Human rights do not dislodge religion, comprehensive ethics, and profound philosophy. Under modern circumstances free and authentic cultivation and development of rivalling religious, moral, and philosophical traditions depend on the protection of human rights. (...)

Human rights are not substitutes for meaning and human fulfilment.(...) The existential or religious meaning of human dignity has to be purchased elsewhere.

Lindholm's comments indicate that documents on Children's Rights depend on something beyond the documents themselves. The Rights should serve to protect authentic religion and spirituality and an upbringing that gives children access to resources of spiritual character. Documents on children's rights have no power without a moral sense of what it is to be human and a sense of meaning in life. *The most important aspect of children's rights is not contained by what it says. It is rather about the responsibility it lays on adults to give children a chance to find out and follow what is important in life.* I want to point out two consequences of this that may be obvious, but, nevertheless, are often overlooked or neglected.

1 Spiritual development requires spiritual language

I have focused on the moral aspect of children's rights, something that cannot be guaranteed by laws, but is intended in the documents. *That leads me back to the Declaration on the rights of the child, stating every child's moral right to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially.* I have referred to pioneers of children's rights who understood the moral force of the concept. They understood that children need words and symbols of meaning to develop spiritually. Religions are shaped around such words and symbols.

A "spiritual language" does not necessarily imply "religious language", meaning words which presuppose a religious setting. However, learning a spiritual language means for children to know words to understand themselves as more than just material beings. A child will under favorable circumstances ask how she was born, what will happen after we die, what is real, what is good and why is something better than something else, and what makes humans different from animals, and why do people pray – the list can go on endlessly. The right of spiritual development implies a duty for the adult to provide material to explore such questions – books, stories, games, music, songs, visits, time of silence and dialogue. Without such material and without response from adults children stop asking.

This is something people have always known. However, common wisdom and ordinary, human morality is somehow not so common and ordinary. There are homes today with hardly any books to read, no meaningful symbols or pieces of art, no one who sits together with the child to tell stories or sing songs, and no one who listens actively to the child. There are broken links in the chain of memories that constitute a collective consciousness.

2 The right to be needed

To be needed is to belong. To be needed is to contribute to a family, to society, to the world. The Geneva declaration from 1924 states: "The child

must be brought up in the consciousness that its talents must be devoted to the service of fellow men".

The documents protect children against being exploited in any way. We have also learnt that a child should be viewed not according to what it means to the adult, but as an independent human being with the right to be what it is. And yet, in our time there are millions of children who seem not to be needed by anyone. They are sold, they are left on their own, or simply overlooked as adults go on their careers, and they seem to be unproductive consumers for a long period of their lives. It is easy to overlook the fact that they are needed as well, for many reasons, not only for the procreation of life. Some of these reasons are:

Children are gifts of God. That is the basis of child theology, according to the American theologian Marcia Bunge (Bunge, 2004).

Children have something to teach the rest of us. They should be heard, not only for their own sake, but because of the fellowship they are members of. This is also a basic tenet in child theology.

Children can do a lot of things in service of older people, and should receive the pleasure of being of use. Allow me to illustrate with a personal experience. As a young child, from I was about four until I more or less moved from home, I had certain tasks I could do for my grandmother and her sister. These two old ladies recognized the importance of me doing these tasks, tasks that developed as I grew up. I was needed, and I knew it, and it influenced my view of myself. Parents can and do, of course, recognize children as well, but it seems that grandparents have a special calling in that respect.

Are children needed in church? I am not thinking only of tasks to be done on Sundays, but of the role of the child in a church fellowship. Children get tasks in church. Do they get recognition as real contributors?

Following the lead of Jesus, the church has a responsibility to present society with the right of children to be needed: Children are the ones who bring their lunch bags to Jesus to be multiplied in the service of their fellow

men. The task of the church is to see these children and let the world see them.

Concluding remarks

Taking a children's rights perspective on children's spirituality presents the universal church and local churches with a moral as well as judicial obligation to

1. respect children as autonomous religious and spiritual subjects with the right to be heard
2. protect children from all kinds of abuse or manipulation in the name of religion
3. provide support for the child to develop as a full, contributing member of a fellowship
4. contribute to children's spiritual literacy in stories, preaching, rituals, and practices

There is little explicit support to be found for church work in children's rights documents and in public responses to these documents, at least in Norway. Implicitly, the notion of children's rights builds, however, on notions of natural rights, which again are closely connected to the belief in God-given rights.

It may be asked what the churches may add to the theory of human rights and the recognition of children's rights besides finding words and concepts that translate the human rights discourse. The answer would demand a separate article, but some points can be made.[1] First, the recognition that human rights are rooted in the realm of the most holy calls for extra vigilance regardless of religious affiliation. Second, a narrative approach to children's rights, including the use of symbols and practices that stimulate children's spirituality, take us into the more substantial side of respective faiths. Third, Christian churches understand human rights not primarily as claims of individuals against the state, but rather as rights of people in

1 These points and many more are discussed in an important article by Martin Shupack in Harvard Human Rights Journal (Schupack, 1993).

community (Schupack, 1993: 135) – that is, as moral expressions beyond their judicial function.

These points will certainly find support and parallels in non-Christian religions and secular worldviews, while the criticism against neglect of children's rights also must cross boundaries of religion and worldview. Exploring sources of children's rights in one's own faith and culture should inspire cooperation and dialogue. Understanding children's rights is a matter of understanding what it is to be human.

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Elaine Champagne

Born to the Word

How do children experience their life? How do they feel and understand, how do they make sense of what happens to them and their family? How can we recognize the spiritual dimension of their life? Then how can we acknowledge and take seriously their insights? How can they contribute to their families' or to their religious communities' spiritual and religious journey?

Children are the same as us and "other" to us. Listening to children's voices and doing theology with children requires that we recognize children as full subjects, the main characters of their life. As human beings, they are the same as us. They are (and ought to be) fully part of our community. But they are not only mirrors or imitators of their parents. Children are different than us physically, emotionally, cognitively. They are also different because every human being is unique. We need to acknowledge that children are children and need to be respected and protected as such. We share with children a common identity in a shared human story: they are "*of our flesh*." (Gn 2. 23) Still, they often are a mystery to us.

Pedagogy has developed immensely, especially in the last fifty years, taking children's participation in their learning seriously and fostering their own perspectives and insights in the process. However, it seems that there is a way to children that is still to be developed. In Quebec – a Province of Canada – listening to children's spiritual experience and view on existential matters, being attentive to their questions and insights on life such as suffering and death, having children participate in the conversation or in the dialogue that leads us to a deeper spiritual and religious life is relatively new. And the many pastoral leaders that become aware of the richness of children's voices for the Church and the human community admit that they "are not there yet". The process can be seen as a journey.

I would like to suggest that in order to enter a theological Christian dialogue with children, adults need not only be Christian literate but also be aware of

their own spiritual journey and be hospitable to newness and constant conversion. In theological dialogue, both children and adults engage in the process of “being born” to a life of faith.

These reflection are the results of research carried out in the field of practical theology, using an empirical and hermeneutical approach and the method of “praxeology”. Praxeology usually consists of four stages: observation, interpretation, intervention and prospect for the future (Nadeau 2004, 1987). Since the data was collected during semi-directed interviews with catechists (observation), the analysis (interpretation) also comes within the scope of narrative approaches (Ganzevoort 2012). While the limits of this paper forced me to focus on the first two of the four stages of praxeology, these stages generated insights and appeals which have the potential to renew the practice of dialogue with children.

I will very briefly present the reality of a practice in which children’s spiritual voices can be listened to – faith education – within the political, educational and religious environment and context of Quebec. Then I will present the results of five interviews I conducted in recent months with lay ministers involved directly in a faith education project led by a dynamic diocese. The interviews offer clearer perspectives about the challenges catechists can face and the fruits they can recognize when they enter into dialogue with children on a spiritual and theological level. I will then present a few theological and pastoral reflections on what seems to happen when this dialogue takes place in the light of the idea of a "*pastorale d'engendrement*" (Bacq 2008) – which can be translated as a ministry of begetting. In conclusion, the testimony of the interviewees will help me bring to light rich and unexpected outcomes of the practice of dialogue in their midst.

1. The environment

1.1 Situation and context

The first ten years of the 21st century were the beginning of a major shift in the politics of education in Quebec. Religious education was to be offered by faith institutions and not by schools anymore. A new *Ethics and Religious Culture* program was developed and published for elementary schools and high schools, starting in 2004. The program aimed at better providing children with resources fit for a society characterized both by secularization and religious pluralism. Dialogue was at the heart of the new program. Dioceses and parishes engaged with faith and energy in this turning point. Preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation - Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion - had already been the responsibility of parishes for more than twenty years. There was then a poignant and urgent need to also offer catechesis to children without school support. Dioceses revisited their pastoral orientations and developed faith education programs on a much larger scale, sometimes welcoming each year a few hundred children already less and less acquainted with their home religious tradition.

If public education and the Church have changed, parents also have changed. Adults in “postmodern” societies expect to exercise their rights of actions and choices; they resist institutional authorities who pretend to bear a truth estranged from their experience. They foster values and convictions to be transmitted to their children. Adults, and parents among them, are not always clear about what they believe and feel uneasy about expressing it. They have doubts and questions. On the other hand, they wish to offer the best of life to their children and they will walk the distance so their children get what they need, including Christian rituals.

The many demands society holds for parents often leave them in the role of an agent that will make sure that all the needed professionals will be solicited to contribute to their child's education and development (Hauerwas 1981:164). Fortunately, they appreciate that schools bear a large responsibility with them in that matter. For some parents, Christian tradition

is considered a cornerstone of their social and personal identity even if they have distanced themselves from the Church. They want to transmit this identity to their child through the Sacraments of Initiation, expecting the Church to take charge of this need. Their first reaction is of shock when they realize that they also must engage in sharing the responsibility of faith transmission and not only delegate it. Some parents fiercely resist the changes; others express a more passive aggressive attitude or simply retreat from the process. Still others are concerned and committed, even if they often feel insecure about their own Christian competences.

During the period of great transition the needs of the parishes were immense. Thousands of volunteers from everywhere came to meet small groups of children for catechesis. Faith educators and lay ministers were urgently needed to train adult volunteers to journey with children. Nobody could have predicted the outcomes of that process. Still today, the Church's experience is one of vulnerability and uncertainty. But it is worth listening more carefully to the personal experience of actors in this transformation: both adults and children.

1.2 Being a catechist - experience and aim[2]

In recent years, not only the milieu, the pedagogy and the actors of faith education have changed, but also the perspectives from which it is done. The faith education that today's catechists have received is very different from that of their parent's who have experienced the Church from before *Vatican II*. Instead of focusing on contents to be learnt by heart, it paid attention on experience and feelings, and presented the goodness of God and the friendship of Jesus in an interpersonal context. However, as they began their adult life, most of them gradually kept a distance from the Church. When they bring their children to the parish and accept to

[2] In the context of this research, five catechists from the diocese of Saint-Jean-Longueuil participated in a semi-directed interview. The interviews were held individually except for two catechists coming from the same parish and working as a team. All the catechists were involved in a program specific to this diocese, the *Grande Halte* (Champagne 2008).

participate in the faith education process, they feel insecure and have many fears. When put in situations in which they are invited to express what they believe in, interviewed catechists mentioned having then realized all the questions and uncertainties their personal faith or religious views carried.[3] This experience seems to be shared by many parents. A catechist reports:

> Especially when their first child participates to faith education, parents have many fears. They are facing the unknown. So they tell us: "Well you are involved! So you know better!" As if we had something to give and they didn't... But I often tell them: "No. We are together in the journey."

As much as they request guidance in the program, some parents fear that what they will have to say to children be imposed on them, or that they will be contradicted in what they believe. They strongly resent those attitudes. A mother explains:

> I always believed in the presence of God in my life. I still can feel it as I am getting older. When I look back, I see the events that happened, the people that I met. I never thought it was mere coincidence. I always believed that God was there. The Church with all her rules will not take that away from me.

It is paradoxical but very significant that the Church might be perceived as a threat to peoples' faith. This observation reinforces the need in faith education programs and in the Church for an authentic dialogue presented and experienced as a shared journey hospitable to differences.

Some parents' initiative towards the Church for their child coincides with their own rediscovery (or discovery) of new depths and richness to their Christian faith. They then experience that textbooks are insufficient to answer their questions and to support a better integration of their faith into daily life. Because they are mindful that what children receive is significant and makes sense to them, their encounter with children prompts them to dig into their own faith for truthfulness and authenticity in a new and challenging role of "witness" rather than teacher.

[3] In many dioceses, lack of financial resources imposes that catechists be volunteers. But whether they be volunteers or employees, academic formation in theology or faith education is unfortunately most often not required of them. These politics are gradually being changed.

1.3 Challenging faith education

Of course, leading children's groups in faith education requires many abilities: children need to be guided and initiated to new vocabulary, new contexts, new worlds, new stories which they need to interpret and to integrate into their own lives. A catechist recalled a boy visiting a church for the first time with his mother:

> *The little boy surveyed the inside of the church with a marveled gaze without a word. I asked him: 'Do you know what types of things we do here?' From what I could see, he had absolutely no idea...*

Not only the spiritual and religious dimension needs to be recognized and articulated, it also needs to be interpreted in correlation with the other interpretations of the world children are learnt. Otherwise, faith education risk producing "schizophrenic" worldviews, insignificant for daily life. Here is an example from Mary, a 10 year-old:

> *I believe in God. But I ask myself many questions. It's about dinosaurs. There were dinosaurs. And then cavemen? Well, God is obviously not a caveman. I know that God created Adam and Eve. And they were not cavemen either... Well I ask myself many questions. There is the Bible. And there was this scientific television program the other day. So I wonder... Which one came first? Is it the dinosaurs or is it Adam and Eve?*

What to believe? What is the truth? How can one be sure of it? And beyond those questions: where do we come from? Where do we belong?
Children will turn to adults for guidance in their quest for meaning and will look for witnesses in their relationship with God. But what happens when parent catechists experience doubts, questions, nuances and resistances? Can children understand their parents' "adult" questions? Is it justifiable to make children carry a burden that even the adults find heavy? Parents intuitively feel responsible of not depriving children of a *naïveté* they have lost. In their journey, some parents need to discover the *second naïveté* pointed out by Ricoeur. (Ricoeur 1986)[4]

[4] According to Ricoeur, the interpretation of a text (which could be referred here to the contents offered by tradition) is not ended by the necessary critical distance following its subjective appropriation. This apparent contradiction can be overcome in a "second naïveté", allowing for production of meaning immanent to the text.

There are also parents who perceive that what is to be known of Christian faith is crystal clear. But their simplified answers risk extinguishing the children's own quest and desire towards a more spiritually integrated life through their religious faith. (Fowler 1995) Faith, hence faith education concerns indisputably much more in lives than a few rules guiding people about what to do or what not to do. It is a way to experience life, to seek meaning through it and to live it to the fullest, in solidarity with our human brothers and sisters. Christian faith also offers a road to interiority and invites to recognize God's presence among us. Hence, faith education needs to relate to the spiritual life of the participants, both children and adults.

Other questions emerge. With the rapidly changing generations, it was mentioned that more and more children come for the first time to parishes without having even heard of spiritual or religious matters. The gap is rapidly growing.

Situational challenges may need to be addressed. At the time of the interviews, two catechists worked in church buildings which were for sale. What impact this symbolic reality can have on children and adults? What is it saying to them?

A certain opposition to the Church and even globally to Religions needs not be overstated, yet recognized. Being Christian today is commonly seen at best as something personal that needs to be kept private or at worst as something marginal and highly criticized. (Taylor 2007) Suzanne, a mother, finds it difficult to "*justify her faith*"(1 Pt 3. 15):

> *I find that confronting my convictions with those of other people is a real challenge for me. I prefer to keep my faith to myself. I don't want people to say that my religion is a crutch or… (…) I don't try to convince anybody. I don't possess a missionary fiber.*

The malaise has two faces: people can truly be as confrontational as Suzanne is insecure. During the year of the interview, a catechist experienced a group of parents who were acting as to sabotage the process she invited them to take part in. Instead of singing with everybody, those

parents were just staring blankly at her. In the same groups, parents decided to have a loud chat while another activity was taking place. This obviously impacted on the group of children. Lucie said to me:

> *It was really sad. I wanted so much that they live something significant. I wished to stay with them and welcome them the way they were. But at one point, I needed to improvise and do something else. Jesus would not have forced them. I found it very difficult. And challenging. What did I do wrong? I know it is more complex than that... But in the midst of the action…*

It is in this changing social and ecclesial context that parent catechists face those many challenges and risk engaging faith conversations with children.

2. Children's voices

2.1 Dialoguing with children

Can children truly participate in a spiritual and theological conversation? The five catechists I met had at heart to arouse children's voices. Claire was adamant: "*Children are capable of talking about their lives, what it is like. Sometimes, we underestimate them, or we want to protect them. But they can reveal things to us*."

When children enter the conversation, they not only recall the biblical stories they have heard, they can link them together with their own experience and begin to interpret it. Narratives, arts, specific gestures or movements (such as a pilgrimage walk) or hands on activities can foster their interpretation work on a more experiential and existential level. When asked: "*Is there a Word from Jesus that makes you feel full of life? A word that talks to your heart like a secret?"* Betty, 10 years old, spontaneously answered: "*Stand up and walk*!" (Lk 5. 24b)

The catechists described the importance and fruits borne from the experiential dimension included in their faith education sessions when children and their parents meet with biblical characters and engage in a semi-directed conversation with them. Interestingly, the catechists could not recall the content of those conversations, but rather the children's attitude.

In this context, children's quality of presence, their curiosity as well as their honesty sometimes resulted in surprising moments experienced by parents, impacting on the whole family dynamics. Such moments were often witnessed at one point of a program when one by one, parents stand in front of their child, within the circle formed by the group, and say to their child: ""*Sandra", I recognize in you the action of the Holy Spirit in the gift of… especially when you… I thank God and I ask God that God confirms you in the Holy Spirit for you to receive His help and support every day of your life*."
The whole time, children are quiet and intently listen to what their parents are telling them. Both the quality of the children's presence and the parents' message to them seem to open up the words and the ritual to a deeper meaning. All the five catechists described this moment as a very powerful one especially for the parents. Parents often express how important that moment is to them as if they realized new insights about their child, and maybe about the meaning of what they were saying: their child already being gifted by the Holy Spirit.
Sometimes children confuse stories and ideas, mix them together. "*They confuse Baptism and Forgiveness… Well they don't mix up but they relate the two together*", says Lucie. The combination makes a lot of sense theologically, even if we have not focused on that aspect in our Church in recent years.
At one point in a session, a catechist asked the children if they knew the difference between the Church with a "big C" and the church with a "small c". In one of the groups, Jonathan, reflected: "I would be tempted to say that when it is a cathedral, we use a "big C"." Others intervened and continued to think out loud. Jonathan was still pondering. He finally concluded: "*Basically, I think that the Church with a "big C", I think that it is like… where we have all things in common*." He probably didn't realize that he was quoting the *Acts (2. 44).* Neither could he have suspected how his word was of comfort to the catechist who knew that their local church would soon be for sale. What would have happened if the catechist had reflected back on the Bible

quote, and pursued the dialogue? Maybe there would not have been much to add, and it could have simply led to a spontaneous prayer.

2.2 Ultimate concerns

Questions of ultimate concerns are usually addressed to religious traditions and world philosophies. They are at the core of human spiritual quest. However, the dialogue with children on ultimate concerns gives rise to different views and conclusions among catechists.

Claire mentioned without hesitation: *"Children know about struggles and fights. They live through them…"* Many have been confronted by intimidation. They have endured disputes. They may have experienced their parents' separation or divorce or fought for their own space at home or among their friends.

Judith sees things differently. She is convinced that children want to talk about their experience, but when it is time to get to ultimate concerns, to talk about death and after death, she finds it difficult to have a significant conversation with them. "*It is difficult with children to go further. They will talk about their sadness to have lost their dog or their grand-parents. It is difficult to dig deep into the concept of death with them…*" Interviews seem to show that catechists and parents who are the most comfortable in facing ultimate concerns will more naturally provide an open and safe space for dialogue on these issues. Children seem to have a lot to express, not from a sole rational perspective but rooted in their specific children's experience. Hence, adults need to also risk the journey if they want to accompany children spiritually and religiously.

It can happen that the children help adults accompany them. All the interviewed catechists but one had experienced at least a group in which one of the children had lost a parent. Diana recalls that Josée, 11 years old, had recently lost her mother:

> *This is what touched me the most. I thought that she would retreat and not say a word. Actually, she was the last one to talk. But she had something to voice.*

> *I don't remember everything she said, except that she was peaceful. There was a tear on her cheek*.

Diana then described how the children seem to stick together more tightly while they were listening to her. Everyone was more attentive, turned towards her and attuned to Josée. Diana continued: "*They seemed to have been… in communion with her*."

When this happens, when children's voice is heard, when parents can discover the richness of their children inner life and attend to their own, the table is set for new insights, renewed relationships and renewed faith.

3. Arousing and being aroused to the Word

What does it mean theologically to listen to children's voices? What does it imply for our Churches? What appears to be the fruits of such a practice?

3.1 Outset of a Christian theology of children's voices

Jesus' call to "*let the children come to him*" (Mt 19. 14; Mk 10. 14; Lk 18. 16) has very often been highlighted in biblical and theological literature. (Légasse 1969; Bunge et al. 2008; Miller-McLemore 2003; Dillen & Pollefeyt 2010). It is not my intention to make a review of these major contributions to the question: dignity and great value is given by God to the smallest of us, to the least prestigious, to the most vulnerable. As children of God ourselves, we are called to act consequently and to treat children in accordance with this.

Here I would like to reinforce that call, but from a perspective which pays more attention to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the book of Joel, it can be read:

> *Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;*
> *your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,*
> *your old men shall dream dreams,*
> *and your young men shall see visions.*
> *Even on the male and female slaves,*
> *in those days, I will pour out my spirit.* Jl 2. 28-29 (NRSB); Jl 3. 1-2 (TOB)

A promise is made by God that in a coming day, God's spirit will be shared among not only a few, but a multitude with no regard to their age or social status. In the Gospel according to John, Jesus promises to give his Spirit to the disciples. Among other things, the Holy Spirit will testify (Jn 15. 26) on Jesus' behalf so that we may also testify and the Holy Spirit will guide us into all the truth (Jn 16. 13-14). In the Acts, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to come upon the disciples, so they be his "*witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*." (Acts 1. 8) The coming of the Holy Spirit is celebrated especially at the feast of Pentecost when the terrified disciples begin to speak about what had transformed their life. And the Holy Spirit makes their words understood by a great diversity of people. What they are saying breaks common frontiers. Joel's prophecy is being accomplished. How is it experienced today?

Christian tradition maintains that the Holy Spirit can speak up through all humans. As Christians, we are aware that we are called to be attentive to the Spirit's teachings through the Word of God which is revealed both in Scripture and in human experience and testimony. Children then not only deserve that their voice be heard but also that it is recognized that the Holy Spirit can testify of God's presence through them. If this is true for the richest and the lowliest, it is also true of children. The Second Vatican Council reminds us that Baptism is a celebration of this gift of God through the Holy Spirit, in which we are both made and called to become prophets, priests and kings, in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 3. 10) It also reminds us that God's gift is not only for our own benefits, but for the service of the human community.

I was recently surprised by a verse from the prophet Isaiah which literally translate from the Hebrew: "*The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught*." (Is 50. 4a) Not the ears nor the heart, not the intelligence nor the wisdom: the prophet is being given a language, a tongue. It sounds as if it is while speaking God's words that the prophet is being taught.

I then came upon a recent text from Collette Beauchemin, a major leader in *Cathéchèse Biblique Symbolique* (Lagarde & Lagarde 1983; 1985) in which she surprisingly suggests: "*Let anyone who wants to listen begin to speak*!" (Beauchemin 2013) What a paradox!

Of course, no one wishes to repeat Babel, also a contemporary experience we are way too familiar with. Control, domination, forms of violence can take advantage of this call and pervert it. I am obviously not suggesting that one should forget about the space, the silence and the openness that is needed for the stranger to be welcomed and listened to. Adults and children constantly need to be reminded of this necessity to be hospitable to the newness brought about by someone who is different than us.

In this kind of conversation, when our words are words of listening, something is being said, greater than us, coming from beyond us. Maybe when we let children speak about their intuitions and questions related to Biblical texts or daily experiences and when we let them participate in the quest conversation, it is possible that we, together, are being taught by the Holy Spirit.

3.2 Paschal Mystery

What are we trying to transmit when we meet children for faith education? Is it a familiarity with Bible stories? Is it a growing sense of responsibility through moral values? A "*relational"* – hence spiritual experience? What is at the core of the Christian experience that "*sustains the weary with a word*?" (Is 50. 4b)

In a very inspiring article commenting on *Gaudium et Spes*, another document from the Second Vatican Council and relating to the relationship between the Church and the World, Philippe Bordeyne, a theologian, brings together the Scripture, the care of the poor and the work of the Holy Spirit in the light of the Pascal Mystery. (Bordeyne 2009) Not only the Gospel calls us to take care of the poor and the lowliest, but it is the encounter with the poor that teaches us the Gospel. It is inasmuch the interpretation of the

Paschal Mystery in our own life that calls us to testify to God's presence in others' life as well as in the Church (and Churches.)

Thus dialoguing with children on ultimate issues, with a deep and competent respect of who they are as children, becomes an inescapable way to discover the Gospel's teachings. Children's ultimate concerns might be about the friendship of a classmate, or about the harmony in their parents' relationship. But it is ultimate to their life. Discovering together how the Paschal Mystery can be correlated with their life and ours becomes crucial. Of course, it is known that the Paschal Mystery is the core of our Christian faith. But when it comes to sensitive issues, it is far easier to elude the question than to accept to journey with the others with empathy and truthfulness. I also believe that the encounter with the other - be it a poor, a bereft, or even a child - often demands that we revisit our personal "paschal theology". What kind of God do we believe in? Can the way we understand the Paschal Mystery be transposed in their life? How is it Good News for the weary, for the smallest? What does Resurrection means to me? To them? How are we prophets to one another?

3.3 A shared ministry of begetting

The attitude that is at stake here deserves a few more remarks. It is an attitude that brings us together, adults and children, catechumen and catechists through the process of transformation, of conversion. There is not, on the one side, someone who gives, and on the other side, someone who receives. There are people who together take part of a conversation which transforms both of them, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Contemporary French speaking theologians, mainly Philippe Bacq and Christophe Theobald from Belgium, have developed in recent years the idea of a "*pastorale d'engendrement*". Bacq specifies that this is not a new ministry. It is "*an attitude at the source of all models of ministries (...) It is a way of being in relationship and a way of acting which is inspired by the*

Gospel and which yields the road so that God can beget people to God's own life."(Bacq). Bacq develops his argument from his reading of Jesus' attitude towards the people he encounters. Bacq points out that according to Luke's Gospel, Jesus is born of God, begotten of God. Through this Gospel, Jesus shows what it means to be begotten of God. We are called to imitate him since: "*The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*". (Rm 8. 16) Jesus is concerned by the life of the people he heals, and he invites them to return to their life: '*I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home*." (Mk 2, 11) Jesus "*serves their most authentic desire, then send them to their liberty"* (Bacq: 5) Bacq concludes on how much it is necessary for us to let God "*give birth*" to us. This means to resist to attempt to control the conversation and to let go of the mastery of what can occur in the group's journey.

A ministry of begetting also recognizes and values the authorship of every individual's "word of faith". (Fossion: 9) Ministry of begetting is at the service of what is being born in faith. Fossion specifies that it is about "*discerning one's aspirations, pondering things, taking the time for meetings and dialogue*."(Fossion: 4)

I deeply believe that this posture of attentiveness and listening to the Work of the Holy Spirit through the words spoken by the individuals and sustained and nourished by the community directly concerns our topic and relates precisely to the experience of what it is to become a Church.

Conclusion - Becoming a Church

When I began to analyze the interviews I had made with the catechists, I was truly surprised by what I discovered. It is true that few of them were able to echo children's voices and many admitted to the challenges of engaging an authentic faith dialogue with children. But many told me of situations or of new practices that they developed with adults and which were inspired by their practice of dialogue with children.

Lucie told me about a new project in her parish that was inspired by her recent experience with children. The pastoral team organized a pilgrimage which took place during 7 weeks. Community members were invited to gather in a different church from week to week. They walked up until they had reached the place where the Word of God is usually proclaimed, sat together and had a conversation on a chosen text. They expected a dozen people if they were lucky. They reached about 80 who came week after week.

Sophie and Pascale talked at length of their experience of gradually gathering all the people involved in their catechesis team - catechists, parents, volunteers - and beginning a journey together. At first, they were trying to give information and settle the details of the meetings with children when they felt they were somehow missing the point. Inspired by their experience with the children, they decided to risk a faith dialogue with the parents and catechists. In doing so, they discovered how the word they were sharing began to take flesh. Reality began to appear differently to them.

Parents expressed their new spiritual insights after hearing their child. Visitors were touched while witnessing children's questions and journey.

Of course, children are not solely responsible of what is going on in the community. It would be seriously unfair that we make them bear that responsibility. But it is because of them that the parents have accepted to walk the distance. Almost invisible, something is happening today. Jonathan is right: the Church is "*where we have all things in common*", old and young. All together, the shared Word brings us to life. This is how we are born children of God.

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Elisabet Haakedal

Spiritual nurture for each and every member aged 0 to 18 years: Two children's voices from the Religious Education reform of the Church of Norway in the second decade of the 21st century

1. Introduction

In 2003, the Church of Norway (C of N) launched a Christian education reform, a comprehensive catechumenical programme, which should be implemented by 2014. From 2004 to 2008, there was a period of trying out ideas in local parishes and of sharing the results. The reform was based on the design principle 'from bottom up'. Only in 2010, the Church Council of the C of N published its national *Plan for Christian Education God gives – we share* (Kirkerådet 2010). The next stage of the reform was to include more and more parishes by state funding, in order that they should construct and implement local plans of Christian education guided by the national plan. The 'bottom up' principle was balanced by the fact that the local plans were to be reviewed by diocesan advisers and approved by the bishop. From 2011 to 2014, I was a member of a research team doing contract research on the realisation of the reform. One of our research reports deals with the construction of the local plans for Christian education (Fuglseth, Haakedal, Schmidt 2012), another report focuses on the broad, outreaching and often nationally launched activities of the catechumenical programme, particularly an event called *Wide-awake* (Botvar, Haakedal, Kinserdal 2013). Below, I will refer to these reports as well as to the national plan. However, the main aim of this study is to provide an access to some of the empirical sources which the research team gathered, having in mind the outreaching character of the reform, aiming at each and every baptised

member of the C of N in the 0-18 age groups. In 2012, the C of N ceased to be a state church, thus legally becoming more like other faith organisations.

From the empirical source material, I will present my observations of two young boys, here for reasons of anonymity given the fictitious names of 'Busy Alf' and 'Active Benny', in particular. It is not my intention to indicate that only boys are super-active or even troublemakers. I believe there are also girls who 'take more space' than the average young child attending Christian education activities does. My reason for providing close-up pictures of Alf and Benny is to encourage further curriculum work in churches, work which will emphasise interactions between individual challenges of spiritual nurture and systematic learning plans for the 'one body of Christ'. Through the images of the two boys, I want to underline the way their voices appeared in the context of the catechumenical events or planned activities for their particular age groups. Alf took part in an activity called *Camping at home* for the six-year-olds of a local parish – here given the fictitious name of 'Sletta' (i.e. the Field) – while Benny participated in *Wide-awake*, an activity for eleven-year-olds that includes a sleeping over in the local church of 'Skogen' (i.e. the Wood, a fictitious name). Having given close-up pictures of the boys and the events, I will present and compare features of the national plan and the local plans of Sletta and Skogen, features which will hopefully show some of the C of N's ideas for children and young people. Afterwards, these ideas as well as the voices of Alf and Benny will be connected. I want to find out to what degree the two local plans and the national plan include references to individual challenges regarding the spiritual nurture they aim at through their outreaching events for children aged six or eleven.

As the study is based on empirical sources, it uses comparative and hermeneutical methods. At first I will narrate certain episodes observed while the parishes of Sletta and Skogen implemented their local plans. Then I will present and compare elements of the national plan and the two local plans. With regard to hermeneutics, I will finally employ certain concepts developed in Nordic contextual theology as well as in theories of spirituality

and of sociocultural learning in order to reflect on the interaction between individuals and groups. As for terminology, I do not distinguish between the concepts of a Christian education, a comprehensive catechumenical programme and spiritual nurture at this stage. My aim is to provide an empirically based comparison and interpretation of a number of 'texts' in a broad social, semiotic sense.

2. 'Busy Alf' participating in *Camping at home* for six-year-olds

The parish of Sletta is located in the 'Bible-belt' region of South Norway where a pietistic Christian culture prevailed for about a century until the 1980s. The nurturing event providing the context for a close-up picture of Alf was a weekend in the middle of August, anticipating the first day at school for the six-year-olds. Alf took part with twenty-five other children, three church employees (a curate, a catechist and a church teacher), one parent and two observing researchers. My outline of the event is focused on Alf, a boy who talks much and appears to be very busy.

Assembling in the choir and nave of the church on Saturday afternoon, the children sit in the front pews of the old wooden church of Sletta. The church employees have rigged a pretended out-of-doors scene in the choir in front of the altar ring. The three church employees, dressed as children, dramatize a secret club. Two of them act as boys who talk about their funny secret names. Then the third person, a girl, discovers them underneath a tree and negotiates successfully for being accepted as a member of the club. In the play, the girl's father is an organist at the local church which makes it easy for her to talk about God and about having Jesus as a secret friend. The twenty-six children in the audience laugh because the grown-ups behave in a funny way. During this session, Alf and two other boys have called for attention because of being unwilling to sit with the rest of the

group. However, the leaders have handled this and the boys seem happy during the performance.

Then the party splits up in two groups for Christian teaching and dialogue. Alf's group starts with a game of getting to know the names of everyone. The curate asks the children what they know about Jesus. Half of them offer short answers showing that they possess a certain amount of Christian knowledge. Alf soon starts to dominate the dialogue when the curate asks how Jesus can be our friend. Alf asks: "Why don't we just jump up on his head? Why can't we just jump up upon the sun?" Another boy remarks: "Yes, but then we burn up." Alf continues fantasising while the catechist brings stories of Jesus into the dialogue, and several children respond briefly as expected: "We can pray to him", "We can sing to him". Alf says: "Why can't we just jump up to him? Then we can cuddle with him and jump on the trampoline – right up to him?" Curate: "So you don't reach right up to him. … Has anyone tried to talk to him?" Quite a few children answer positively. Alf: "I heard that he said something to me. I can jump up to him and eat with him. I do it every day." Curate: "What can we say to Jesus?" Girl (silently): "How can he get into our bodies?" Curate: "We do not know how, but he is there. We may talk to him when we are angry." Catechist: "I think he wants to get to know us in many ways." Alf again breaks into the dialogue: "God is so kind that he gives away gifts all the year." A girl continues (piously): "There is a gift from him all through life." The curate emphasises that "Jesus loves everyone all the time", that "we are first-rate to him" and that "we should be good to one another". A boy breaks in, stating: "Now he reminds me of this. Is he inside the head or the stomach?" Alf asks: "What if he climbs down into the leg? He is tiny, he falls down. Just like Santa Claus. Then Santa Claus fell down right through the chimney …" A girl manages to break off Alf's fantasising by asking a practical question, and the curate sums up: "Now I am going to say something important. If something is difficult, we may talk to Jesus about it. We can ask Jesus to help us to be braver. If we don't manage it, he still loves us. Remember, Jesus wants to be our invisible friend."

Afterwards, both groups assemble again for a session of narration about Jesus in the choir and front nave of the church. They also get to know the doctrine that Jesus is both God and human. Some of the children are instructed to dramatize the story of Jesus feeding the 5000. Next, there is time to play outside and to have sausages and juice. Then, there is another split-up into two groups for do-it-yourself activities in different parts of the church. During this session, including the threading of richly coloured pearls onto a string, Alf and another boy behave as if the activity is a competition and the goal is to win a race of making necklaces. Alf secretly takes a tool from some of the other children and tries to hide it while starting on a second necklace, but he gets bored a little before the activity is rounded up. While observing this group session, I got involved spontaneously, telling Alf and his friend that the point is to share (the pearls and the tools). The quick answer was: “The point is to win.” I had no immediate solution to this challenge.

The Saturday program ends with a final assembly in the choir and nave in order to hear a story of Jesus and his disciples from a book called *Three in a tree* (Bang 2003), which the children will receive the next day, to talk about the Sunday morning service, to practice singing as a group and to walk in a procession behind the curate. Alf tries to sing with the loudest voice. And while most of the children are playing together, he roams through the church with another boy, hoarding as many hymn books as possible in a corner of the church. Then it is time for the parents to pick up their children for a night of *Camping at home*.

Everything is well prepared for the Sunday morning service. The children seem to enjoy themselves in general. They participate willingly in certain prepared parts of the service and show happiness when receiving the promised book about the secret club. They immediately start leafing through the pages. Alf sits together with the others and takes part in the activity, but he leaves his place two or three times to communicate with some grown-ups, probably his parents. The church is crowded and noisy and his wanderings make little difference. His facial expression, however, shows

that he has moments when he seems to worry (or mind) about something so much that he cannot sit still like the others.

Reflecting on the observation of this Christian education activity at Sletta, I am reminded of the aim written down in the national plan: of offering educational and nurturing activities to all, "irrespective of their degree of functionality" (Kirkerådet 2010: 4). During this event, particularly on Saturday, the three church employees did not seem prepared for handling the individuality of a very active child. Alf was partially allowed to 'take much space', i.e. to dominate the other children, and partially he and his friend were left to themselves.

3. 'Active Benny' participating in *Wide-awake* for eleven-year-olds

The parish of Skogen is skirting the southern 'Bible-belt' while being located further to the East of South Norway than the parish of Sletta. The context of my picture of Benny is a nationally planned event called *Wide-awake* for eleven-year-olds (*Lys våken* 1). The eleven-year-old children will be together for a weekend and sleep over in the local church. The Norwegian title of *Lys våken* (sometimes written as *LysVåken*) plays on the Norwegian noun *lys*, which means light or candle in English, reminding of the centrality of this concept within the Christian faith and within religion in general. This activity takes place at the beginning of December including the first Sunday of Advent, which is 'the New Year' of the Christian church. Skogen parish contacts all its baptised eleven-year-olds by personal invitations. For reaching out even further, the event has been featured by the local newspaper and a poster put up at the biggest school in the community. The children arrive at the church at 4 pm on Saturday afternoon. The participants are eighteen children, i.e. seven boys and eleven girls, two church employees (a vicar and a church teacher), a young voluntary from an ideal organisation, four fifteen- or sixteen-year-old girls acting as assistant

leaders, a team of parents (among other tasks, they take turns in keeping watch during the night in the church) and myself, the observing researcher.
The active boy, here named Benny, is outspoken, lively, sociable and a bit naughty. He is the noisiest of all the children, while another boy is the quietest of the group. However, none of them sticks out. They all know each other and seem to enjoy being together as a group, while also hanging out together in small groups of two or three at the same time. The church teacher is a relatively young man. He knows the children because of previous catechumenical events and he communicates with them well. This is the third time he has organised *Wide-awake*, cooperating smoothly with everyone.
The program of *Wide-awake* at Skogen shows a quick beat of sessions which alternatively take place in an old medieval stone church and the nearby contemporary club house owned by a Christian scout organisation. First, there is a welcome and the children have supper (sausages and soft drinks) in the club house, then a workshop in the church, a fruit break in the club house with an instruction about the *Wide-awake* song and dance (*Lys våken* 2) and then, there is another workshop in the church that prepares the first Sunday of Advent Morning Service. Later, there is a New Year dinner party at the club house (pizza, soft drinks and dessert), followed by entertainment (e.g. learning a funny dance) and cinema (a Narnia film on DVD). The Saturday program ends with the rigging of mattresses and sleeping bags in the choir and nave of the church, a good night story, a prayer 'by the hour' in the choir, and a celebration of the 'New Year' outside at midnight (with fake champagne, sparklers and running around in the grave yard). Finally, the children go to sleep. On Sunday morning, they are woken up by organ music and have to clear up the church. After breakfast, there is practice for the service in the church as well as a short break in the club house while the church attendants arrive. The Sunday morning service is for the whole family and includes an infant baptism ritual. Afterwards drinks and nibbles are served at the back of the church, which marks the end of the event.

Benny behaves in quite a noisy way by nature. He calls for attention throughout this event through childish abundance and innocent gaiety. At the Sunday breakfast he brags about having slept among the girls in their section at the front of the church (with mattresses and sleeping bags inside and outside of the altar ring and in front of the pews under the pulpit) while the boys (being fewer) have their section at the back part of the nave. On Saturday, Benny is the only one to climb into one of the deep window niches of the church where he shows off by playing air guitar. He is quickly ordered down without further fuss from the grown-ups. Benny is silly, joking with the teenage girl assistants, but does not tolerate a tickle by one of them and fights her by slapping. During the entertainment session, two of teenagers teach the children a type of individual silly-movements-dance, which they find very amusing. While practicing for a line-dance with Christian lyrics, which is to be performed at the end of the Sunday service, the children have to work in pairs. Both the girls and the boys (including Benny) decide to dance with someone of their own sex, there is only one mixed couple consisting of a sporty tomboy and her friend, a quiet boy. While observing, I reflect on the nationally launched program for *Wide-awake*, which can be found in nearly all the local plans (Fuglseth, Haakedal, Schmidt 2012). I consider that the event is rightly planned as an activity for older children, not for adolescents.

All the children have to play a part or have a duty during the Sunday service. For example, two boys and one girl narrate and dramatize the story of Samuel hearing God's calling voice in the temple, being advised by the old priest Eli. Benny's part is to read prayers together with four girls after the vicar's sermon. The vicar has provided the prayers, which all starts with 'Dear Jesus' and deal with everyday themes, for example saying thanks 'that we may have so much fun together'. During the rehearsal of the prayers on Saturday, Benny uses a silly deep voice and some of the girls giggle. The rehearsing on Sunday morning is slightly more orderly. However, Benny is the one who speaks in the clearest, most solemn and loudest

voice during the service. He obviously knows when to show off and when to act according to the situation.

In a short interview with a few of the boys, in which they have a chance to comment on the late night prayer 'by the hour', Benny remarks that he is used to praying 'by the hour' at home. When I ask him to explain that a little, he says that his family prays in the morning and in the evening. I agree with him that praying at certain times of the day may be called 'hours'. After the service I observe Benny's mother stroking him on the cheek without any embarrassment on his part. I get a few words with the mother and learn that although not a frequent churchgoer herself, she hopes that Benny will think of this old church as his own and that he will celebrate the important events of his life in it.

Reflecting on the observation of *Wide-awake* at Skogen, I am reminded of the first article of faith: God as the creator of heaven and earth and of joyful relationships. I put aside my quiet thoughts about grown-ups serving and entertaining the children and choosing a very quick beat to make sure that they do not get bored. I remember the quietness and solemnity during the prayers 'by the hour' in the choir of the church where the children lighted their tea candles from a central candle and placed them in a cross of bricks wrapped in tinfoil. I remember the church teacher praying with his own words in a quiet, natural way and the children taking part in saying the Lord's Prayer and a blessing which they know by heart actively. I am also reminded of a previously observed activity at Skogen called *Holyday event* where the same church teacher made a distinction between sport and fun, and the solemnity of the prayers in the choir of the church, by the 'globe of lights'. This globe is a simple wrought iron construction with a horizontal ring bearing a multitude of candlesticks. It has been in use in most C of N parish churches for a couple of decades, i.e. in the end of the 20th century.

4. The national plan and the two local plans of Sletta and Skogen – a comparison

In this chapter, I will compare the main aim of the national catechumenical plan of the C of N with the main aims of the local plans of the parishes of Sletta and Skogen. I will also compare the aims, contents and methods of two activities found in these plans, i.e. the planned events for the six-year-olds and events of *Wide-awake* for eleven-year-olds.

The general aim of the national plan is "to contribute to a systematic and continuous Christian education that awakens and strengthens Christian faith, imparts knowledge of the Triune God, helps in interpreting life and mastering the art of living, encourages interest and involvement in the life of the church and the community for all baptised persons aged 0-18 years, irrespective of their degree of functionality." (Kirkerådet 2010: p. 4)

As stated in the local plan of Sletta, the main aim is: "We wish that children and young people at Sletta will get to know the Triune God. Through the Christian education we want them to discover and be sure of their own faith – and to want to have a life with God" (Fuglseth, Haakedal, Schmidt 2012: p. 81, my translation). Originally, the authors of the plan had written 'Jesus' instead of 'the Triune God' and 'God' which may be seen as a reference to the Jesus-centred Christian culture of the 'Bible-belt'. The change was done in accordance with the diocesan advisor. The main aim of the local plan of Skogen is influenced much more by the general aim of the national plan: "We wish to develop a systematic Christian education. This education will encourage faith in the Triune God, [encourage a sense of] belonging to the local church, give biblical knowledge, encourage an experience of intrinsic value and give help for mastering the art of living. This will apply for all aged 0-18 years, irrespective of their degree of functionality" (Fuglseth, Haakedal, Schmidt 2012: p. 85, my translation). There are two phrases in Skogen's main aim which I will pay particular attention to while presenting certain parts of the contents in the national plan and the two local plans, i.e. 'give help for mastering the art of living' and 'irrespective of their degree of

functionality'. Both these phrases refer to the broad, outreaching character of the Christian education reform of the C of N.

In the *Plan for Christian Education God gives – we share*, the content is illustrated through a generalised diagram with a central phrase ("the love of God in Jesus Christ"), and three more phrases placed around it like a circle (1 *Interpreting life and mastering the art of living*, 2 *Faith and tradition in the church*, and 3 *Christian faith and practice*, see Kirkerådet 2010: p. 15). Here we see that the first phrase, which is echoed in the local plan of Skogen, is meant to be interacting with the two other encircling phrases. All three phrases substantiate "the love of God in Jesus Christ", the phrase placed in the centre of the circle.

C of N's national *Plan for Christian Education God gives – we share* has four informative guiding appendices. Appendix 1 shows three tables as tools for working with the local plans (Kirkerådet 2010: p. 45). The first is titled *Tools for making a local plan for Christian education*. Here the local plan authors are instructed to fill into 'the electronic tool' a main aim, basic and special characteristics of the parish, and details about organisation, structure and responsibility. The second table is titled *Important aspects of systematic Christian education*. One out of the eleven aspects listed there is especially relevant for this study, i.e. "children's and young people's influence" (p. 45). The third table has the headline *Activities in systematic and comprehensive Christian education for 0-18 year olds*. In this table the three 'sub-aims' of *Interpreting life and mastering the art of living*, *Faith and tradition in the church* and *Christian faith in action* are listed under the general slot for theme / contents (p. 45). The authors of the local plans also have to be specific, e.g. concerning the age group, the name and the aim of each activity. Appendix 2 is an extensive list of "[k]ey Bible passages for renewed Christian education", underlining the importance of the phrase "faith and tradition in the church" (Kirkerådet 2010: p. 46-47).

Appendix 3 gives "[e]xamples of basic activities in renewed Christian education" (Kirkerådet 2010: p 48-49) while appendix 4 (which only appears in the Norwegian version of the plan) shows two fictitious local model plans

which have been completed, one for an urban or big parish, the other for a rural or smaller parish. Concerning appendix 3, I will only underline the middle part (the part for the six- to twelve-year-olds) as it is where we find the 'basic activity' of *Celebration of first day at school* for the six-year-olds, and *Sleeping over in the church* (i.e. *Wide-awake*) for the eleven-year-olds. Of these two events only *Wide-awake* is similarly described in both the model plans. There are more variations regarding events for the six-year-olds, but the common theme seems to be the church service and its symbols. All this shows the 'process' character of C of N's Christian education reform – 'from bottom-up' as well as 'from top-down'.

Sletta's planned event for the six-year-olds is called *Camping at home*. The aim of this activity is to "[c]elebrate school start together with them and show that God and the church take part in their life. Experience that Jesus wants to be their friend. Get new friends they will meet again at school. Motivate to join the *Age 6 club*." (The translations here and below from the two local, anonymised plans are all mine.) In the slot for *Interpreting life and mastering the art of living* Sletta has filled in: "Independence and belonging. Friendship and relationships" As for *Christian faith and tradition*, there are "Bible stories. Jesus feeds 5000. Jesus and the children. Zacchaeus". As for *Christian faith in action*, we find "Prayer. Church service where the age 6 book *Three in a tree* will be handed out. Songs: I clasp my small hands; I am so happy when I see you." As for pedagogy, Sletta's plan says: "Saturday (6 hours) and Sunday (2 hours) teaching, prayer, play, activities. Church service where a book is handed out, and drinks and nibbles after church to celebrate the start of school."

In Skogen's local plan the activity for the six-year-olds is called *Age 6 book* [to be handed out]. (Again the translated titles and quotes are mine, and no references are given because of reasons of anonymity.) The aim is that "[t]he children will experience safety regarding the church and what is/goes on in it. They will get knowledge about the content of baptism." As for the *Interpreting life* etc., Skogen has a short phrase: "Get to know the church's symbols and reflect on the stories." As for *Christian faith and tradition*, the

plan says: “Discover the church house – art and symbols. Discover God’s creation (outside the church). Discover the Bible.” And finally, with regard to *Christian faith in action*: “Pray *Our Father*. Participate in the liturgy and the hymns.” The pedagogy is also kept brief: “Narration. Prayer. Song. Church service.”

Both of these locally planned events seem to centre round the handing out of a book written particularly for this age group (Bang 2003). We notice that Sletta’s aim for the event is more Jesus-centred, and oriented more towards pietistic experience than Skogen’s aim which focuses on each and every child getting a feeling of normality and comfort in the church service. Here, Skogen’s local plan is more in line with the national plan than Sletta’s plan is.

Sletta’s aim for *Wide-awake* is to “[c]reate a sense of belonging to the church by letting the children stay inside the church day and night. Learn about baptism, the Holy Communion, liturgical colours and Jesus as the light of the world. Encourage to joining the *Soul Children*.” The *Soul Children* is a children’s choir run voluntarily by a Christian organisation, and just like the *Age 6 club* at Sletta, it is a nurturing activity ‘external to’ the local plan as it does not count when it comes to extra state funding because it is not outreaching enough. As for *Interpreting life* etc., Sletta writes: “Experience that they can be completely themselves together with God.” Regarding *Christian faith and tradition*, Sletta says: “Biblical texts about light. The sacraments: baptism and Holy Communion. Liturgical colours”. And as for *Christian faith in action*: “Sing the *Wide-awake* song with *Soul Children*. Service workshop. Prayers and lighting candles. Walk and explore.” The pedagogy of this event is: “Treasure hunt, songs, prayers, lighting candles, experiential walk, getting a book, food, sleeping over, service workshop and celebration of [morning] service.”

Skogen’s phrases for *Wide-awake* are shorter. The aim is to “[e]xperience that the church is my house. Think about who Jesus is for me.” As for *Interpreting life* etc., the children will “[g]et inspiration to be *Wide-Awake* to myself, God and others”. With regard to *Christian faith and tradition*, they will

get to know “Jesus rides into Jerusalem. Jesus is the light of the world. God is with us. Advent”. And as for *Christian faith in action*, Skogen says: “The Golden Rule. Co-worker in the church service. Say prayers. Sing. Explore. Walk.” The pedagogy consists of “[s]tations in the church. Pray. Sing. Activities and play. Service workshop. Stories and dialogue”.

The phrases filled into the ‘electronic tool’ for the event of *Wide-awake* are more similar to Sletta and Skogen then the phrases chosen for the activity for the six-year-olds. This is probably the case because the national launching of the concept, the learning means (cf. *Lys våken* 1 and 2) and the pedagogy described in the national plan. However, with regard to the *Interpreting life* etc., Sletta emphasises the relationship between the individual child and God, while Skogen also includes the child’s relationship to himself/herself and to others. Skogen mentions ‘The Golden Rule’, which emphasises general ethics, while Sletta hopes that more children will enrol in continuous Christian nurturing activities. However, both local plans are brief and quite similar, probably due to the national plan.

5. Interaction of the local plans and achievements of events for six and eleven year olds

I have already underlined the signs of Christian pietistic ideals of thought and practice in the phrases of Sletta’s local plan. According to such ideals, a Christian should be ‘sure of’ his/her ‘own faith’ and get to know God by individual, inner experience. During the achievement of *Camping at home*, Sletta emphasised formal transmission of doctrines, prayers, specific songs and Bible stories. However, the grown-ups also employed humour, e.g. while dramatizing *Three in a tree*. Sletta’s teachers brought God (Jesus) into their everyday life in an outspoken manner. A co-researcher observed *Wide-awake* at Sletta and reported that the children were involved in exploring their faith while being taught. During the Sunday service the children had taken over nearly all the functions of church employees. In this event the

parish also celebrated a Holy Communion (Botvar, Haakedal, Kinserdal 2013: p. 48-53).

In Skogen's plan there are clear signs of a theology of creation. The general aim of the plan clearly includes the sub-aim of 'mastering the art of living'. Achieving the event of *Wide-awake*, Skogen included short moments of revealing the 'holy mystery' (e.g. praying 'by the hour') and to a certain degree seemed to distinguish between liturgy and everyday life. However, the main principle for methods during *Wide-awake* seemed to be to allow the children to have a good time while being looked after by grown-ups and entertained or instructed by teenagers. Compared with Sletta, Skogen had chosen to include the 'broader' ritual of infant baptism in the Sunday service of *Wide-awake* (Botvar, Haakedal, Kinserdal 2013: p. 62-72).

Regarding the boys called 'Busy Alf' and 'Active Benny', the observed achievements in both parishes were inclusive in a manner which allowed for a little deviation from a generally expected behaviour. After observing Sletta's *Camping at home*, I talked with the curate about the achievement. She said that in order to avoid that one child dominates a whole group session, they would probably be prepared to split the children into even more groups for practical activities and dialogue. She did not, however, comment on the rather traditional, doctrinal way of the communication which the church employees used in Alf's group as I have noticed. At Skogen's *Wide-awake* achievement, a few girls participated who did not normally take part in the Christian education activities. One reason for this, they said, was the opportunity to sleep over in a medieval church with an altarpiece underlining the passion of Jesus, strange wall paintings and spooky rumours. On the contrary, one of the boys participating in the same event explained that his classmates were not tempted as they stated that all church activities were boring.

6. Nordic contextual theology and theories of spirituality and sociocultural learning

Below, I will apply the concepts of 'life-view', 'interpretation of life', 'life attitude', 'life mastering' and 'spirituality' in order to comment on the differences found in the local Christian education plans of Sletta and Skogen as well as on the influences from the national plan. All the concepts can be found within the Nordic contextual theology and the theory of Religious Education. A loose definition of the concept of 'life-view' is given by the Finnish theologian, Tage Kurtén, as "the verbal expression s of an (adult) individual's profound way of orientating himself in existence. A life-view therefore concerns beliefs, attitudes, values and ways of action related to this profound orientation" (Kurtén 1997: p. 110). I have argued, based on writings by Kurtén, that because of his definition, the concept of 'life-view' could easily be exchanged with 'life attitude' and 'interpretation of life'. My argument is that Kurtén includes 'ways of action' in his definition and that the concept of 'basic trust' plays an important role in his understanding of 'life-view' and his contextual theology (Haakedal 2007).

In my understanding of the Christian education reform of the C of N on the national, local and individual level, I want to underline the element of 'basic trust' and of embodied practices which the national plan, *God gives – we share*, seems to include at least as one strand in a (more or less successful) band of strands. I also want to emphasise the concept of (lifelong) learning as it is used in the wide tradition of sociocultural learning theory. Such learning is based on social and dialogical experiences involving outer and inner meaning-making processes. It heavily involves an embodied learning of religious practices and symbols. It does not equal the concepts of socialisation or a passive passing on of traditions. Formation through an active encounter with parts and wholes of the Christian faith and tradition may well correspond with children's and young people's self-formation (Fuglseth, Haakedal, Schmidt 2012).

Sturla Sagberg (2010) has argued that if only the concepts of 'interpreting life' and 'mastering the art of living' are used (and thus, the concept of 'spirituality' is excluded, which the national plan seems to have done), there is a danger of creating a big gap between a secular, immanent understanding of human beings and the world on the one hand, and a hypothetical transcendent reality on the other. (These are my simplified formulations.) As I understand Sagberg, he wants to use the concepts which may open up best for an integrated experiencing of the 'total reality' which includes 'liminality' (experiences of transcendent otherness) and moral consequences of such experiencing. To Sagberg, the concept of 'spirituality' (despite the use of it, which seems to exclude institutional established religious practice) is broader than 'interpreting life' and 'mastering the art of living'. Thus, he offers an improved illustration compared with the diagram from the national plan as commented on above. In Sagberg's illustration, the concept of 'spirituality' seems to signal a two-way interaction: an opening up for a dialogue between "the love of God in Jesus Christ" (substantiated by the three phrases of "interpreting life and mastering the art of living", "faith and tradition in the church" and "Christian faith and practice", cf. Kirkerådet 2010: p. 15) and (to a high degree secularised) general human experiences, thoughts and language.

I lean towards Kurtén's definition of 'life view' (including 'ways of action') which equals 'life attitude' and 'basic trust'. To Kurtén, 'basic trust' is not the result of one's deliberate choice or rational reasoning. It is rather something that one has grown up with (and into) or something which one has come to embrace "in a very unfathomable manner" (1997: p. 111). Kurtén's empirically based typology of 'basic trust' includes the Self, Nature, Human/Social Life and Transcendence (plus Nihilism which is distrust, as a fifth type). Thus, 'basic trust' is qualified, and Kurtén is critical to trust in the Self (not speaking of Nihilism). I think the concept of 'spirituality' also needs to be qualified, and I accept Sagberg's two features of 'liminality' and 'morality'. I wonder if people (empirically) expressing 'basic trust' in Nature or Human/Social life could also be said to have (had) experiences of

'liminality'. Moral attitudes would surely be included in their utterances of their way of life. I find that the concepts of 'basic trust/life attitude' and of 'spirituality' are applicable to observations of young people and children's bodily and oral expressions at encounters with Christian education.

7. Learning from Alf and Benny through the concepts of 'spirituality' and 'basic trust'

'Busy Alf' and 'Active Benny' both took part in activities described in the local plans of two C of N parishes, the plans reflecting in various ways the national plan *God gives – we share*. Skogen's plan reflects the idea of being 'socialised into' belonging to the church more than Sletta, which emphasises the 'growing into consciousness of' both believing and belonging. Still, I do not think that there is an enormous difference between the two plans. There will always be a variety of local dynamic implementations and achievements of the national plan.

I am fascinated, but also a little ambivalent when thinking about my observations of the two boys. Regarding Alf, I do not know why he (being the leader in the friendship between himself and another boy) signalled an ideal of competition so spontaneously and clearly, and why he showed unsocial behaviour to some extent (sheltering himself after having pinched something from the other children) and why he seemed to be worried over something during the Sunday service. If my impressions are not incidental, I think Alf may already have had to learn rules of behaviour in groups at school. I wonder if there are resources in the local church to offer him something, he will value in terms of 'basic trust', e.g. patient love with opportunities for spiritual fantasising combined with limitations of anti-social behaviour. Much will depend on the quality of interaction between the church employees and the families of children as busy as Alf, as well as on a problem-solving inclusion of the children / young people (individually and as a body) during the catechumenical programme.

Regarding Benny, I think his active body and mind will provide him with good opportunities to grow spiritually and to have faith in himself. I believe that he has had some experiences of transcendent otherness through praying 'by the hours' at home and at church. I think Benny, as an eleven-year-old, has unconsciously based his life on a mixture of social family trust, transcendental trust and trust in himself. However, I wonder whether his charming eagerness to be the midpoint of attention will prevent his ability to see the needs of others and to develop a sharing and caring attitude. As boys are often a minority in church events and Christian activities for children and youth, some sociable and charming boys may develop 'a big ego' which may be the cause of unhappiness for themselves and others later in life. I think churches in general need to pay more attention to individual challenges of spiritual nurture and to spend more resources developing communicative competences and attitudes among church employees.

Concerning the local plans of Sletta and Skogen, I think there is still quite a distance to cover before they show a clearer way forward regarding an integrated vision of a Christian 'basic trust' or a Christian 'spirituality'. However, there is a need for a sober balance (Leganger-Krogstad, Mogstad 2006) between structural awareness of limited resources and individual agency. Therefore, church teachers should be able to integrate their practical communicative abilities and their theoretical awareness when learning through encounters with a wide variety of children's voices.

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Noemi Bravená

Philosophising and theologising with, for and of children as a way to an integrated development of children's transcending within the post-communist society and the place of these methods within the reform efforts of "turning to child" in the Czech education

Introduction

Which places have the methods of philosophising and theologising within the Czech education system? Which factors prevent or support them? New reform efforts of educational psychologists and primary education specialists give hope that the door is being opened for such interactive methods at present schools. It seems that it will not only be a phenomenon of catechists or of few teachers of religion, philosophy and ethics.

This paper presents a new theoretical background for philosophising and theologising at primary schools as it is being discussed in the latest scientific debate within the Czech Republic. It also introduces the first adult and children research to the concept of overreach itself (transcendence), which is, according to my mind, crucial for the implementation of these methods within the Czech education system.

1. Is the situation for philosophising and theologising in primary schools favourable in the Czech Republic?

There are some factors which inhibit the development of the above mentioned methods. Among them the residues of ideas of the communist past are to be named, when teaching the sciences and philosophy were deformed by the one sided atheistic ideology which had been regarded as the only correct scientific attitude taught at schools, colleges and universities. This atheistic approach to life, society and knowledge prevented from holistic teaching and holistic scientific exchange at universities in general. After the Velvet Revolution in November 1989, another unpleasant circumstance appeared, namely the quick exchange of Ministers of Education in Czechoslovak and then Czech Republic. Those ministers did not have any perspective or idea of the direction for future education, which was a main reason why Czech teachers have lost their enthusiasm about the change of the school education from below.

Implementing and developing these methods, in my opinion, were even prevented by the relations of Czech society to the churches and to religious education at all. After the political changes in 1989, Czech people were very receptive to new ideas and many longed for genuine ideals. Some churches offered mass evangelisations led by foreign guest preachers and ministers coming from different political and cultural contexts. On this occasion, they often screened films about biblical characters. However, no one asked whether they were suitable for Czech people who had lived with an atheistic ideology for fifty years. They were presented to people who had been hearing about the unhealthiness and uselessness of the Christian education for their daily life and about the exclusivity of the Marxist ideology, which undermines the plausibility of religion at all (‘opium of people’), for many years. After the Velvet Revolution, Christianity was presented to all these people in a much idealised form by Western ministers. The result of this effort was twofold: denial or affirmation of Christian faith. After facing the real situation within Christian churches, many people not only have left the

churches, but also suffered from a deep spiritual injury. Many of them joined various world religions.

Even though Religious Education was offered at state schools, it was realised by a curricula taken from concrete confessional catechesis that stands in relation to the post-communist situation, where religious teachers were educated partially, which was not enough for teaching Religious Education at state schools in the Czechoslovak Republic. These were the reasons why Religious Education sounded to pupils like fairy-tale stories.

The last census, which took place in 2011, showed a reduction of three million in the number of believers in comparison to the census of 1991 (Data of Czech Statistical Office: Czech Census 1991/ Czech Census 2011). According to the last census, there are only 1.5 million Christian believers in the Czech Republic at present. Up to a certain extent, the church activities and efforts were also accepted positively by the society. However, some of the unconsidered steps taken by Christian churches strongly influenced the present perception of Religious Education at the primary schools in general.

The position of philosophising is a little better than the position of theologising within the Czech society. Its main strength is that it does not contain religious cliché and that it does not matter to the people as a method, but still they do not understand its deeper meaning. As a result of this non-understanding, criticism can be heard: "Why should I talk about anything that I cannot change?", "Which meaning or significance has philosophising with children, if it prevents them from 'real' educational work?" Many consider it as waste of time, but it is necessary to meet curriculum.

However, there are reasons why it is very important to introduce or professionalise philosophising and theologising with, for and of children at the primary schools. One reason is the strong material orientation of life within the society that evokes religious-philosophical and ethical questions in some people that could be very good developed by these methods from different perspectives. Another reason seems to be existence of some individual activities (practical activities at primary school, theoretical lectures

at universities) within the philosophy and theology for children, on which even professional discussions can build easily. Third reason for professionalising the methods of philosophising and theologising refers to the implementation of Ethic Education as voluntary subject within the Czech curriculum documents from the year 2010.

2. A new theoretical basis for the method of philosophising and theologising – Education of overreach (transcendence)?

Czech teachers who work philosophically and religiously with children focus predominantly on the curriculum. They mostly do not use the variety of interactive methods, although they know them. However, in practice they use them in a fragmentary way at best. Some other mistakes can be detected in the teaching process, such as: teachers do not follow the sub goals, they disrespect the individuality of children, they do not develop children's statements and their general creativity etc. These professional teachers defend themselves with words like: "We lead dialogues with children, use games, creative expressions, let them write texts etc." These teachers are even ready to tell the child at the same time: "Do not draw head of God, because we do not know how it looks like", "It does not belong to this philosophical issue." Regarding the thoughts mentioned above, I think that it is not enough to simply correct the method or to introduce it to other subjects without a deeper theoretical ground, which would lead to a new way of thinking within the Czech society. The basis for these methods must stand in relation to our communist past and, therefore, it cannot be super-religious and super-philosophical.

The basis for these methods cannot be seen as an anchorage in supplements only, i.e. like an implementation in the curricula of a particular subject, or like courses of philosophising and theologising that are organised. The basis of such methods must be a new way of thinking of the

professional teaching public. Therefore, I would like to introduce a new theoretical foundation in primary school education, which is already well perceived in the Czech scientific community and is the hope for the methods of philosophising and theologising.

The education overreach does not exist as a sub-discipline in the Czech Republic. In spite of that, I like this verbal connection for several reasons:

1. It involves the ethical, philosophical, religious, ecumenical, and spiritual dimension.
2. It is a cross-curricular field.
3. It is not influenced in a negative way by the Czech political past.
4. It does not primarily evoke thoughts about Christian education, as it is evoked by the term "Religious Education".
5. It has a larger theoretical basis.

2.1. Psychology of overreach as the basis of the child-centred education

The prominent Czech social and pedagogical psychologist Zdeněk Helus presents reasons for why it is important to respect the child as an independent being and to deal with the factors that help or suppress it's socialisation in his book *Child In Personality Concept*. The book reveals a deficit of the Czech society, namely the relationship of adults to perception and social position of the child. Furthermore, the author calls upon teachers and parents for turning the attention to the children of the country in order to understand their personality better and to give them a chance to mature in all their individual qualities, i.e. even in overreach (Helus 2009).

In 2004, the above mentioned author defined overreach psychology conception for the first time. He was inspired by humanistic (Maslow), positive (Křivohlavý, Mares, Antonov) and spiritual psychology (Bucher), and it intervenes into theory of personality. All qualities of personality mentioned by Helus are:

1) Basic character attributes
2) Directivity of human beings
3) Incorporation of human beings
4) Gender
5) Potentiality

6) Self-approach
7) Self-regulation
8) Overreach (transcendence)
9) Integrated wholeness of the individual
10) Way of life

The author defines the concept of overreach (transcendence) as a behaviour in which "an individual is not concerned with the daily worries or joys, but cares for something that – in the process of transcending – goes beyond him, what gives to his life a higher goal and sense" (Helus 2009: 105). According to my opinion, there is a threefold significance in this definition: Firstly, the author relates the Czech overreach conception back to the Latin word transcendence and, thereby, creates a terminological depth, an interdisciplinary value and nonviolent spiritual dimension for the Czech secular society. Secondly, he defines the concept of transcendence without theological or philosophical influence, which means without any prejudices. Thirdly, the author connects the concept of transcendence with the daily behaviour of human beings and gives a special dialectical character to the term “overreach” (transcendence).

Although the overreach concept is not in foreground of scientific discussion at present, it is an integral part of the “turning to child” education (child-centred-education), which is well received by Czech pedagogical specialists (Spilková, Helus, Pelcová, Hejlová etc.). This seems to be a new direction in the Czech primary education that opens up a large space for the method of philosophising, and, I believe, also for interreligious theologising in the future.

2.2. Anthropological background

The concept of education overreach has not only a psychological basis as it has been proved above, but also an anthropological basis. It is connected to an education which goes completely beyond the highly technologically oriented society and leads a person to self-collected understanding of the natural world. The Czech philosopher of education, Naděžda Pelcová, views

the concept of transcendence as essential in relation to the idea of the "third dimension of education". According to her view, the transcendent dimension of education is the education that leads a person to understand the complexity of the whole world and to understand himself/herself as an active being that co-creates the realty of human beings within the world. The author discovered this third dimension of education in the thoughts of the neurologist Viktor von Weizsäcker, the human scientist Wilhelm Flittner and especially in the thoughts of the Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka (Pelcová 2000: 151-152).

It is Patočka's phenomenological teaching about the three dialectics moves of human existence that offers a principal legacy for new Czech educational efforts. The author's new contribution sees human beings in a constant existential motion which co-creates our reality:

1. "acceptance/anchor" a person in their family within the world and
2. "self-prolonging/self-reflection" by which a person faces out to the reality of work and relationships that surround him (1995: 124).
3. In the third motion of existence (motion of truth) the individual transcendences the whole technical world and experiences internal conversion (metanoia) (1992: 251) that means that the individual is no longer "being for itself" and so it can meet people and face things as they really are (1992: 249).

This anthropological thought relates to H. Hejlova's dissertation on international children's rights at a Czech primary schools, too. She accentuates the need of the individual child's personality (2010: 67). On this anthropological foundation, the children's rights have very deep inner meaning. According to our author, through an education in rights the child is able "to achieve full humanity, at least in the sense that we now appear to be valuable as ideal, which is a good and meaningful work. .... Its essence and ultimate form is ... experiencing self-fulfilment, including self-overreach in serving to others, or in union with the spiritual dimension of being." (2005: 43).

2.3. New concept of Czech education at primary schools

Vladimíra Spilková covers the efforts mentioned above in a "new concept of teaching" at Czech primary schools, which are based on the idea of humanisation, which itself contains ideas of "the child-oriented teaching" as well as of the "integral development of personality" (2005: 48-49). Both issues also include overreach. Together with this new concept of teaching, Spilková also discovered meaning of some ideas of Mathew Lipman, from whom she is underlining the crucial fact that "a pupil is oriented to a position of a researcher" that "emphasises doubting, questioning, searching for research answers, detection problems and formulating hypotheses". One of the goals of this "new concept of teaching" is the "development of critical and creative thinking" (Spilková 2005: 62). By means of this reflection, the author indirectly includes the method of philosophising in the conception of a new orientation in primary education.

These reflections are carried by a desire to reform the Czech education system and are joint in the European educational idea based on the *Dellors pillars* (Spilková 2005: 51). For our topic the pillars named "learning to live" and "be together with others" are significant. According to my mind, all of these accents create a new background for the overreach education, which is providing space for philosophising and theologising methods.

2.4. ***Definition of overreach***

The concept of overreach can be defined similarly to spirituality in terms of vertical and horizontal. Both of these dimensions are interdependent and mutually complement and interactive.

By horizontal direction transcending the self toward the good and welfare of another (neighbour, groups, creature, nature, state) is meant. It is being realised by the act of love, wisdom, creating works, by the struggle for ideals, filling the meaning of life, by helping the other through self-actualisation, etc. It also includes the internal positive and conscious human

intention, the free will and the pleasure to act and belong to something higher.

By vertical direction we mean crossing the self towards existence, God and supreme sense of unification with the universe. It is accomplished with the highest fellowship, trust, hope, faith, devotion and insight. It may be accompanied by intense experiences.

The concept of overreach includes social and spiritual levels. For Czech people, it seems to be a more neutral than spiritual term. The two concepts overlap in topics. Its differences will be shown by following example: The child presents overreach for its mother, but this cannot be understood as spirituality because their relationshiphas a spiritual nature. The child presents overreach for its mother in direction to the future. Transcending acting of mother contains her creative activity, active love, educational creativity etc. The mother has to perceive internally that the child is her overreach. In Patočka's words, it means to come into the existential move of truth. In other words, the overreach closely matches what D.N. Elkins called the "fruit of spirituality" (Bucher 2007: 41).

3. Where is philosophising and theologising with children possible?

In the Czech Republic, a lay approach to children's philosophising at primary schools and to theologising within religious catechetical education predominates. Therefore, all depends on the ability and education of teachers.

3.1. Theologising

Theologising with, for and of children can be practiced in the catechetical teaching at individual churches and in the subject of religion at primary schools.

Teachers in the frame of lay theologising focus on the ‘lower’ theology for and with children. In distinction to this, the ‘higher’ theology remains in the background. A theology of children can occur in isolated statements of an individual child, but the teacher does not give these statements enough room and support to be further developed by the child. Another problem is that the teacher does not speak with the children about their drawings, which are also connected to children’s theology. It is a pity that the method of philosophising does not have more room within the Christian education because it would offer more space to listen to children and, thus, to theologising with them.

Similar problems are being solved in Religious Education. Religion is mostly being taught at church schools, but displays an exception at state schools. Main reasons for this seem to be: optionality of the subject, low interest of pupils and school directors, religious closeness and the lack of didactic material. Besides, Christian education is denominationally conditioned, which is why the ecumenical efforts and even inter-religious teaching are introduced at some schools.

3.2. Philosophising

Philosophising can be found at primary schools as well, but not as a specific subject. It mostly depends on the teacher’s ability to use this method themselves as well as their access to teaching this subject. We mainly find teachers as moderators of the discussion, not as those who lead pupils to discover their own philosophical formulations. A very young child is often responding with only one word and the interviewer may think that this is all it knows about a certain problem. Some teachers are not even fully developed on a religious or philosophical level to practice philosophising, others are not interested in it or they cannot use it in practice. Often, there is the idea: "I will ask something", but to prepare the topics properly for the actual

philosophising with children means that the teacher would have to understand the topic deeply and extensively.

In 2010, ethics was included into the curriculum for elementary education as following words are stating: "The main reason for the inclusion of ethics education in the Framework Education Programme for Elementary Education is the fact that our education system lacks a subject that would systematically develop the moral aspects of pupils' personality. The importance and topicality of this step is also supported by experience of most OECD countries, in which a subject with a similar content is included into the educational system." (2009: 91).

The inclusion of ethical education as "complementary educational field" is, nevertheless, a very important step for the application of both methods because philosophising and theologising can be related to human spiritual dimension. Ethical education is to be understood as an additional (voluntary) subject of the above mentioned curriculum and its teaching depends on school.

4. Research design of the overreach concept

In the submitted research, I have focused on how a Czech person understands the concept of overreach. The research was realised in two steps - the first was focused on adults, the on children (2013).

4.1. Adults and overreach

The aim of the unstructured depth interview was to obtain answers as samples of how the adult population that is independent of religious affiliation subjectively understands problem of transcending. For these purpose, I chose the following criteria:

1) the ability to understand the concept of transcendence (overreach);
2) the ability to reflect the experiences of what was related to overreach in their own childhood specifically and retrospectively;

3) to have own children, or work with them, i.e. the ability to be competent to view overreach in the other childhood.

4.1.1. The content of the concept of overreach of adults

The interviews showed that the concept of overreach views most people linked to the spiritual dimension of man regardless of their religious affiliation. Religious people, from the beginning of the interview, had problems to relate overreach to non-religious areas. Even though they defined overreach for the social area, they, nevertheless, came back to the topic of religion. This is illustrated by the following statement: "I do not know if such person transcends - the notion in the non-religious area confuses me. Transcending a person is trying not to succumb to one's own human nature, and trying to fight it. It means: I will not just skimp money only for myself, but I will try to change something for welfare of other people... If everything around us is just a material world, the quality of the overreach effort is for nothing. This quality derives its meaning only from the point of view that there is something higher beyond it…"

On the religious level, adults identify the overreach concept with transcendent relationships ("relation to God", "faith in God"), religious values ("love", "hope", "wisdom"), spirituality, eschatological dimension ("afterlife"), and also with the human ability "to think about God".

The interviewed adult include the following aspects in overreach:

- physical overreach ("someone is taller, the other smaller"),
- intelligent overreach ("gain experiences", "reading a lot", "one thinks about his behaviour"),
- the orientation of life ("effort of life quality", "one's own overreaching options"),
- act ("to do something that has a deeper meaning", "service to other", "act justly, wisely, sensibly", "victim", "life dedication to some activity - i.e. a scientist "),
- intellect and sense incomprehensibility ("the answer to the life mystery"," dreams coming true", a feeling of "déjà-vu"),
- subjective reality ("inner voice transcending my options", "deep inward peace and unshakable hope that everything is as it should be", "not to succumb to one's own human nature", "special ability of man").

During the dialog with the adults, it has been demonstrated that overreach, on a general level, is mostly associated with human actions of different qualities. It is just a difference in human intentions as it is expressed by one lady's statement: "Someone is either ambitious to achieve something by his [her] activity for his [her] own purpose, or wants to achieve it because he [she] wants to change something in the world."

4.1.2. Childhood and transcendence

Anticipation of overreach in one's own or another's childhood was described by the respondents as "a deeper perception", "a fascination of life", "a perceiving of meaning of life", "a relationship to nature", "an acceptance of one's own limits", " a desire for well-being of the other" or "a spontaneous intention to go to a church and sit down there for a while" etc.

According to the testimony of adults, an apprehensive surrounding has a great influence on children. Children from religious families – in contradiction to the non-religious ones – generally found understanding for their overreach experience within their families. One woman states: "When I was ten years old, I felt the desire just to sit down in the church. I did not analyse it, I liked it; how it smells there, how pretty it looks, how the organ plays, and I was feeling very well there. My family did not know it because they did not understand it and would have been angry."

Most respondents describe that experience of overreach during childhood was a self-evidence in their life. As one woman said: "I thought that if a child could exceed its own shadow, it is because anyone can do it. .... Since my childhood, I came across very good and nice people, ... I have been thinking for a very long time that everybody is like this."

The respondents differ from each other by the time determination when a child is able to overreach itself. All of them think that there is a certain anticipation of children younger than ten years old, and they associate it

with a manifestation of conscious non-egocentrism - i.e. helping others, wise conduct and faith.

4.1.3. Education and overreach

There are two concepts to develop overreach for children in the testimonies of adults - within each subject or one teaching subject. This became clear in one statement: "I would bring together religion, philosophy and ethics in one teaching subject, and I would ask questions during last fifteen to twenty minutes, and just let the children think".

In my opinion, these two teaching conceptions do not exclude each other. On the contrary, they could form two directions within the education overreach. The first direction appeals cross-curricular to all teaching subjects to draw up the ideas to overreach. The second direction presents the concrete educational subject that deals with overreach itself and creates a basis for a cross-curricular dialog.

In the context of the Czech curricular documents, this area could be called *Man and Life*. It could include: 1. ethical topics (right to live, respect for life, a positive evaluation of oneself and others, patterns, pro-social behaviour, ethical values), 2. philosophical and religious topics (the meaning of life, importance of a higher purpose for human life, afterlife , human values, pursuit of wisdom, search for goodness, truth and beauty, good and evil) etc.

4.2. Children and overreach

In this research, sixty-five children between eight and ten years from the state primary school in Prague participated. I took one main idea from the research of adults and tried to discover whether the children see the transcendence in human acting. For this reason, the anthropological typology of overreach has been created. It has the following characters: "hero (Knight)", "artist", "sage", "saint" (theory of optimal personality, Coan

1999: 20-21), “an ordinary man: teacher, parent, friend” (psychology of overreach, Helus 2009: 42-43, 265-266). I relate all these characters with one overreach meaning, which is the "effort to do something significant, valuable, important."

4.2.1. Hero

Especially in the 2nd – 3rd class, heroes play an important part in the realities of children’s lives. Children have a favourite movie hero (Superman, Spiderman, Ironman, Harry Potter, princesses) and are able to talk about them and what they are exceptional for (can fly, magic, walk on walls, saving the world). The type of a hero is very important for the overreach development in this age, because the children want to resemble the actions of the heroes in their own acting.

For older children, movie heroes are no longer that important, there are children who dislike them at all (e.g. because of their fighting). Children, however, are able to talk about the powerful actions of specific people whom they associate with heroism. Among them are real heroes can be found, including cops, fire-fighters, doctors – a heroism that refers to employments that save human lives.

Children describe heroism by means of supernatural characters, like helping others on the basis of their special abilities. Children specialise an activity of heroism more when referring to real characters. Heroism means saving another life, resolving the irresolvable ("dad repaired a computer") and enduring suffering ("My sister endured eye surgery; my dad endured pulling a tooth").

One child mentions an un-heroic profession spontaneously, a garbage collector, but it explains this occupation’s heroism at the same time: "He takes away trash, so that we don’t drown in it". Also, artists do important things by bringing joy to people ("The singer makes people happy").

Children primarily associate their own heroism with saving someone's life or to become someone important. Without philosophising children are not able

to see that beside doctor or a scientist there are other professions that are transcending in their acting. That a doctor is able to save lives is also the work of all those who provide facilities (state hospitals, serving tools, etc.). Even adults cannot see the overreach acting at usual professions such as those of office workers.

Children give more reasons for actions of real characters:

1. the self-interest of a person ("he/she can do it", "enjoys it", "likes it", "feeding by it"),
2. the nature of the profession allows it ("a scientist can do some experiments"),
3. higher interests ("to see the new things to be done in the life," "to invent antidotes" (boy, 9 y.).The unreal and real heroes demonstrate for kids the best evidence of overreach.

4.2.2. Wise man, wise child

A wise person is mostly known to children from Christmas story. “They look like man” (girl, 8 y.). “It can be also Jesus, because he knew a lot” (boy, 10 y.). Acting of the wise man children identify with:

1. Protective function of the infant Jesus
2. Helping people using advice
3. Cleverness - "they knew everything and were able to be led by the stars" (boy, 8 y.)
4. Righteousness

When children think about a child, it may be "little" or "a little wise" because it is small. A child is unwise to some extent because it is not adult (girl 10 y.). If the child is wise, it is "wise in the being naughty" (girl 8 y.).

Children identify wisdom mostly with cleverness or the level of education - "a wise man is known by the fact that he wears glasses, this is because he has read a lot and spoiled his eyes" (girl 10y.),"a wise man has mega-brain"(boy 10 y.). Smart is also the owl "because it is in fables" (girl 9 y.), "because it guards the forest," and "gives advise" (boy 9 y.).

There is a difference between the perception of wisdom and wise actions. Children identify wisdom with brightness, fun and generosity. In this kind of acting, children see something deeper. One seven-year-old girl gives a concrete statement about a wise child action: "I guess, I acted wisely a bit

when we were on the playground and a friend stayed in the creeping, so I went to call parents." For this reason, it seems that children need to grasp the wisdom from using specific examples and that is why they need the method of philosophising and theologising.

4.2.3. The best teacher

The teacher should serve as an example of overreach. Children perceive his/her acting with their whole personality. According to children's responses, the best teacher is their class teacher, because she: "is kind", "teaches us various things," "wears glasses" and her wisdom means that she "is helping children" (very similar answers in all classes). The best example for children is the conduct of the teacher, which refers to helping the children, judging of classroom situations fairly, pointing out hazy situations and to enlightening the atmosphere with humour.

4.2.4. Saint, holy

A saint is known to children mostly from art: paintings and sculptures. At best, they can vaguely say that they have done something important. Only religious children see saints acting with faith and leading an exemplary life. For this reason, the method of theologising also has its deep meaning for the children at the primary schools.

Most of the children connect the significance of the person with an aureole - "it means that he was holy and good" and "that he was in heaven" (girl 10 y.). There was one child which argued that the aureole with stars means that he was hit at his head. This type of saint connects most of all mentioned characters within the horizontal and vertical direction of transcendence.

4.2.5. Loving parents

Additionally, a parent can do something significant. Here, the overreach occurs in the context of the child itself. There were responses like: parents

are doing something important, because "they take care of us" and "cook food" (girl, 8 y.). In addition to these daily activities, some children appoint the overreach facts: "Mom made the meaningful thing that she gave us life" and "survived childbirth" (girl, 10 y.).

4.2.6. The best friend

Children at this age need to be surrounded by good friends – people and animals – and can indicate a variety of examples. Religious children also mention Jesus as their best friend. For each of them, transcendent acting lies elsewhere. For most of the children, their best friend: "loves us", "help us", "can set us laughing, when we are sad".

A dog can also be a man's best friend - especially for those who have a disability (i.e. are blind), a best friend for people in dangerous situation (fire and police dog), or it can protect his master at the cost of losing its life. One child says: "When the hunter should not shoot a wild-boar, so the dog protects his master" (boy, 8 y.). These situations were mentioned by the youngest children in whole research. I later learned that these children come from a class with one integrated child. This points towards the fact that an integration of children with specific needs in the class helps children to develop a higher way of thinking, because they are confronted with the question of assistance to another person.

4.3. Anthropological typology of overreach

The anthropological typology of overreach presents one of the ways to grasp the concept of transcendence among very young children. To this typology belong human characters that live the overreach and develop it either vertically or horizontally. Children aged between seven and ten years sometimes have no idea of what they want to be in life, yet. This typology can motivate them to see other heroes with whom they can identify.

These types of people also had their background in the Bible, so it is also good material for theologising. The above mentioned typology may be related to Christ's titles: Saviour of mankind (hero), Wise (wise man), Rabbi (teacher), Sufferer (saint), loving father (a parent), and best friend. It may also be related to some characteristics of God: God as a potter (Jer 18.6), a loving Father (John 3.16; 16.27), a teacher (Job 36.22), wisdom (Lukas 11.49; 1 Kor. 1.24) etc. All kinds of people have their finalisation to the practical life of faith: God's armour (hero), the pursuit of divine wisdom (wise-man), to teach and educate (teacher), suffering for Christ (saint), love as agape (best friend) etc.

5. Conclusion

The psychology of overreach seems to be a great hope for the methods of philosophising and theologising with children in the Czech Republic. As the research with adults has proved, the concept of overreach leads children to deeper thinking on the social as well as on the spiritual level. It is not burdened by religious clichés or a political past. This is why I think that it might be appropriate for a comprehensive curriculum including ethics, philosophy and religion, and also for pedagogy overreach perhaps resulting in the new area *Man and Life* in the Czech educational documents.

Philosophising and theologising as methods also have a place in the personal development teaching and the "turning to child education", which leads the pupils to "overcome the purely utilitarian life orientation with respecting a transpersonal sense for acting" (Helus 2012: 25) and, thus, it creates "a converted man".

Children need ideal characters for their own actions, they need to see the heroic conduct among themselves and they also need to know that not only Superman, but also an ordinary person can change the world for the better by taking full responsibility for it.

As a result, it is mainly the individual, who have to strive for higher values as well as for knowledge of the meaning of life. I believe that anthropological typology of overreach carries such potential in it and that it is one of the possibilities to bring Christian values closer to Czech children. With respect to the extensity of topic overreach it requires involvement the whole potential of the method of philosophising and theologising for, with and of children.

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Elisabeth E. Schwarz

Workshop: Philosophizing with children – or maybe theologising?

Children's Theology has always been interested in the methods of how to theologize with children. What could encourage children to express their own religious ideas in various cognitive and creative ways, and to ask or argue thoroughly and to reflect about their arguments? What could enable them "to talk about God, themselves and their environment self-confident and well informed"[5]? Religious teachers found that many ideas on the philosophy of children can be used to deepen the discourse about existential, religious and biblical topics.

The following workshop was designed to demonstrate different methods of philosophizing with children.

Leading this workshop my basic idea was as follows: The participants of the workshop would experiment themselves with these methods of philosophizing. They would get in contact with the special atmosphere of "contemplating sessions" by short documents of lessons, when children were encouraged to ask questions about life, to find their own words for inner ideas and to reflect about arguments and positions. By the way of examples, due to the lack of time, the participants would compare their own answers to philosophical questions with those of the students. And maybe they would discover particular spots in the own or the children's arguments, where the change to theologising would be possible, helpful or necessary.

I therefore chose three philosophical issues children dealt with in religious classes in Austria in order to exemplify their way of philosophizing. The

[5] Kammeyer, Kaharina / Schwarz, Elisabeth E. (2013): „Why am I in this World?" Attitudes, Methodes and Examples of Theologizing and Philosophizing with Children. In: Kuindersma, Henk (Ed.): Powerful Learning Environments and Theologizing with Children, kassel university press, 109-127,127.

issues asked for details of Kant's great philosophical questions: What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope for?

Philosophizing with children needs special attitudes of communication. It's a certain kind of how to deal with own and children's questions and how to support and appreciate children's answers, comparable to moderation in the tradition of Rogers talk-therapy[6]. Eva Zoller, a well known child philosopher of Switzerland, noticed.

> *"Those, who wish to philosophize with children, must be ready to immerse in the realm of unsolved questions, must try to see many (apparent) certainties in a new way with the unspoilt pure eyes of children. The conviction to accept children as serious partners in a discussion is indispensable for us adults[7].*

In my experience it often needs a long way of learning to internalize these special attitudes. It is, why for example the University College of Teacher Education Vienna / Krems offers two years in-service courses (7 modules – each for three days) for "Philosophizing and Theologizing with Children and Youngsters". A workshop is only able to give a short impression of this attitude. To warm-up I invited "to immerse in the realm of unsolved questions".

1. Questioning - an important condition.

People, after years of school education and working in the job are used to give answers – correct and immediately and they prefer questions, which allow correct and immediate answers! But to stop answering and to appreciate the so called "indiscernible questions" (Heinz von Foerster) at first - maybe remembering one's own questions of childhood - is an important starting point for teachers, when they want to philosophize or

[6] Büttner, Gerhard (2014): Theologisieren mit Kindern – zwischen Empathie und Strukturierung. In: Büttner, Gerhard / Freudenberger-Lötz, Petra / Kalloch Christina / Schreiner Martin (Hg.): Handbuch Theologisieren mit Kindern. Stuttgart, München: Calwer/Kösel, 19.

[7] Zoller, Eva (1991): Die kleinen Philosophen. Zürich: Orell Füssli Verlag, 7 (translated by E.E.S.); Cf: Hidalgo Oliver / Rude Christophe / Wiesheu Roswitha (2011) Gedanken teilen: Philosophieren in Schulen und Kindertagesstätten. Interdisziplinäre Voraussetzungen - Methodische Praxis - Implementation und Effekte, Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 114ff.

theologize with children. Life offers a lot of existential philosophical questions and many of them are indiscernible. No final answer exists, and each person must set out anew to find provisional answers.
So at first we started with a picture of Lemieux and a typical question, a five years old child once asked: „Mum, can there be somebody exactly like me?“

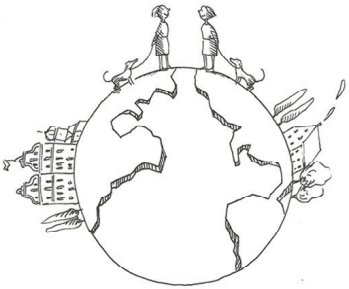

Fig. 1

To wonder about this existential question helped the participants to remember their own great questions of early childhood and maybe the curiosity and the pleasure which accompanied them:
“Is it possible to think nothing?” “Where is my grandma now after death?” “Would I be another girl, if you didn‘t call me Heide?” and they spoke about their different ideas to answer.
Teachers as well as (elder) students must re-discover, that it may be fascinating and helpful, to ask in existential topics. And most of the students must be encouraged to ask questions at all. They must notice that questioning is neither silly nor unneeded and that there are different kinds of questions, minor and great ones[8], easy to answer for everybody or only one special person, discernible or indiscernible. The following game might help:
“I give you the answer. What question could it be? My answer is:

- 3
- Martin Luther
- Please, look into an encyclopedia!

[8] Zoller, Eva: Selber denken macht schlau. Philosophieren mit Kindern und Jugendlichen. Kempten, Zytglogge 2010, 24f.

- Only you can know it.
- When you are in heaven"

Interesting, original and surprising questions were collected by the participants of the workshop. To find questions, which motivate students' philosophical or theological inquiry, is a great challenge for teachers.
Questioning is also important to deepen the dialogue between the students. Therefore we looked at typical „midwife-questions", Socrates would have asked and for their relevance in classroom discussion:

- What exactly do you mean by that?
- Would you give an example?
- How does what you say relate to...?
- What do you assume here?
- Is it always like this?
- What are the reasons for your assumption?
- Are there reasons to doubt this?
- Who might know whether this opinion is true?
- What difference does it make?
- Does anybody have a different perspective on this?
- Could it be completely different?
- If this happens, what would follow?
- Why is this question important?
- Are we still sticking to our subject? …

Another helpful tool to deepen the dialogue among students is the "The good thinkers Tool–Kits", developed by Thomas Jackson, the initiator of Philosophy for Children in Hawai.[9] Children can hold up a letter "W", "R", "A" …, to show which information they just need for better understanding.

- W - **W**hat do you mean by…?
- R - What **R**easons are there, that support what he/she said?
- A - What are we **A**ssuming (taking for granted as true)?
- I - What **I**nferences have we made from what was said?
- T - Is what is being said **T**rue? How could we find out?
- E - Can you think of an **E**xample to illustrate what you mean?
- C - Are there any **C**ounter-examples to the claim being made?

(Fig. 2)

[9] Cf.: http://www.creighton.edu/ccas/philosophyforchildren/toolkit/

2. Questioning as Kant – examples of philosophizing

Philosophizing with children refers to different traditions of "Kinderphilosophie" and "philosophy for children (P4C)"[10] .
In all these traditions philosophizing with children is cognitive training:

- Terms and their individual relevance are analyzed.
- Terms are defined more precisely.
- Arguments, justifications are weighed again and again.
- Logical reasoning is being trained.
- Controversial discourse is being provoked.

Philosophizing with children is also creativity-training:

- Children's questioning is provoked.
- Children are gathering different, maybe curious ideas.
- They express their ideas or their inner images by painting, modelling or composing poems.
- They try to find their own position or to understand position of others by role-playing… .

By the following three examples of philosophical questioning I tried to demonstrate different methods of "cognitive training" and „creativity-training" in classrooms and to show, where the change into theologising would be possible.

2.1. What can I know?

We chose the following basic question: „What are thoughts?" When the religious education teacher asked this question in a classroom of second graders, the following dialogue developed: [11]

> Priscilla: „Thoughts are invisible."
> Sarah: „Thoughts are, for example, when I have an argument with Marlene, I am thinking about it afterwards, and think that it was not quite right, what I did. Then I apologize and afterwards we are good friends again."
> T: "What can thoughts provoke?"
> Sarah: „Well, thoughts can make stomachache. When I think about something, that was not okay, then I get a strange feeling in my stomach."

[10] Cf.: Kalloch, Christina (2014): Kinderphilosophie – Kindertheologie. In: Büttner u.a. (2014), 13f.
[11] Tüchler, Ariane (2009): Aller Anfang ist schwer. Auf den Weg in eine philosophische Grundhaltung. Abschlussarbeit im Lehrgang: „Theologisieren und Philosophieren mit Kindern" an der KPH Wien/Krems, 5f.

Fips: „No , no … that's not right! If I have a stomachache, afterwards I think: Oh, mother will surely say again, we cannot go swimming. The stomachache is first and because of it, I am not allowed to go swimming."
Anais: "I don' believe that. I believe, first there are the ideas, then comes the stomachache."
Priscilla: "Thoughts are in the head, not in the stomach."
Sarah: "And how can they make stomachache?"
Marlene: "When thoughts are there, where you are just in pain, then thoughts are always at other points."
Alina: "But where are they, if I am not in pain? Or, don't I have any thoughts in this case?"
Priscilla: "Well, right now I am not in pain, but I think, I just now have many ideas!"

After this wonderful dialogue, the teacher asked the students to catch the last thought they just had and to find a suitable colour for it.

T: "Maybe, your thought will be changed, when you talk about it with your friends. Other colours will come in your mind. What will happen?"
The students exchanged their painted and coloured thoughts with other thinkers and watched, what happened:
Alina: "First my thought was green. But after the exchange of ideas, my thought was like this."

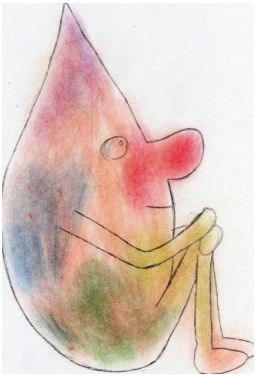

Fig.3

I found this was a real creative and wonderful way to illustrate the outcome, when pupils exchange their ideas in the so called "contemplating sessions".
But "Where do my thoughts come from?" I asked the participants of my workshop and invited them to philosophize about it in groups of three persons. They found their "adult answers" using brain-research or Platons theory of ideas … and found, that the answer is not at all easy.
Now, maybe this could also be the starting point for theologising with children.

The useful book “Der Gedankensammler” (The collector of thoughts)[12] offers different, creative and provoking answers to this question.

It tells the story of Mr. Grantig, who collects thoughts every day and carries them home in a rucksack. He arranges them in alphabetical order, the admirable, angry, allowed… ones in one box, the beautiful, black, boring…ones in the second box. In the evening he plants them in the garden and wonderful new flowers grow up during the night. In the dawn they fly as colourful clouds up in the sky and come as new thoughts into our bedrooms, when we are still sleeping.

When I was a five years old girl, I had some possible answers of this question and maybe one or the other child in classroom argues like this:

- I get my thoughts from my parents, grandparents… from all the things surrounding me.
- They come in my brain, when I am dreaming.
- God has put all of them in my brain, when I was created, and now I have to look for them by thinking hard, or sometimes they overcome me.
- God influences just now that I am thinking like this, but it can also be the devil.

Speaking about God or the devil needn’ t already be theologising, but if the teacher decides to spend time with the last answer, I am sure, children will share their images of God, the devil and the evil in us and maybe they will ask themselves: “Who is God for me?” or “What is the evil for me?”[13]

To ask for the relationship: “Who is God for me” is the typical theological question in contrast to the philosophical one: “Does God exist?”[14]

The theological challenge would be to formulate productive “midwife-questions” to stimulate this reflection and discussion and to offer pictures of hope[15] according to Christian faith and the bible, when children express their dark and horrible images of hell and the devil.

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[12] Feth, Monika / Boratynsk, Antoni (1993): Der Gedankensammler. Düsseldorf: Patmos.

[13] Cf.: Schwarz, Elisabeth (2014): Hölle, Teufel und das Böse. In: Büttner u.a.(2014), 288f.

[14] Cf.: Müller, Peter (2011): Problem und Untersuchungsdesign. In: Müller, Peter /Ralla, Mechthild: Alles Leben hat ein Ende. Philosophische und theologische Gespräche mit Kindern. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 10.

[15] Martens, Ekkehard (2005), Kinderphilosophie und Kindertheologie – Familienähnlichkeiten, in: Anton A. Bucher u.a. (Hg), „Kirchen sind ziemlich christlich“, Jahrbuch für Kindertheologie 4, Stuttgart: Calwer, 27.

Other basic questions to Kant's: What can I know? may be suitable for philosophizing with children as Barbara Brüning, a well known German philosopher, suggests[16]:

- Where do the words come from?
- What does thinking mean?
- Is there an answer to every question?
- What is time?
- What is the beginning of the world?

Maybe a child will answer to the last question: "This is a minor question, because everybody knows, God created life" and suddenly a discussion arises, that could be philosophical or theological[17].

2.2. "What ought I to do?"

Brüning also tells about her good experiences with Kant's second question[18]. Children like to philosophize about:

- What is happiness?
- When am I a good friend?
- What is courage?
- What is justice?

For the workshop I chose the question: What makes a good friend? Ethical issues are important in religious education and the method of "Dilemma-discussion", as developed in Konstanz by Georg Lind[19], is not only fascinating, but also an essential method to train democratic competences. A religious education teacher adapted this method for her group of 8 to10 year old children[20].

[16] Cf.: Brüning, Barbara (2001): Philosophieren in der Grundschule. Berlin: Cornelsen, 45 – 60.
[17] Zoller (2010), 26 – 27.
[18] Cf.: Brüning (2001), 61 – 85.
[19] Cf.: http://www.zellux.net/m.php?sid=208&page=1
[20] Krammer, Sabine (2009): Anders. Das ist doch kein Grund einsam zu bleiben. Oder doch? Abschlussarbeit im Lehrgang: „Theologisieren und Philosophieren mit Kindern" an der KPH Wien/Krems, 26f.

She used the following dilemma-story:

> *As every summer, Christina (10 years old) will spend her holidays with her mother on a wonderful lake. She looks forward to see her friend Robert, whom she has got to know last year. And she promises her mother to take care of Eddi, the neighbour there on the lake. Eddi suffers from Down's syndrome and is often alone, because nobody wants to play with him. On the second day of her holidays she already meets Robert. Right away they go to the lake to lose no time. When they pass Eddi's house, Eddi greets them kindly. Robert seizes Christina by the arm and hisses: "Don't stop and speak with this imbecile". Eddi follows them. Suddenly Robert turns round and shouts: "Hey, Eddi, beat it! You follow us like a dog!" Christina stops startled and turns to Robert: "You must not hurt Eddi like this!" Robert hesitates and then says: "Either I or Eddi! You have to decide on whose side you are!"*
> *What should Christina do?*

At first the students were motivated to paint the dilemma and entitle it:

Title: "Robert or Edi?"

Fig. 4

Title: "Known and unknown"

Fig. 5

They also played the dilemma and expressed their feelings: One group expressed the fear to lose a friend, the other group the difficult decision.
These creative methods supported the understanding of the dilemma. After that the students collected arguments pro Eddi or pro Robert in two different groups. The adults in our workshop did it too.
The students found the following arguments:

Pro Robert	Pro Eddi
- Christina wants to discover something with him - Robert knows the landscape there very well - they are best friends - she feels safer with him, with Eddi she would be the elder one. - she doesn‘t know Eddi so well - she is familiar with Robert - she was longing for Robert already for a long time 6. Robert is longing for her 7. Robert is looking forward to it	- Eddi is sick - Eddi is alone and lonesome - Eddi would be sad - nobody plays with him - he knows some other things - he is very special - she promised her mother to be with him - Eddi needs a friend

Fig. 6

At last children were looking for the best argument of the other team and decided: The best argument „pro Robert“ is: “Christina was longing for Robert already for a long time.“ The best argument „pro Eddi” is: „Eddi knows some other things“.

It was interesting to compare the adult arguments with those of the children. The frequent adult-argument “pro Eddi” was: “Robert cannot be a good friend, if he demands this of Christina.” It was wonderful to find just the same argument - given by Jakob - in the open discussion followed afterwards in the classroom[21].

Now, where can we start to do theology in this philosophical “thinking session”? Maybe a child is suddenly emotional struck by the problem of theodicy: “How can God allow disabilities?” In an open philosophical dialogue with children there can always be unpredictable questions and

[21] Krammer (2009), 33

suddenly to change into theologising would be necessary and helpful for them[22].

Maybe the religious education teacher will ask the students: "Why at all should promises be kept?" and suddenly the commandments will be discussed.

After this dilemma-discussion the RE-teacher may also decide to read, discuss and interpret a bible-story like: The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10, 25-37) or Zachaeus and Jesus (Lk 19, 1-10)

I am sure children will react, ask and theologize in a more sophisticated way after this elaborate philosophical dilemma-discussion.

2. 3. „What may I hope for?"

Basic questions to Kant's famous third philosophical question, suitable for children's philosophy can be:

- Wishes for a good, successful life?
- Dreams about a better world
- What do I belief?
- What is God like in my imagination?[23]

I decided to focus the issue: "What is a good, successful life?"

The participants of the workshop first were looking at the term: "successful life". What is it? What is it for me? What do I think about it? They reflected upon these questions for themselves.

Afterwards we experimented with a helpful method to arrange a term-discussion, the so-called "bridge"[24]. On one end of the bridge – arranged at the bottom with scarves – I put the word "successful life", on the other end

[22] Cf.: Gebler, Julia / Riegel, Urich (2011): „Ich wende mich an Eltern, Freunde, Opas, Omas… und Gott." Eine explorativ-qualitative Studie zu den Theodizee-Konzepten von Kindern der vierten Jahrgangsstufe, in: Freudenberger-Lötz, Petra/Riegel Ulrich „Mir würde das auch gefallen, wenn mir einer helfen würde". Baustelle Gottesbild im Kindes- und Jugendalter. JaBuKi, Sonderband, Stuttgart: Calwer, 140 - 156

[23] Cf.: Brüning (2001), 86-96

[24] Cf. Schwarz, Elisabeth E. (2007): Methoden der Kindertheologie. Oder: Wie hilft ein Philosoph wie Sokrates beim Theologisieren mit Kindern? In: Bucher u.a. (Hg): „Man kann alles erzählen, auch kleine Geheimnisse". Kinder erfahren und gestalten Spiritualität. Jahrbuch für Kindertheologie Bd. 6, Stuttgart: Calwer, 166-177.

“unsuccessful-life”. The participants wrote their ideas to life on sheets of paper and placed them at a suitable distance between the two words on the bridge and gave reasons why they had chosen the specific spots. In a second round other participants discussed each placement from their own perspectives. Whenever we were working with this method, it provoked a deep and existential discussion. The participants were engaged in comparing their ways to use a term and they were very interested to share own experiences to strengthen their arguments.

Fig.7

In a 7th grade students collected the following ideas and put them on the bridge between “successful and unsuccessful life”:

meaningful life, contentedness, family, friendship, happy partnership, love, free time, religion, faith, success, financial security, safety, school, stress-situation, quarrel, being frustrated by friends, aimless, unreasonableness, sorrow, loss, terminal illness, loneliness, misfortune.

Kant’s third philosophical question leads into the metaphysical, transcendent sphere. Students and adults wondered if faith and religion are necessary for a successful life or not. Both discussed the correct spot for these phenomena between successful and unsuccessful life. “How important is God for a successful life?” and “How important is God for my successful life” – these two different questions arised just at the end of the workshop. Could both questions be answered in a philosophical and a theological way and what would be the difference? There was no time anymore to speak about this interesting topic.

In general the discussion about the differences of philosophical and theological enquiry is already documented in different contributions, for example in the yearbooks of children's theology. Philosophical enquiry cannot lead to certainty but to elucidation[25], whereas it is constitutive for theological enquiry to refer to Christian Faith and its narrationes[26].

A detailed empirical analysis of the differences, when philosophers philosophize and theologians theologize with children, showed that theologising naturally works with the assumption of God ("etsi deus daretur") and life after death[27]. It seems more interested in narrative competence and personal answers than in conceptual competence or looking for a consensus. It is provoking more inner conceptions than concept-clarification or argumentation[28].

A big and certainly difficult aim of theologising is, to develop a reflective discourse, where children are active in thinking and opening up in matters of faith and where they notice, that a simple worldview without alternatives will not be adequate to describe reality[29]. Theologising with children in classroom will always be supported by theology for children[30], which offers different answers of Christian Faith and helpful pictures of hope, if children cannot find them in their theological discussions. Theologising with children should always enhance the courage to live[31].

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[25] Zoller (2010), 31.

[26] Zimmermann, Mirjam (2010): Kindertheologie als theologische Kompetenz von Kindern. Grundlagen, Methodik und Ziel kindertheologischer Forschung am Beispiel der Deutung des Todes Jesu. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 86.

[27] Rupp, Hartmut (2011): Auf der Suche nach dem Unterschied. Theologisieren und Philosophieren im Vergleich. In: Müller / Ralla (2011), 24-25.

[28] Werner, Hans-Joachim (2011): Zusammenfassender Vergleich philosophischer und theologischer Perspektiven. In: Müller /Ralla (2011), 171.

[29] Kammeyer / Schwarz (2013), 127

[30] Cf.: Bucher, Anton A. / Schwarz, Elisabeth E. (Hg) (2013): "Darüber denkt man ja nicht von allein nach." Kindertheologie als Theologie für Kinder. Jahrbuch für Kindertheologie Bd.12, Stuttgart: Calwer

[31] Freudenberger-Lötz, Petra (2007): Theologische Gespräche mit Kindern. Untersuchungen zur Professionalisierung Studierender und Anstöße zu forschendem Lernen im Religionsunterricht, Stuttgart: Calwer, 340

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Mirjam Zimmermann

Considering the Questions of Children and Adolescents – A Didactic Principle of Discussing Theology with Children and Adolescent

1. An example: Paula 13th grade, Schlossgymnasium Mainz: "Are students questions in (religion) class welcome?"

A student writes:

> *"In theory, this question can be easily and clearly answered – yes, of course. Questions are important and are always welcome. If you have not understood something, you must immediately ask a question. We have been told that since elementary school. However, in practice the situation is somewhat different.*
> *Right now I look back on 12 years of school and the day-to-day school situation has taught me that questions are often the very opposite of welcome. In grade 8 I had a negative experience with question asking when I received my oral participation grade. The justification offered for my grade of "only" a 2 (a "B") was "You ask too many questions". The teacher said that someone who has earned a 1 (an "A") has understood the material so well that he or she does not need to ask questions. But then again, understanding a subject well leads to new questions, doesn't it?*
> *Another category is questions to other students during class. These are the questions that follow the pseudo question "Do you have any questions?" at the end of a presentation. Once, shortly after changing schools, I made this mistake and actually asked about something that had interested me during a student presentation. I did not ever do that again. After class two very upset classmates took me to task. Did you have to do that, they asked? Did you have to show us up like that? Who do you think you are? My protests that I did not mean it like that fell on deaf ears. So I learned that this invitation to the class to ask questions really is not an invitation at all. It is simply meant to demonstrate to the teacher that the class understood everything. (…) Therefore, no questions allowed!!*
> *I recently came upon another question situation among classmates during a lunch break. My little sister was upset at her teacher, who had made her move to a different table because she had been talking to her neighbor too much. However, they had only been asking each other questions about the topic in class. So, questions to your classmates about material you do not understand are also not allowed! (…)*

> *School and particularly religion class are meant for learning, for grappling with issues and thus also for asking questions. Anyone who believes otherwise is in the wrong place."*

The statement of this student with 12 years of school experience reveals the current classroom situation. In elementary school, questions are still welcome; however, over time, they are systematically discouraged by teachers and classmates. The end result is a frustrated insight into school culture – an insight which criticizes the fact that questions, while actually necessary in the framework of acquired learning, have no place in real school culture. This deficit, however, does seem to be slowly being recognized. Apart from a few exceptions[32], didactic handbooks are not yet dealing with this topic but there has been an interdisciplinary meeting on this issue (Lindner/Zimmermann 2011) and first practical suggestions for encouraging and dealing with student questions in the classroom have been made. Additionally, the subject is beginning to appear in some official guidelines.

2. The importance of student questions in official guidelines …

Some more recent curricula have adopted the "considering the student questions" as a guiding principle. For example, the new *Lehrplan evangelische Religion für die Grundschule in NRW 2008 (Curriculum for the subject of protestant religion in elementary schools in North Rhein-Westphalia) states: "Students ask questions that are significant for their lives".* (Lehrplan 2008: 151) *Religion teachers begin "with the children's questions and then, at their own initiative, undertake theological and religious educational networking".* (ebd:153)

32 In his work, *Handlungsorientierte Didaktik,* Becker does not describe an empirically investigated phenomenon. However, as a cause analysis, he states that teachers often feel annoyed by student questions, especially when there are large numbers of questions, when the questions extend beyond the actual class material or if they are asked by weaker students. (Becker 1998: 173f.)

Questions are also granted importance in the formal curriculum for the lower secondary level schools (Haupt- and Werkrealschulen) in Baden-Württemberg (2004):

> *"Religious competency (…) is the ability to discover the religious dimensions of life and to understand and interpret, with religion, fundamental human experiences. The students are thereby encouraged and supported in their efforts to ask for the meaning and hope in life, to search for what sustains us and to discover religion in their daily lives. (…) In doing this, they also learn to question how their own lives and actions are influenced by their relationship to God and to Jesus Christ (…)"* (Bildungsstandards 2004: 31f.)

The curriculum for protestant religion classes in grades 1 to 10 of the protestant church in Berlin-Brandenburg and the Silesian Oberlausitz directly mentions a "*didactic system of questions*" and states*:*

> *"Protestant religion classes in school enable children and young adults to grapple with the fundamental questions of human existence according to God and the world."* (Rahmenlehrplan 2007: 23)

3. The importance of student questions in observed practice:

In pedagogy, conversations about "questions in the classroom" usually always revolve around "teacher questions", which are particularly important as a pedagogical instrument in question-developing teaching because they determine the topic and tempo and thus direct the teaching-learning processes. There are many pertinent publications and textbooks on this and the topic is important in teacher training.

Studies about the questioning behavior of students, however, are much rarer. When looking at available research, we notice two things. One is that the frequency of student questions in various classroom settings are documented from the perspective of an observer, from the perception of the teacher's sense of self or from that of the students themselves. The other is that the research focus is on the conditions influencing the student questions.

Empirical studies confirm that student questions have very little if any importance in the classroom. If they are observed at all, the average value

for questions per student and lesson hour is approximately 0.1[33] (Niegemann/Stadler 2001: 173) in many studies. Graesser/Person found a similarly low value of 0.17 questions per student and hour (Graesser/Person 1994: 121) while Good et al. report values between 0.64 and 2.0 questions per student during a 50 minute lesson hour (Good et al. 1987). We must take into consideration that a large number of the questions asked referred to the coordination of the lessons or to securing a common basis for discussion and were not relevant for the direct acquisition of knowledge. Niegemann/Stadler were also able to demonstrate that student questions were not at all evenly distributed among students. For example, in one grade 52% of the questions were asked by just two students. (Niegemann/Stadler 2001: 182) In tutorials or group work, clearly more questions were asked (Graesser/Person 1994; Seifried/Sembill 2005: 236) so that the passivity also seems to arise from the social form.

The low number of student questions observed in a traditional classroom situation with the teacher leading the lesson from the front of the class deviates strongly from the self-assessment of the students. Seifried/Sembill (2005) asked 172 students how often they would ask questions in a traditional classroom setting. 42% of the students estimated 2-3 questions per hour. In a group work setting, they estimated that they would ask about 3.5 times more questions. (Seifried/Sembill 2005: 231f) Using a questionnaire, the authors tried to determine the reasons for the differences in questioning behavior. (Seifried/Sembill 2005: 233) In their evaluation of the observations of four learning groups (16 to 18 year-olds in their first training year) in student-centered, project-oriented small group work, Seifried/Sembill established a connection between the quantity of student and teacher questions. A decrease in student questions resulted directly from an increase in teacher activity with teacher questions. In lesson phases

33 Niegemann/Stadler produced an average from various studies and speak of a frequency of student questions per lesson hour of “1.3-4.0 with a median of 3.0. With an average of about 27 students per class, this corresponds to 0.1 questions per student and lesson hour.” In their own study, they count 82 teacher questions and 1.6 student questions per lesson hour, (Niegemann/Stadler 2001: 181). (Seifried/Sembill 2005: 231): “clearly less than one”.

in the described setting during which students were active, however, there were an average of 15.2 questions per student per 45 minute lesson hour. Carlsen (1997) was able to show that teachers with little subject knowledge often discouraged student questions.

Within the framework of the so-called “help seeking approach” (Schworm/Fischer 2006), North American authors in particular have tried to determine the reasons for the lack of student questions during lessons. Some of the reasons identified are found in our student’s introductory statement. Schworm/Fischer list the following reasons:

8. inability to recognize knowledge deficits
9. reluctance to interrupt the flow of conversation
10. difficulty formulating the context of the question
11. low expectations that the questions will be helpful
12. lack of motivation to learn
13. fear of being laughed at
14. attempt to cover up missing knowledge
    lack of expectation that the teacher will give a competent answer

Thus, we can identify environmental conditions, personality traits, motivational attributes of existing knowledge and content as factors which influence the questioning behavior of students. Some if not all of these reasons are identified when surveying students.

4. The importance of student questions in the assessment of university students:

In January 2013, I asked the following questions in my seminar ”Preparation for Practical Training”, which is taken by university students in the 4th or 5th semester of study. At this point, we had not yet dealt with the subject of student questions in the course.

- *In your opinion, what is the importance of student questions in (religion) class?*
- *What was your experience as a student at school?*
- *How has this topic been handled up to now in your training?*
- *What have you experienced so far with student questions in student teaching situations (how often, reaction of the teachers, encouragement of..)?*

- *What questions or intentions do you have regarding this subject?*

Although the experiences described as students at school varied greatly, my expectations that the subject of student questions had not been dealt with at all during the university education of 33 out of 34 of the students, whether it be in theology or in didactics of the other subjects or in education or psychology classes, were universally confirmed.

Some students had felt encouraged by their teachers to ask questions in school. ("Our teacher always said, everyone learns from questions, no matter how stupid the question may seem. Our questions were usually always an important part of the lessons" (5)). Others said, I "only asked questions if the subject was interesting to me." (6) Others reported that teachers perceived questions as "annoyances" (22), that they "did not make it very possible to ask questions" (31) and "reacted with annoyance to questions and often just did not answer them." (7). (Therefore) "you tried to find answers with the help of other classmates and not to ask the teacher." (9) Some admitted asking only "administrative questions" (32). There were also teachers who put off answering the questions ("The teachers always said that they would answer the questions in the next class but then they didn't.") (10). Students also complained that "teachers often made fun of the questions and the students asking them" (10).

The university students established that students at school react to the various attitudes of the teachers "so that some teachers simply did not get asked questions any more after a while." (12). However, the students all agreed that "questions are a basic component of teaching." (18)

Their experiences in their practical training show that in elementary school and the lower middle school grades (27) - that is with the "little children" (32) - questions are dealt with in a positive way. However, "students tend not to ask subject related questions, but rather more organizational questions" (3).

The students gave the following reasons for not <u>asking questions in school</u>:

- "because the teachers were often annoyed by questions" (2)
- "there were often situations (M.Z. while asking questions) in which classmates reacted inappropriately." (3)

- "if you did not understand something and asked a question, the reaction often was that the teacher could not repeat everything and the student would have to look it up themselves." (3)
- "in order not to seem 'stupid'. When 'stupid' questions were asked, classmates laughed and did not take the question seriously." (…) The problem was "not to appear stupid in front of the whole class." (8)

The issues mentioned here are also found in our student's statement in the introduction as well as in academic works on the subject (see above).

The students also gave reasons for the importance of <u>student questions, from their perspectives:</u>

- "Questions can enrich the lessons "(2)/ "enliven" (24)
- "They can clarify the topic, strengthen existing knowledge and point out possible mistakes to the teacher (e.g. he or she did not explain it such that the students can understand it.)" (7)
- "Questions motivate students to delve deeper into the subject." (9)
- "In my opinion, student questions are an important signal which the teacher can use to measure student interest, difficulties in understanding and 'can read between the lines' about other things. They are an offer from the students for a discourse that teachers should welcome and take seriously." (18)
- They offer the teacher the opportunity "to gain insight into the thinking of the students (…) At what point are the students in their thinking on this subject? What was particularly interesting to them?" (20)
- "show that they are interested in my lessons." (23)
- "give reference to the status of knowledge." (24)
- "have a high potential for motivation" (31)
- "They give information about how important or unimportant particular subjects are to students." (34)

Summing up, we can say that questions can be indicators of the interest level and the learning difficulties of students and can also be motivational for classmates.

The students also listed <u>conditions that are necessary in order for questions to be asked:</u>

- "appropriate atmosphere" (3)
- "an atmosphere (…) in which students are comfortable, are not afraid and therefore want to ask questions."
- Students need "a feeling of security" (5) when asking questions.

As mentioned above, this shows that the students are able to identify what has been established in academic journals – the cost of asking questions

must be in relation to the usefulness of the same. An atmosphere free of fear is absolutely necessary for this.

Difficulties dealing with student questions were also listed by the students in view of their future teaching jobs:

- "to develop the ability to filter important questions and make them part of the lesson in a smart and meaningful way." (8)
- It is "difficult to deal with all questions fairly." Because in the case of some questions, "it is difficult to tell if they are meant sarcastically or seriously." (8)
- "that some of the student questions could make me feel insecure."(10)
- "what you should do if you do not know the answer." (11,15,19)
- "before you can respond to the questions, you must determine which questions are meant seriously and which are not." (13)
- "However, there were students who used questions as a strategy to get off of the topic. One question followed another, which led further and further away from the subject." (14)
- "If you allow questions, the lesson can take a completely different direction than planned. In that case, how can one optimally prepare for a class?" (31)

The students' statements reveal that they perceive the fact that student questions are not dealt with during their studies and practical training to be a deficit. From their perspective, it would be important to talk about strategies for differentiating among the pragmatic intentions of student questions (interest, wanting to distract, wanting better understanding etc) and for dealing with difficult and unanswerable questions.

5. The importance of student questions in children's theology

We have clearly demonstrated the importance of student questions from the empirical perspective of students at school and teachers-in-training. In the following, I will attempt to bring together issues from the field of children's theology that could contribute to this subject.

The first questions are whether the uneven relationship between teacher and student questions has already been eradicated in children's theology and what role do student questions play in the analysis of conversations in

children's theology. Using a study, I will ask whether the consideration of student questions can be described as a didactic principle of children's theology and whether such an orientation could be used more intensively for lesson planning and how this could be achieved. Finally, I will demonstrate how questions can be encouraged and ensured in the process of discussing theology. This serves to establish the consideration of the questions of children and young adults as a didactic principle in discussing theology with children and adolescents.

5.1 Developing a consciousness for the importance of student questions in discussing theology

The importance of student questions is emphasized in various places within the framework of children's theology. Petra Freudenberger-Lötz writes *"The central point of theological conversations with children is to perceive, take seriously, address and encourage children's questions. (…)"* (Freudenberger-Lötz 2007: 21)[34]

However, is this claim fulfilled in conversations as we have them within the framework of children's theology? In his work "Schüler fragen. Zur Beschreibung einer sprachlichen Handlung im Religionsunterricht ("Students ask. A description of linguistic activity in religion class") (Weber 2011: 89-110), the linguist Gerd Weber examined in what circumstances students ask questions, what they do with the questions and how teachers react. As a source of data he evaluated conversations in children's theology conversations, concretely the conversations that Petra Freudenberg-Lötz[35] listed in her work on the professionalization of university students. His results are sobering. "In two thirds of the cases, the students carry out

34 There are various times in the lesson during which students should be animated to ask questions and to develop questioning behaviour, e.g. 123. "It is the task of the teacher in the introductory phase to pick up on a ‚challenging impulse' from the students or to present a subject in such a way that it creates a 'challenging impulse' that amazes, baffles or astounds the students and challenges them to create a personal relationship with the subject and to develop a specific questioning behaviour."

35 "The corpus of the transcripts printed in Freudenberger-Lötz (2007) will be used in the following as a sampling of lesson segments in order to examine these questions." (Weber 2011: 94)

object-oriented, linguistic actions: in essence they clarify (62%); they rarely ask theological questions (4%). (…) The work in the parts of the classes that were recorded is made up of the students in essence grappling with the lesson material to which they add their own personal thoughts, when applicable. Questions belong to the linguistic actions of students. However, there are many fewer student questions than teacher questions – 144 teacher questions to only 18 student questions." (Weber 2011: 97-98) To put it clearly, what we see here is almost always the "question-developing conversation." "Because questions appear in almost all statements by teachers (almost 90%), teachers have a much stronger influence on the development of the conversation than students do. In almost half of the conversations, only teachers ask questions and in another third, more questions are asked by teachers than students. In extreme cases (T8, p. 204), teacher questions make up almost half of all spoken contributions in the conversation." (Weber 2011: 101) This dominance of teacher questions of 50 – 120 (Levin 2005: 70) questions per lesson hour is not unusual for classical teaching settings as portrayed above. However, this is not the goal in conversations in children's theology, as shown by the quote from Freudenberger-Lötz.

It is good Socratic practice to challenge the thinking processes of students with questions. However, the teacher questions in the sequences analyzed generally do not respond to the children's statements, they do not address them and call them into question. In this area the "professionalization of the adult conversation partner" in children's theology needs work.

5.2 Collecting questions and using them to structure lesson units

Commeyras and Sumner present the radical opinion that lesson planning and teaching should be unconditionally oriented around the questions that would be asked by students. (Commeyras/Sumner 1998: 129-152) If one wants to implement this didactic principle in the planning of religion lessons, one must first determine which questions students have regarding religion.

Kristin König did this in her Master's thesis. (König 2011: 183-194) In March 2009, she posed the following question to a 4th grade elementary school class and two 6th and 9th grade secondary school (Hauptschule) classes in order to collect possible questions on the subject of "religion and faith". She chose to pose the question in writing so that all students would have a chance to answer:

> *A new book is being put together in which scholars will answer the questions of children and young adults about God, faith and religion. For the book we need suggestions in the form of questions from students. Please write down the most important questions you have on these subjects.*

Using Oberthür's system (Oberthür 1995: 14-16), the student questions were categorized into the following fields. The fields of "Jesus' existence and his actions", "the Bible", "other religions" and "faith" were added:

- Questions about the own identity
- Mysteries of the infinite/unimaginable
- Fears about the future/wars
- Grief, suffering, death
- Life after death
- The existence and reality of God
- The Bible
- Jesus' existence and his actions
- Other religions
- Faith

König was able to show the diversity of the topics that the secondary school students questioned and also that it would be possible to plan a year's worth of lesson topics for each grade according to the student questions. This would demonstrate to the students that their interest and their questions are significant for lesson planning, whether it be for an entire year or for a series of lessons.

5.3 Encouraging and guaranteeing questions in the process of discussing theology

As part of my examination of students' interpretation of Jesus' death (Zimmermann 2012), the students were asked to write down their positions

on the following situation. At the same time, I asked them to note down important questions they had on this subject. The results reveal the close connection between grappling with a subject and asking questions about the subject, as can be seen from the following examples:

> *Exercise 1: "Imagine you are taking a walk with a boy who is visiting you as an exchange student from India. During the walk you pass this wayside cross (see picture) on which Jesus has been crucified. The boy stops and asks you: 'Why is that man hanging there?' What would you answer? Write your detailed explanation below."*

Instead of simply collecting answers, I wanted to begin with a circular search to determine which questions the students have on the subject:

> *Exercise 2: "If you now had the opportunity to ask your teacher questions about Jesus' death, what would you want to know? Please write your questions here!"*

In the questionnaire, it was necessary for the students to be confronted with the subject before being asked for their own questions on the topic because through the confrontation, they were able to develop their own scope of questions. The ability of the students to create questions (exercise 2) from their confrontation with the subject (exercise 1) is retrospectively confirmed by the following examples of (truly) circular development:

> *Questionnaire 42:*
> On exercise 1: [only one sentence, which was crossed out:] "Jesus said: "I am the son of God!"…
> On exercise 2: "Why was it so bad back then to say that one is the Son of God?"
>
> *Questionnaire 52:*
> On exercise 1: "(…) Actually Jesus was a Jew but he. (…) At the end of his life he was nailed to the cross by Jews."
> On exercise 2: "Jesus was a Jew; why was he killed 'by Jews'?"
>
> *Questionnaire 62:*
> On exercise 1: "He was crucified because " [No further entry]
> On exercise 2: "Why was he crucified?"
>
> Questionnaire 42 mentions and then crosses out Jesus' "Son of God Proclamation" in exercise 1. In exercise 2, the proclamation is taken up again and identified as the implicit source for hostility or even death ("Why was it so bad back then…."). The student in questionnaire 52 perceived Jesus' "Jewishness" to be a problem upon the (incorrectly) assumed background of

> his killing by the Jews. The unresolved tension seen in the act of crossing out is then explicitly formulated in the question.

After analyzing all 196 questionnaires, we can see that the large majority of students are able to formulate questions on a subject that is surely foreign to some of them. After reading the questions through again, it becomes apparent that it is appropriate to separate the material into “historical questions” and “theological questions”. Within the framework of a structured content analysis, these categories were then differentiated further. In the historical block the questions about sources and truth take on a stronger methodological-critical aspect while the differentiation of the other two question fields (Jesus’ life – Jesus’ death) is motivated only by content. (Zimmermann 2012: 344-351)

6. Summation in favor of a didactic principle in children’s theology that is oriented towards student questions

To sum up, I would like to formulate theses from the existing results that emphasize the importance of student questions within the framework of the didactics of children’s theology.

Thesis 1: Within the focus of research on children’s theology, children’s and adolescents’ questions must be given more extensive consideration as a specific form of access to children’s/youth theology.

When considering the theology of children/adolescents, their questions should be gathered and their approach to theology should be placed in specific relation to the questions they ask. While this subject received discernable scholarly attention in the 1970s and 80s, today it appears only sporadically in academic publications. Research on children’s theology should take up and intensify the examination of these questions. The topic of “student questions” should also become a component of teacher training.

It should be dealt with at universities and teacher training schools and be thematically integrated into basic publications.

Thesis 2: The asking of questions should be encouraged and supported methodologically in order to change the unacceptable situation in German classrooms. This is true also for the concept of "discussing theology with children/young adults".

It is the task of work being done in children's theology to emphasize the importance of student questions in order to sensitize teachers to this subject. There are now methodological and thematic suggestions on how to proceed in this field. Allowing student questions as input could be one way to connect a "theology for children" with a "theology of children".

Authentic questions (from previous studies, other teaching processes etc) can be presented to children in writing or as recordings. Thus, the focus on the content begins with the children and the grappling with the theological issues is "a common process at eye level" (Schlag/Schweitzer 2011: 108). What is hidden, covered up or overlooked can be exposed and because of the lack of complexity, children or young adults at a lower level of competency will be challenged to embrace and discuss questions that are, nevertheless, not adult questions.

Thesis 3: Thematic questions do not simply exist; they arise out of an engagement with a subject. Teachers trained in children's theology must proceed with care in this respect.

Children produce questions in the process of positioning themselves on theological issues. This means that it is necessary to initiate the gathering of questions in a way that is didactically meaningful. The role of the teacher employing didactic principles which are shaped around student questions is

- to present the subject in such a way as to engender questions
- to make clear the importance of questions
- to encourage or stimulate questioning behavior
- to decode the intention of questions and when necessary to paraphrase questions

- to structure an aggregate of questions
- to moderate the process of finding solutions to the questions in the classroom
- in doing so, to put various questions together and make them more precise, to pass questions on to groups and, of course, when appropriate to provide information about the subject in question.

If these processes are implemented in theological conversations with children and young adults, a consideration of their own questions can be meaningfully established as a didactic principle of discussing theology with children and young adults.

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Gerhard Büttner

Addressing the question of the supernatural in children's theology

Within children's theology a separation into a theology *of, with* and *for* children is undertaken (Schweitzer 2003). The two qualities of children's theology mentioned first are rather new aspects. Within the newly formed movement of children's theology, attention was paid to the children's contributions to theological questions. Furthermore, the representatives of this movement reflected on an appropriate way of talking to children in order to give them the opportunity to present their ideas in the best possible way. It is quite clear that children have to be offered interesting content to enable them to consider theological questions carefully. Nevertheless, one can argue that this insight has existed long before the actual formation of "children's theology".

It is clear that children should be told biblical stories. This point of view can be applied equally to talking about the "great questions". However, one important question seems to have played a comparatively small role so far. Basic works of developmental psychology suggest that children and adults have different ways of understanding. In adolescence the problem arises that the things as they were understood before cannot be accepted anymore. Hence, it is difficult to find new ways of understanding which are appropriate for adults. This phenomenon can especially be observed when it comes to talking about miracle stories; in fact, the problem covers understanding the supernatural in general.

The Bible tells a variety of stories in which things that are impossible according to our scientific worldview happen through a divine intervention. That is why since the Enlightenment the question of how to treat the biblical tradition is asked. There are, roughly speaking, four possible interpretations (cf. Reiß 2015):

(a) The *supernatural* interpretation suggests that it is God's choice to intervene in what happens in the world. This intervention can take place while avoiding the laws of nature.
(b) The *rationalistic* interpretation attempts to find an explanation behind the narrative which is in accordance with the scientific view.
(c) The *symbolic* interpretation asks for the actual message of the narrative hiding behind the miracle story.
(d) Nowadays, there are attempts to discover the meaning of a historical miracle story in the *context of its time*, seeking to avoid an impetuous transfer to the contemporary time.

In theology the question arises how and where the divine can be experienced in the world. At least when considering the resurrection from the dead, some kind of supernatural intervention of God has to be assumed. Interpreting Jesus' miracles from this perspective, the historicity of his healings should not be questioned. However, the multiplication of the loaves and Jesus' walk on water are usually considered as symbolic narratives. In this case it will be rather difficult to identify a historical core. Consequently, it can be useful to leave over a *grey area of interpretation* when approaching miracle stories.

It has to be supposed that talking about the possibility of a divine intervention within the frame of a seminar at university differs from talking about this topic in a hospital's intensive care unit. It is possible to show that it seems to be easier for a Christian, who is not a fundamentalist, to allow for the existence of such a grey area without the urge to make its meaning clearer in employing a rationalistic or symbolic interpretation. I will show this phenomenon using one of the first books which has tried to present some kind of theology for children to the German-speaking world (Biesinger/Kohler-Spiegel 2007). The underlying model is the concept of a „university for children", which is the academic place where over the last few years scientists have presented their discipline's results to children in a child-oriented way. In my analysis I will concentrate on a presentation of wonders from the New Testament. In the essay "Wunder – gibt es

das?“ [“Do miracles exist?”] by Vreni Merz, the author describes experiences with the contingency within our time leading to the question of a possible divine intervention in the world (Merz 2007, 42f):

> “Miracles are special experiences which we ponder on at length without being able to explain them in the end. […] You can certainly ask where […] happiness comes from. From us humans? From God? Or is it created by chance? […] Whenever something inexplicable happens, we realise that we are just small people.”

While in this excerpt the attempt is being made to provoke the discussion of the individual case, Matthias Morgenroth (2007, 29ff) rejects this approach in his essay “Stimmt das, was in der Bibel steht?” [“Does the bible tell us the truth?”]. He answers this thematic question in an apodictic way:

> “The answer is quite clear: No, nobody has to believe in what religion says. […] That is why everything people say about God is restricted and full of mistakes.”

Referring to the statement above, Morgenroth’s way of describing how biblical scholars explain the multiplication of the loaves is consistent (35). According to the rationalist interpretation, people have shared their food and thus made the “feeding of the five thousand” happen. One will certainly have to take this interpretation into consideration besides others. The concept of children’s theology ought never to rely on one single interpretation. However, magical and supernatural interpretations have not even been allowed as possible options in theological conversations with children.

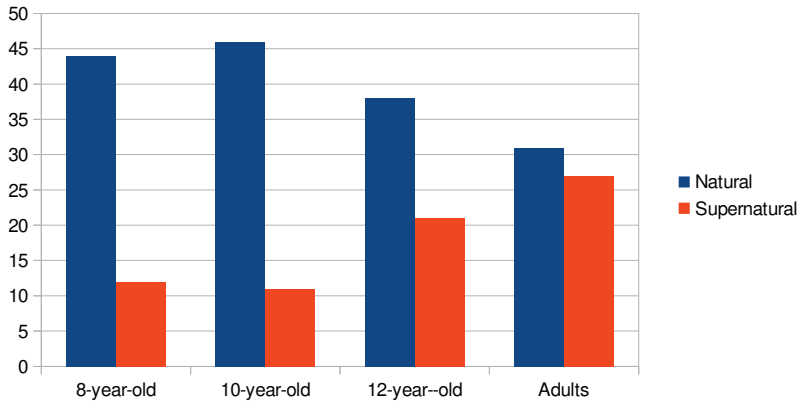
Morgenroth is undoubtedly full of good intentions, but his approach is not a theology compatible for children’s level of understanding. The protagonists of children’s theology usually have their origins in a “liberal” theological environment and feel connected to reading the bible in a historical-critical way. This leads, as I have shown here, to problems if children quite naturally express their literal understandings of biblical texts. Anton Bucher (1989) used to be the first theologian to demand the children’s right of a “first naivety” just a few years ago. It is interesting that in recent psychological discussions of the Anglo-Saxon world, important articles examine the

supernatural thinking of children and adults. These articles come to the conclusion that the rationalist common sense is not as common as it seems to be in the European context.

The developmental psychologist Jacqueline Woolley, who is teaching in Austin,Texas, as well as her colleagues have examined under which conditions children (and adolescents) employ supernatural interpretations. In her first study, short stories were presented to the participants who were asked to explain them. These short stories contained an extraordinary component just as Vreni Merz' suggests in her article. The following excerpt exemplifies the type of stories used by Woolley (Woolley et al 2011. 332):

> "Veronica lives in Austin with her husband and daughter. About two years ago, Veronica became very sick with cancer. Veronica had to quit her job, so she did not have enough money to buy medicine. Veronica became very sad because she thought she would never get better. Then one day, Veronica woke up and did not feel sick anymore. She went to the doctor and the doctor told her that the cancer had gone. Veronica asked the doctor: "How did the cancer go away?" The doctor replied that he did not know."

In this excerpt, natural interpretations (e.g. interpretations from natural sciences) are used as well as three supernatural interpretations: Immanent justice, God and luck. The following figure illustrates the study's results:



The authors explain the results in the following way (Ibid. 318):

> "Figure 1 shows that the majority of the participants tended to use natural

> instead of supernatural explanations to interpret these events. The figure also indicates that this difference is particularly distinct within in the first two age groups. These younger children frequently appeared driven towards finding a natural explanation even for scenarios that adults explained via supernatural reasoning. One ten-year-old child argued for example that the woman had suddenly recovered from the fatal illness "because, um, she slept a lot, and it helped to cure cancer"[...]."

The study shows a comparatively broad understanding of the *supernatural*. It becomes obvious that children try to interpret these episodes in a natural way. Their main concern seems to be the *how* of the sudden cure. In spite of the extraordinary character of the stories, the question of *why* the cure occurred is asked only gradually. All age groups tend to make various – partially contradictory – attempts at an answer (Ibid. 328). Moreover, different variations allow for alternative possibilities of interpretation: These vary from the influence of chance, to the expectation concerning an immanent justice, to the causation through or participation of God. Overall, the study shows that in conversation with children it is not always mandatory to head for a rationalistic interpretation which is in accordance with science.

This seems especially important as Paul Harris et al. (2006) claim that the scientific knowledge of children (and of a majority of adolescents) is by no means grounded in personal observation; it is rather *adopted* knowledge. That is, it is part of a shared belief – exactly as it is the case with religious contents. If children try to interpret the supernatural in a rationalistic way, they do so because it is an adult convention. If they belong to a religious community which considers supernatural interpretations within the field of religion as possible, they are likely to accept them as well. This phenomenon is examined in the following study conducted by Vaden & Woolley (2006). The authors asked children whether certain biblical stories could really have happened exactly as they are told in the Bible. They presented them with both well-known and unknown stories from the Old Testament. There were always four original stories taken from the Bible, whereas the other four stories were altered versions (without reference to God and with changed names) as can be observed in the following example which parallels the Exodus tradition (1132f):

> "Matthew helped the people of Ison, the Isonites, to flee the town in order to get away from the mean king. But the king of Ison was mad. He sent his army to chase them and bring them back to Ison to work for him. […]"The Isonites were resting at the Green Sea when they saw the king's army chasing them. They were scared and did not know what to do. […].The Isonites called to Matthew for help, and Matthew stretched his hands over the sea to divide the water. When Matthew did this, the water moved away so the Isonites could cross the sea without getting wet. All the water moved when Matthew stretched out his hands. […]The king's army chased after them into the parted sea. Matthew stretched out his hands again, so the sea would go back together. The water covered the whole army and swept them into the sea […]The king's army could not chase
> them anymore. The Isonites were safe and they continued to follow Matthew to their new home.'

The four- to six-year-old children exhibited an interesting tendency. As their age increased, the attribution of realism to biblical texts decreased. If a division into children who are religious and children who are not religious is made, it becomes obvious that children who are not religious constitute this general tendency. Religious children distinguish "real" from "false" biblical stories. The confidence in real biblical stories increases with the age. This tendency is underlined as realism, and is attributed more often to the known stories (e.g. Exodus) than to the unknown stories.

The study indicates that the attribution of realism is a split construction. Environments that employ a literal interpretation of the Bible do not subordinate the sector of religion to the same rules as other areas of life. If supernatural events are expected in the field of religion, children learn about these expectations as they grow older. Where religion follows general epistemological rules, it receives the same critical devaluation concerning its potential realism.

Consequences for children's theology

In a study on the Christology of children we have – just like Woolley – presented pupils with a fictious story which is based on a biblical miracle (Büttner 2002, 115f).

> Some children are playing by the shores of the Sea of Galilee as a storm arrives. Their uncles are on a boat on the lake. Several fishermen have drowned a fortnight ago. What can be done? Organise a bigger ship to rescue them? Then Jesus, the miracle worker from Nazareth, appears. What is he

going to do?

In our study we were able to identify the different modes of reaction of children which are part of their development. In the following part of my presentation I will present a typical excerpt from a conversation at first and then explain the line of argumentation. All the excerpts show the pupils' reactions concerning the story mentioned above. A group of children from grades one and two are arguing in the following sequence (Ibid., 127f; partially as a reaction to the teacher's questions).

> Ann-Kristin (1): He could make the storm go away.
> L: Mhm. * Yes, Miriam.
> Miriam (2): He could say that nothing is going to happen. God will make that they don't sink.
> L: Mhm. * And how could he do that, how can you imagine what he could do?
> Miriam (2): He could tell the children that nothing will happen to them.
> L: Mhm. * Yes.
> Elena (1): He could make that Jesus can let the waves go away.
> L: Mhm. * Florian.
> Florian (2): He could get a big boat and go to them with the children and then take a rope and tie it to the boat and then go back and calm the waves.
> L: Mhm. * Nicolai.
> Nicolai (1): He could push the water to one side.
> L: Mhm. * You mean push all of the water [Nicolai (1): Yes, to the side.] to the side and then?
> Nicolai (1): And then Jesus can walk over to the people and help them.
> (The language was improved.)

The children's line of argument indicates that they perceive the supernatural acting of God or of Jesus as completely normal. Furthermore, God's and Jesus' ways of acting are linked with a "realistic" attitude towards actions as can be observed in the plan to organise another boat. Such thinking is a classic case of artificial thinking in the sense of Piaget. Recent studies also see a confirmation of the so-called "agent-theory" in this conversation (Barrett 2012, 15ff). It is generally regarded as rather complicated to explain certain events if the acting subject is missing. Who is supposed to be the causal agent of the salvation of the men on the lake? Simultaneously, narrative arguments are emphasised. Currie and Jureidini (2004) refer to the human tendency to attribute supernatural powers to agents as "over-coherent thinking". This happens in order to establish causal relationships

with phenomena that otherwise cannot be understood (Koschorke 2012, 80).

With respect to these suggestions, it is not surprising that the children in this sequence argue exactly as they do. Later, they try to think of different solutions such as the idea that Jesus could relieve the participants of their fear.

Interestingly enough, the children employ – and this is indeed in accordance with the results of Woolley's study – biblical stories. If Jesus was able to help in a miraculous way in these narratives, he can be trusted to help again in the particular situation by the shores of the Sea of Galilee (Büttner 2002, 129)

> René (2): Because he helped the other fishermen and the other children.
> L: Which fishermen did he help? What else do you know about this?
> René (2): When those people went out on the lake to catch some fish and then they could not get any fish and Jesus performed a miracle, so they could catch some fish.
> L: Yeah, suddenly the fishing net was full of fish. Mhm.* Yes, um, Jennifer.
> Jennifer (2): And I think that he can do this all alone [L: Mhm.] because he once healed a girl all by himself when he held her in his arms.

A supernatural argument - particularly concerning biblical narratives or stories which come close to the biblical originals – is not problematic for these younger children. They easily link these stories with "realistic" ideas. One girl suggested that Jesus could walk over to the people in the boat on the water. But if it was quite urgent, he would simply have to get there by magic.

In the following sequence from a grade five the unbiased use of supernatural explanations can hardly be found. As a matter of fact, the emphasis is placed on the motives behind the participants' subjective experiences (Ibid., 186f):

> Sören: Jesus maybe prays to God, so he maybe gives a bit more strength to the men maybe, so they succeed in rowing against the waves.
> L: Ok, you mean they get strength in spite of the storm in order to get back out safely.
> [Sören talking over the teacher: Yes.] Mhm. Could you comment on that,

> Christian.
> Christian: And courage.
> L: Mhm. [Christian: That's what they need.] How do you mean this?
> Christian: Just, that somebody wants to rescue them at all. Because most people just think it's of no use.
> L: And then they give up?
> Christian: Yes. [L: I see.] In order to get the courage and new strength and.
> L: Mhm. Mhm. * What do you think, Vanessa?
> Vanessa: I think so, too. A big wave comes and pushes the whole boat forward.
> L: To the shore [Vanessa: Yes.] Mhm.* Natalie, you didn't say anything so far. Why don't you say something?
> Natalie: Yes, I did. [L: Did you say something?] Yes, that the others go out on the lake and just try something with a rope [L: Sure, you said something about a rope. Um, yes.]
> L: Does somebody else have an idea?
> S: Maybe Jesus just says that they can swim now, just in case the ship overturns.

This excerpt underlines the difficulties in deciding on the quality of the individual utterances. The pupils still expect the intervention of a divine power (Jesus). Nevertheless, the supernatural does not manifest itself in magic anymore, which breaks natural laws. At first glance, one could have the impression of having come across two variations of the rationalist interpretation of miracles. But is this first impression justified? The attempt to rescue the fishermen using a rope in order to take the ship in tow certainly matches this interpretation. The helping wave pushing the boat to the shore is in accordance with natural laws, although it is quite hard to imagine such a phenomenon. The encouragement of the fishermen on the boat, allowing them to help themselves is the most likely case of all. However, the last statement of the sequence indicates that the pupil relies to a large extent on magic in his subjective judgement as he expects Jesus to endow the fishermen with special swimming abilities.

Consequently, the children exhibit a tendency to search for solutions within the frame of natural laws. Whenever they are faced with difficulties, they are satisfied with "somehow" as an answer. An interpretation being more and more based on psychological (and sometimes even physical) strength becomes increasingly important. Kohlberg and Gilligan regard this new point of view to be in connection with the beginning of the phase of formal

operations in the sense of Piaget. At the same time, this leads children to a subjective understanding of their experiences (1971, 1064):

> „The development of formal operations leads […] to a new view on the external and the physical. The external and the physical are only one set of many possibilities of subjective experiences. The external is no longer the real; 'the objective' and the internal are no longer 'the unreal'. The internal may be real and the external unreal. At its extreme adolescent thought entertains solipsism or at least the Cartesian cogito, the notion that the only real thing is the self. I asked a fifteen-year-old girl: 'What is the most real thing to you?' Her prompt reply was 'myself'."

By examining these two points of orientation which are related to age, one can observe that the sharp division of natural from supernatural and of real from fictional within children's thinking should be considered inaccurate. Various nuances and transitions can be discovered; when employing the concept of theologising with children and can be a great advantage. First of all, this concept implies to listen carefully and to perceive the nuances within different statements. The results of a conversation have to be regarded as preliminary because new aspects will probably lead to the revision of certain opinions. Furthermore, conversations within groups always encourage new constructions. The pupils' positions gained in conversation do not really have to be coherent and consistent. The task of the adult interlocutors is to enquire into the pupil's views and to mirror their statements; hence they ought to encourage clarification. In general, the teacher has to allow for several options as the "result" of a conversation. Approved theological positions have simply to be regarded as constructions. In theological conversations with children they cannot demand to be established as the only valid "truth". In order to moderate these discussions adequately, adults need the capacity to distinguish between different positions. This capacity presupposes a personal attitude towards the supranatural which has undergone thorough reflexion. Thereby, adults can avoid manipulating the children.

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Hanna Roose

"Has God spoken to you?" Scenes from a lesson in Religious Education within the framework of Child Theology Workshop held at the International Conference on Children's voices, Trondheim (Norway), 8-10 April 2013

1. The workshop

The workshop – which was held twice – was focused on the groups' interpretations of a short scene taken from a lesson in Religious Education (RE). The lesson had been videotaped in a primary school at Lüneburg (Germany) in November 2012. The children are approximately 8-9 years old, the RE teacher is a very experienced member of staff, RE is her only subject in this class. The topic of the videotaped lesson is Moses and it starts with the song 'When Israel was in Egypt's land'. After singing the song with the children, the teacher tells them the story about Moses up to the point when Moses comes to the blazing bush and hears God's voice (Exodus 3). This period takes about 25 minutes. The scene presented in the workshop brings this part of the lesson to a close.

The workshop started with a short introduction to the lesson and the presentation of the first part of the scene (names have been altered):

> *Scene 1a:*
> *Teacher*: Moses was alarmed and wanted to run away, but God showed him that he could change the staff back into a snake. And then God said, "Your brother Aaron is on his way. You will meet him. Take him with you, because he can speak well. And then, go to Pharaoh, so that this suffering may finally come to an end." And that is what the song was about. So, Moses did not make this up, but – who gave Moses this order? Who can repeat that? Who gave Moses this order? Tom.
> *Tom*: God.
> *Teacher*: And if God gives you an order,… can you refuse?
> *Class*: No. No.

> *Teacher*: So it was something special. … Now, I have got a second worksheet for you [she picks up a stack of papers from her desk], there you have… Maria.
> *Marie*: I have got a question.
> *Teacher*: Ok. [She puts the worksheets back down.]
> *Marie*: Em, but today this does not happen anymore – God speaking to someone.

The groups were asked to discuss the scene and suggest possible reactions by the teacher. In both workshops the groups focused on the normative question of 'good' teaching practice, but they also included analytical questions asking why Maria and the teacher behaved the way they did. The participants in the workshop criticized:

- the way the teacher presented the story ('too uninvolved').
- that the teacher did not let the children find out for themselves that they had reached the point in the story where the song 'When Israel was in Egypt's land' came in.
- that the teacher did not clarify in which way God's speaking to Moses was 'something special'.
- that her rhetorical question ("And if God gives you an order, … can you refuse?") prevented the children from developing their own ideas.
- The groups also discussed what might have triggered Maria's objection. Two ideas were put forward:
- The teacher stressed that 'Moses did not make this up'. This remark may have prompted Maria's reaction: Moses did not make this up, but nowadays people who claim that God has spoken to them might make this up so.
- The teacher stressed that Moses had to obey God's order. But nowadays – according to Marie – people do not act on God's command.

As to possible reactions to Marie's remark, both groups recommended that the teacher should ask the children what they thought about Marie's objection. She should start an open discussion, inviting the children to develop ideas and share them with the class. However, the groups did not really expect this kind of reaction from the teacher. From what they had seen in the short scene, they did not think that the teacher would give that much liberty to the children. She gave the impression of being very much 'in control' of what was happening in the classroom.

After having discussed the first scene, the groups watched how the scene continued.

Scene 1b:
Teacher: No. To most people, he does not speak. But perhaps there are a few people to whom God has spoken. Also, in Moses' time, when this happened, God only spoke to very few people. Moses is one of those [people] to whom God spoke. However, even in those days most people did not make this experience.
Marie: Has he spoken to you?
Teacher: No, he hasn't.
Pupil [at the same time]: Yes, he has.
[The class is restless.]
Teacher: But apparently there are people – I can only say what I have heard, I have not spoken to anyone like that – to whom God has spoken. But as I said, this only happens very rarely. [She picks up the stack of papers again.] So Moses experiences a very special encounter. He comes across [points at the picture on the worksheet], this is Moses as a shepherd, he comes across a blazing bush which is not consumed [by the fire] and God speaks out of the bush to him. Now you colour in this picture – Jeremy [Jeremy is restless] – and I want you to reflect on which colours you want to use. … It was a bush with thistles.
Pupil [aside]: Why thistles?
Teacher: Which colours could you use in order to colour in a blazing bush? Jannis, which ones would you choose?
Jannis: I'd choose red, yellow, orange.
Teacher: You would choose red, yellow and orange. Aaron.
Aaron: I'd choose red, yellow, orange and perhaps a few other colours.
Teacher: Ok. Marie.
Marie: Well, I'd also choose red, yellow and orange and the bush would radiate with yellow light.
Teacher: Ok, well done. Before you start, think about … Greta, you have also got an idea?
Greta: Em, red and green?
Teacher: Hm, I think everybody can come up with their own ideas.

The groups in the workshops criticized the teacher's reaction for reasons both of method and of content. She should have invited the children to express their ideas. She should have clarified that she was telling a story (as opposed to giving a historical report), which must not be taken literally (Roose: 2013a and b). She should have explained that there could be different ways in which God speaks to us.

However, someone pointed out that the teacher acted under stress, without much time to prepare a theologically correct answer. Despite her lack of personal involvement in the story, the teacher's way of telling the story did in fact trigger Marie's critical remark, so – in a paradoxical way – it did make the pupil think.

Both groups were intrigued by the spontaneous reaction of one the pupils to Marie's question whether God had spoken 'to you' ("Yes, he has").

Two different interpretations were offered:

- The pupil claims that God has spoken to her. She relates the question to herself.
- The pupil assumes that God has spoken to the RE teacher – she answers for the teacher, perhaps because she thinks that the answer is so obvious: Of course God has spoken to the teacher; why else would she be a RE teacher?

In any case, the teacher's spontaneous reaction highlighted the necessity to enlarge on Marie's question in the eyes of the group.

2. The discussion in the context of the concept of Child Theology

The concept of Child Theology is a normative concept. It strives to give children a voice in theological debates and to support them both in expressing their theological questions and in developing their own answers in a dialogue with different opinions – either from other children or from expert theology. According to the distinction between children's theology, theologising with children and theology for children, the teacher's role varies (Freudenberger-Lötz 2007: 16). (S)He encourages the children to ask their questions and develop their answers (children's theology), (s)he chairs discussions among the children (theologising with children) and (s)he presents ideas and concepts from expert theology in order to support or challenge the children's views (theology for children).

Therefore, by claiming that the teacher should have asked the other children to express their ideas, the groups addressed a central requirement of Child Theology. They focused on Child Theology as children's theology and theology with children. In the light of Child Theology as theology for children, we could ask: Does the teacher give a qualified answer? Is her answer biblically and theologically correct and pedagogically adequate? Does she present a helpful theology for children? Is it 'allowed' to tell a child that God speaks only very rarely to people and that He has never spoken to the

teacher in a Religious Education class? These questions were discussed controversially in the workshop.

If we look at the biblical texts, we find that the story about Moses in Exodus 3 is modelled after the calling of prophets (Schart 2010). Prophets, as biblical texts tell us, are elected by God and they experience auditions in which God speaks to them and orders them to do specific things (e.g. Jeremiah 1; Ezekiel 3). Their lives are completely and irrevocably changed. However, the Old Testament also speaks of an end of prophecy. Prophets cease to appear among the people (1 Maccabees 9.27), the psalmist laments, "There is no longer any prophet, and there is no one among us who knows for how long." (Psalm 74.9) In this respect, Marie's distinction between nowadays and biblical times can be supported by biblical texts. The teacher opposes this view with a different concept: She stresses that God only speaks very rarely to people. If we turn to the Bible, we find indeed that (spectacular) auditions are rare. They are mainly reserved for exceptional people: 'elected' prophets or, in New Testament times, the apostle Paul (Acts 9) and John the Seer (Apocalypse 1). So *both* Marie's *and* the teacher's opinion can be supported by biblical texts. Both – and this is important – implicitly refer to a specific way of God speaking to the human person: auditions.

It is this implication which also shapes the teacher's answer to Marie's second question: God has not spoken to her, but she has heard of people to whom God has spoken. If we assume – as I think we must – that she is talking about auditions, her answer is not really surprising. Again, the answer is not 'wrong', yet it is problematic because it does not make explicit its limiting implication, in other words: It does not address the question *how* God can speak to the human person. Because according to the Bible, God does not only speak to the human person in spectacular auditions, He also speaks to the human person in prayer (Matthew 7.7-11). Prayer is presented as a way of communication between God and the human person that is open to all people at all times (Matthew 28.20; Roose 2006).

So the Jewish-Christian tradition offers a range of possible answers to Marie's question. This observation is both encouraging and discouraging: It is encouraging because it opens space for discussion within the Jewish-Christian tradition. The teacher does not have to commit (and restrict) herself to the one right theological answer. It is discouraging because it shows that the concept of 'Theologising with Children' demands a rather high degree of (biblical) literacy on the part of the teacher.

So, how can teachers be encouraged to embark on the adventure of Child Theology? The *Handbuch für Kindertheologie* (Büttner et al. 2014) tries to help teachers to prepare lessons according to the ideas of Child Theology. First of all, the teacher needs to anticipate central theological questions that are related to the topic (in this case: the story about Moses) and gather relevant information (Altrock 2012: 105-137). In fact, Marie addresses two questions:

- Does God speak to the human person today?
- How does God speak to the human person today?

On the level of method, it can be helpful to lay down the structure of possible answers to a theological question (cf. Fig. 1, Fig. 2). This might help to structure the discussion among the children and to decide which aspects of a theology for children the teacher wants to present. Many theological aspects come to mind when we consider the question whether God speaks to us today. However, it is not necessary to cover the whole range of pertinent theological traditions and ideas. The important thing is to offer (at least two) different answers (from the Jewish-Christian tradition). In this way, the children are challenged to think for themselves, they learn that the Jewish-Christian tradition offers a range of answers and views. Thus, the children are given a *structured* space, in which they can flesh out their views.

3. Routines that might interfere with Child Theology

So far, we have tried to explain the teacher's reaction by certain deficiencies, namely her lack of preparation and theological knowledge and her unwillingness to open spaces for the children. However, this is a very limited perspective. I want to contrast it with a perspective that is inspired by conversation analysis (Sacks et al. 1974).

Conversation analysis focusses on the resources that people (subconsciously) use and rely on in specific situations in order to make sense of the contributions of others. In other words: Rather than looking for deficiencies, we now look for resources, for (subconscious) routines or social practices (Schatzki 2002) that structure a certain social field (in this case: the RE lesson) and that help the participants to make sense of the situation. However, these routines might at some point interfere with our normative expectations inspired by Child Theology. Looking for such routines can help us to understand what our normative appeal to Child Theology might imply for experienced teachers better. Where do we (implicitly) ask them to change their routine? Unfortunately, we did not have time to discuss probable motives for the teacher's reaction during the workshop. Therefore, I will discuss some possibilities here.

Perhaps the teacher feels interrupted by the question and, therefore, wants to keep the answer short. Indeed, she has already announced to the children that they are going to work on another worksheet and has started to explain what she wants the children to do. It is only then that she notices Marie putting her hand up. The teacher interrupts herself and calls Marie's name, inviting her to speak. This shows that the teacher is willing to give her attention to the children (at least to Marie). Marie announces that she has got a question. The teacher could react to this by saying that it is now too late for asking questions, that she wants to explain the worksheet or that Marie can ask her during break etc., but she allows Marie to ask. So, although the teacher does not actively encourage questions from the children at this point in the lesson, she is willing to be interrupted so that a

question can be asked. She even puts the worksheets back on her desk, thus, showing that she is prepared to give all her attention to Marie. 'Asking questions' is obviously an approved (implicit) norm in the classroom.

Marie's 'question' does not come out as a question, but as a (critical) remark: God does not speak to us today. Perhaps Marie wants to relate the story to her own life: She has never experienced anything like Moses with the blazing bush. Therefore, God does not speak to her. Perhaps she wants to question the reliability of the story as a whole. If God does not speak to us today, how reliable is it that he did so in Moses' time? – In this context, it is interesting to point out that earlier on in the lesson, Marie objected that Moses could not really kill the Egyptian, since he did not have a weapon (Exodus 2.12).

Scene 2:
Teacher: One day, Moses witnesses how an Egyptian kills a slave from Israel. He whips him until the slave dies. […] Moses gets so angry that he… Lukas, what do you think, what did Moses do?
Lukas: [looks confused, does not know what the teacher has said].
Teacher: Lukas, will you pay attention? … Marie.
Marie: I think he went to the Pharaoh and told him that this should stop and then the Pharaoh got angry.
Teacher: He did something really stupid. He was so angry and he looked around and he saw that he was on his own with the Egyptian. And then he did something which you should not do – he killed the Egyptian. And then he got frightened and he buried the Egyptian in the sand and ran away.
Class: Really?
Teacher: Really. He killed the Egyptian who had killed the slave from Israel and he buried him and he ran away. […] He had to flee from Egypt and went to Midian. Midian, that's close to Egypt and that's where Moses went. He got to know a shepherd who was very nice to him. The shepherd gives him shelter [Marie puts her hand up] and Moses lives in Midian now. No, he wasn't a shepherd, he was a priest. Moses looks after the priest's horses. He is not a royal son any more, he does not live with the king's daughter any more, but he lives with a priest in a foreign land. Marie, can you remember?
Marie: No, but I have got a question.
Teacher: Ok.
Marie: How could he kill him? He did not have a knife?
Teacher: Well, I wasn't there, I don't know.
Aaron: I do.
Teacher [to Marie]: Ask here.
Aaron: He assaulted him, perhaps he assaulted him.
Teacher: Possible.
Martin: I have got an idea.
Teacher: Tell the class.
Martin: He snatched the whip from the Egyptian and started whipping him in turn.
Jonas: I had the same idea.

Teacher: Ok, Kirsten, do you have an idea?
Kirsten: I wanted [incomprehensible] he strangled him.
Teacher: Morten.
Morten: He beat him.
Teacher: He did not only beat him, he killed him.
Morten: Yes, he beat him and killed him.
Teacher: Jannis.
Jannis: He took the whip and strangled him with it so that he could not breathe any more.
Teacher: That's also possible. Ok, Marie, you see, the children have got enough ideas as to how it could have happened.

The teacher invites the children to present their own ideas. The discussion is very lively. She concludes the discussion with the words, "So you see, Marie, the children have got enough ideas as to how it could have happened." So obviously, asking the children to present their own ideas *can* be an approved (implicit) norm in the classroom, but apparently not in the situation with the blazing bush (scene 1). Why not?

At this point in the lesson, the children have been listening for almost half an hour to the story. They are getting restless. This might be the reason why the teacher answers herself when Marie objects that God does not speak to the human person any more. Perhaps she relies on her routine of pedagogical 'timing'.

However, it is remarkable that immediately *afterwards*, she once again invites the children to think about the colours they want to use for colouring in the blazing bush (scene 1b). She encourages them to think for themselves and listens to several suggestions. So here again, she asks the children to express their ideas. However, she does not come back to the pictures in that lesson, nor in the two lessons that follow. There is no discussion about the possible meanings of different colours in the picture.

Looking at these scenes, my impression is that the teacher wants the children to take an active part in the lesson. She wants to create space for them, for their ideas and their creativity. However, these spaces are created in relation to questions which do not seem really relevant to the overall topic. The teacher does not discuss why it could be relevant *how* Moses killed the Egyptian. She does not come back to the children's pictures. So perhaps she answers Marie's question herself in scene 1 because she

thinks that Marie's question is too difficult and too important for the children to answer. She, as a teacher, assumes all the responsibility and tries to give a valid answer which is consistent with what she has told the children: It is only very rarely that God speaks to someone.

If this interpretation is adequate, it highlights – by contrast – one of the main concerns of the concept of Child Theology: According to this concept, children are not only capable of asking 'big' (important, philosophical and theological) questions (Oberthür 1995). They are also capable of finding valid theological or philosophical answers. Whereas the teacher in our examples tends to invite the children to think for themselves when 'it doesn't really matter anyway', Child Theology wants to hear the children's voices when 'big' questions are at stake, when it gets 'risky' (cf. the article by Elisabeth Tveito Johnsen in this volume). Whereas the teacher assumes her role by answering 'big' questions herself, Child Theology allots (at least three) different roles to the teacher (see above) while encouraging the children to find their own answers to 'undecidable' (Foerster 2002) questions, to questions which in the end the children have to answer for themselves – like the one if and how God speaks *to me* today.

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Katharina Kammeyer

Teachers' perspectives on theologising and diversity in classroom teaching

1. Introduction

1.1 Aspects of diversity

The following contribution deals with theologising with children and adolescents in classroom discussions and beyond, focusing on the perception of differences among the participating pupils. More exactly: Diversity in our classrooms refers to aspects of the cultural and religious backgrounds and material resources of the pupils' families as well as to the pupils' gender and their individual interests, abilities and disabilities. All of these aspects set the frame for the children's and the teenagers' life and learning situations (Bräu/Schwerdt 2005).

In the following, the term *diversity* is used in terms of a growing tendency towards individualism within pluralist societies in which traditions and former milieu descriptions are constantly changing. Migration is one clear perceivable form of this change. Very often, children and adolescents cannot be classified as belonging to only one religion or culture. There rather exist multiple cultural and religious affiliations of individuals and groups (Lösch 2005: 26). Concerning talents and needs this is similar: Pupils show talents and needs neither in general, nor in a black and white manner, but in different ways depending on the topic. They gain knowledge relying on sources of their learning environment as a domain specific developmental psychologist approach has shown (Wellman/Inagaki 1997; Büttner/Dieterich 2013). As the analytical concept of transdifference shows, binary distinctions are put in the background. Transitions become obvious without differences necessarily being ignored (Lösch 2005: 27). For life at school this point raises questions: We are used to perceive students with *or* without special needs, with *or* without a migration background, from poor *or*

rich families, as girls *or* as boys – but can we also perceive them in between these concepts and, moreover, within all of them?

Theologising considers children and young people as being able to speak for themselves about their relationships and their social affiliation in general, and especially their relationship to God. This point of view is close to the one which is used in the concept of transdifference: Pupils *themselves* have capacities to shape their concepts of needs and talents, culture and religion, gender and material resources, and can do so within transitions. Although, when doing so, they are restrained by conditions, attributions and role expectations from the outside environment at the same time. In the end, their talents are simply recorded in form of grades, but this is not the only way to present them. In the sense of a *diversity approach* that pays attention to transdifferent transitions, it is significant to remind oneself that grades should not be the only way of how the different abilities are made visible in school.

1.2 Diversity and theologising – Enrichment through diversity?

Inclusion is a vision which tries to overcome binary attributions and aims to include personal diversity. This cannot only be applied with regard to differentiations within *one group* consisting many of individuals, but also with regard to such differences which only concern *one individual*, i.e. changes that occur within a personal life story or, moreover, in view of the varying social roles an individual person is acting in. As a paradigm, inclusion challenges to consider the given diversity of overlapping backgrounds, interests, needs and abilities to enable everybody to participate on an equal basis in society as well as to compensate possible disadvantages (Hinz 2002). Germany, for instance, was requested by UNESCO to examine whether the three-tier school system, allocating 10 year old pupils according to performance, indeed compensates disadvantages of pupils regarding their learning presuppositions, or whether it rather creates these disadvantages.

The UN convention of the rights of persons with disabilities clearly formulates in Article 24: “States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to: a) The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity (…). In realizing this right, States Parties shall ensure that: a) Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability; (…) d) Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education; e) Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.” (UN 2006, §24)

Regarding Religious Education we may ask: How do we recognise diversity in a group? How do we perceive diversity within a lifetime? How can we show respect for children and young people who have the right to develop themselves? Can children be as they are? Can they learn in ways which fit them to learn successfully? Can they learn to theologise in individual ways as well as to theologise in cooperation? Which support is helpful to them? And can we as teachers, adapt ourselves to a further increase of diversity of childhood and theologies in our classrooms and, moreover, perceive them in an adequate way?

In Germany, inclusion is often understood as enabling ‘disabled children’ to go to regular schools. This is one important aspect of a development towards inclusion as ways are opened for those who have been excluded so far and it will contribute to an increase in diversity. However, inclusion is more than that: Even today, there are no homogeneous classes. Therefore, considering the above mentioned aspects of diversity, we can conclude that all classes consist of different children and teenagers. Therefore, the perception of diversity and the acknowledging handling of diversity are topics of learning that have to be dealt with in a broader sense and that

concern the change of school structures, the school culture as well as the lesson planning. Likewise, varying and different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, interests, levels of learning as well as needs mix in church groups, too. The UNESCO document *Guidelines for Inclusion. Ensuring access to education for all* views inclusion as "a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning" (UNESCO 2005: 12). Heterogeneity is, therefore, not only taken into account, but favoured as enrichment (Prengel 2005: 21). Is this also true for theologising?

1.3 Questions

Linking the diversity concept with the theologising approach we can ask:

a) In which sense is diversity enriching theologising?
b) In which regard is theologising helpful for religious learning, especially in heterogeneous groups? / Which adaptations are necessary to enable all children with respect to their individual differences to participate in class and to offer them access to religious learning?

2. Teachers' perspectives on diversity

To answer these questions, the data of ten interviews with teachers who teach Religious Education at secondary schools and use theologising in their classrooms have been analysed (Kammeyer 2012).[36] These teachers work at different types of secondary schools, which are visited by pupils who are 10 to 18 years old, in Germany and in Austria. The schools prepare children for a high school degree at the middle (*Realschule*) and the highest

[36] I would like to thank Gesa Menzel, Christin Baumann and Maria Kipper, who joined the research group in 2010.

level (*Gymnasium*) of the national public school system. At a *Gesamtschule* all children and young people learn together at all levels. Two of the interviewed teachers work at such a school, which is also visited by students with cognitive disabilities. Another teacher, who participated in the study, works at a *Berufskolleg* which offers classes to students who are apprentices in vocational education. Each of the ten interviewed teachers spent one hour of their time to participate in the study and to share their experiences with us on the basis of two questions:

- How do you recognise diversity in your class?
- How do you deal with diversity in theologising?

The interview analysis shows seven structures of answers to the first questions and four structures to the second one.

2.1 Recognising diversity

The answers to the first question give an idea of the teachers' perception of diversity. They mention:

1. Different critical attitudes of asking and discussing within the overall spectrum between the two extremes of a critical faith attitude and an uncritical faith attitude, struggling for unambiguity
2. Differences in sustainable 'orientational' knowledge and wealth of experience, also due to extracurricular socialisation
3. Different competencies, e.g. language skills and usage of expressions resp. special needs
4. Interest vs. obligation in participating in Religious Education
5. Differences between girls and boys
6. Different cultural backgrounds
7. Different religions and confessions

The following examples address all of these levels.

2.2 Dealing with diversity

The second question relates to dealing with diversity: What are the teachers' contents and methods in theologising? What do they focus on while leading the theological classroom conversation? Which limits and opportunities do they perceive in the attitude and method of theologising? Examining the answers of the teachers mentioned above, four kinds of solutions become

visible:

a) In some situations teachers organise a group following criteria like homogeneity or heterogeneity;
b) in many other situations, teachers want students to organise themselves when they do individual or cooperative work;
c) meta-discussions about diversity in theology and within a learning group are crucial for teachers;
d) teachers are sensitive to create a safe space in theologising to help the group build a confidential team.

2.2.1 External group differentiation by the teachers

Some teachers mention that they choose homogeneous groups, e.g. exclusive boy or girl groups, when pupils are to *develop a view of their own*. They do so in order to formulate individual questions or to find interpretations on what makes sense for them, for instance on how they would define friendship or happiness. Heterogeneous groups, e.g. of adolescents with a critical as well as adolescents with an uncritical faith position, are deliberately employed for *listening to others' opinions*. One teacher at a *Gymnasium* states in this context*:*

> "Pupils with no access [probably: to the topic of biblical miracles] at all often sit together in class, and so do the charismatic ones. Then I let them count themselves off and form new groups. They exchange information and learn from each other. [The new mixed groups of critical and uncritical pupils learned to understand the classical proofs of God and had to compose a rap on this including their own comments.] I still remember it well: At this point, the uncritical pupil reacted very aggressively. 'That something is a miracle, and one cannot understand it!' They worked brilliantly on this issue in a rap. The boys rapped about the proofs of God and the two girls used the inserted text, 'Humans cannot understand. You have to look to God.' So they distanced from it [the proofs]. [Citing the female pupils:] Well, of course there are no proofs indeed. You can try it, and we explain now what Thomas Aquinas meant, but [quoting the girls] we deliberately distance ourselves at this point and state, 'God cannot be explained, nor be proven, you just have to believe enough, then you gain access.'"

It becomes clear that the rap method allows to set and express an emphasis of its own and, moreover, is a first encounter with other points of view. Later we will come back to this group.

2.2.2 Internal group differentiation by the students

In our interview study, another *Gymnasium* teacher stresses that she leaves room for *choosing the contents* of further engagement in a certain subject. Her pupils' choices concerning, e.g. 'good and evil' the topics included 'purgatory in the medieval church', 'good angels - evil angels: from Lucifer to Satan', 'the transition in the image of humanity between good and evil', and 'good and evil visualised in a photo series'.

A *Realschule* teacher reports that free *choosing of the methods* according to personal interests has had a positive impact on both contribution and contents of further engagement in a subject. Closely connected to acknowledging the pupils' work in terms of content is acknowledging their methods:

> "Once we had the opportunity to present the Lord's Prayer in signs, pantomimic, or to draw a comic about it, or sing it – unfortunately, nobody was willing to do that – or perform it as a rap, or to act a promotional scene for it. Most of them chose the advertisement. However, there were also some who said, 'No, we would not like to physically act in front of the class'. They opted for the comic. So, there are different ways to present oneself, or how learning is preferred: Rather drawing at the desk, or better express oneself, walking around and being loud, if possible. Now, when it is possible, you can try to respond to it."

Additionally, a teacher working at a *Gesamtschule* with students with very different cognitive skills and needs emphasises that contributions on various levels complement each other. In this context, she is reminded of dealing with the topic of 'Thanksgiving' in year 6:

> "The presentation phase consists of action-oriented and discursive elements. Not all pupils contribute to the reflective discussion, but all present their results. In reality, this includes that pupils heading for the *Gymnasium* and pupils with cognitive disabilities prepare different products. They present, e.g. collages and documentations on a topic, or they present performed contributions. They are included in an assessment; however, it takes place on very different levels for each of the two groups."

2.2.3 Discussions on the meta-level

The *Gymnasium* class mentioned at the beginning, who had worked on

proofs of God, also worked on biblical miracles and their interpretations. They learned to distinguish and respect different interpretations through theologising as their teacher emphasises:

> "I think that they [uncritical pupils] perceive these [non-literal interpretations of miracle stories]. There was a statement in between that one of them said, 'There are different opinions here in this room, and everyone can believe what they want.' That is quite much, I think. As they come from a context in which the Free Church hinders them from joining a class trip because they do not want them mix up with others, the leisure behaviour of the others. [...] Yes, this sentence is worth more - we will not achieve more. […] And I think it is likewise appropriate that the other pupils, parts of whom are totally ignorant, perceive this Free Church position. [...] And that they realise, 'these are my classmates that I deal with, and they hold another position and believe, too. They are Christians as I am. And in crucial issues they believe something completely different.' This is a quite good increase in learning."

Different confessions and religions which are present at schools contribute to forming the meta-talk about theologising at the *Realschule* as well:

> "In my 6th class, there is a Turkish Muslim girl who joins [our class] out of curiosity. Now, when we deal with the Abraham stories, this is of course an occasion for me to slip the Muslim edition in. Naturally, this strengthens the outside perspective. Now, that also the Protestant pupils have so little Christian socialisation, maybe this is not as bad because they, too, have an outside perspective, and they have to look [at well-known topics] afresh: What are our reference texts? How do our stories run?"

Different religious socialisation then becomes a subject of theologising: In the sense of the transdifference perspective described at the beginning, which makes multiple affiliations visible, theologising addresses the available sources of knowledge. The same *Realschule* teacher states in the interview relating to the topic of different backgrounds of socialisation:

> "The following situation occurred in the 10th class: I said, 'These are topics you addressed in the 7th, or 8th, or 9th [class] already, aren't they?' Then it turned out, 'Well, no, we had signed off. We have joined again only now.' Of course, there were also the others, who said, 'No, we did it, we know this from class.' Or [they said], 'We know that from home.' Then we indeed addressed these differences. And, after all, it becomes a topic, in this respect: What is it that makes me still stick to our religion, to religion at all? Or, concerning religion, what is interesting to me? And how is it that I did not experience such a religious socialisation? What are my parents, my grandparents like, what did they give [me] on the way? […] And then, one of them said, 'My granny once told me about a wolf and a lamb.' Immediately, I got the Bible concordance out..."

2.2.4 Organisation of safe places

Meta-discussions correspond with caring for a safe, confidential place (Jackson 2001: 460), where pupils are trained to respect every contribution that does not harm others (using rules how to listen and to discuss). One teacher tells us how he tries to reduce shyness. Both pupils who know much or little can be affected. At first he refers to pupils with religious background knowledge and experiences, e.g. pupils from YMCA who do not have the courage to contribute:

> "They know that there are other pupils rather ridiculing it. It nearly takes months working with them before you have established a climate of openness. Respecting each other must come naturally. However, pupils with little religious socialisation, who nevertheless join the class, feel they start with a deficit. So, in the beginning I try to convince them that they are in good company [using statistics showing that only 3% of all church members attend services]. So, if they have no background knowledge now, they do not need be afraid that they are wrong in this class."

The *Berufskolleg* teacher explains that her pupils help to shape the safe place by their completely open notion of tolerance:

> "[In situations] Where very different interpretations are being brought up for discussion; but rather the attitude prevails, 'Well, everybody has his or her opinion,' consequently, there are few mutual critical challenges. There rather is an attitude of subjectivity, even in the sense of indifference, 'You believe that, and I believe something else.' Now, what is true, everything is true somehow. I perceive teenagers today like that: On the one hand maybe more tolerant than we used to be, on the other hand also no longer really searching for valid truth."

3. Discussion - Chances and limits

After the questions of teaching methods, presentation and creation of a safe place have been discussed, chances and limits of theologising in classrooms where diversity is consciously perceived can be concluded. The introductory questions are reconsidered again:

3.1 In which sense is diversity enriching theologising?

Diversity is enriching the process of theologising when there are occasions

for pupils to ask questions. Not as in the last quotation, but when pupils can clearly see the differences that inspire them to ask questions and to discuss them. Thus, a teacher of an international class in Vienna reports:

> "The story of a Christian from Nigeria differs from the story of a Christian from the Philippines or from Vienna. There are different stories, different questions, different traditions from which they come [from], and this is exhilarating. This is very, very exhilarating for RE. Firstly, because particularly Africans and Asians come from cultures including Buddhism, Hinduism, and other issues; therefore, these topics are much closer to them from the start, and hence with a certain urgency to share [these information] in the discussions; of course, with these classes, you get much further on a cognitive level, [you also get] much quicker much further because curiosity is higher due to the multiple backgrounds, and it is also more necessary to deal with these issues. From the start, children do not have such a multitude of questions in a homogeneous setting."

Here it becomes clear what *elevated potential lies in considering cultural and religious diversity in theologising*.

Many teachers point out that the experience of *a respectful acceptance of different views in theologising increases the diversity of interpretations in theology and even the quality of theology itself*! One Gymnasium teacher indicates this and gives an example:

> "We asked about a sense of life and goals in life, and there was a photo exhibition we visited. It was about people just being photographed in their sphere of life. I went there together with the class, an 8th class, and they were encouraged to choose, 'Which picture can you identify with?', and everybody found one, fifty pictures offered, twenty children, and no one chose the same picture as somebody else."

Certainly, empirical studies on theological conversations with regard to different theological interpretations will display examples concerning this important point of the discussion.

3.2 What adaptations are necessary?

The main strength of theologising is to encourage people to express different views and to make use of them in a learning process. Pupils are invited to discover their own questions and to develop their own way of interpreting biblical stories, confessional elements, sacred places or rituals. The approach offers a high level of individuality what makes it evidently

valuable in the context of diversity. Adaptations are, therefore, only necessary where the orientation of people-centred learning is not fully utilised, yet. To avoid an understanding of theologising as a form of promoting highly gifted pupils, as one teacher did, a mutual relatedness of nonverbal action or art work and verbal discussion is required.

Theologising is also limited when pupils know too little about the topics or consider different points of view to be all alike. Besides a development of a theology of adolescents and with adolescents, a theology *for* children and adolescents becomes significant in such cases, as one Gymnasium teacher reports:

> "You come up against limitations when children are religiously unresponsive, where there is no knowledge at all and no access. Then it is very difficult; results are few. This is why I often like working with texts and stories in order to provide input for them, that they can discuss." A relatedness of developing knowledge and developing discussion is helpful.

Furthermore, it is necessary to be carefully concerned with the safe place or another option to agree on bringing rather few personal items into the discussion as one other *Gymnasium* teacher suggests:

> "Limitations come up when it is revealing too much of one's own personality. I would rather try to limit this, for it is sometimes regretted afterwards. In the heat of the moment you say, 'But I think...' As it is critical just to tell, 'I pray every morning and every evening.' That can be abused sometimes."

3.3 Can theologising be helpful for religious learning in heterogeneous groups?

As theologising is open to different realities of God and life in the eyes of children, adolescents and adults, this approach includes diversity from the beginning. Regarding the relation between children and adults in theological dialog, also aspects of transdifference have been indirectly discussed. Their contributions have been considered on the basis of equality as everybody makes an individual start in asking theological questions and finding out answers of the religious traditions and the personal life (Schluß 2005: 27ff.). Although adults can lead a discussion on a higher informed and reflected theological point of view than children can, both children and adults find

answers which cannot be considered either typical or valid for childhood or for adulthood, but are inspiring for both.

Theologising is helpful for religious learning in heterogeneous groups because it welcomes differences between children and adults and many other differences between human beings.

A real strength of theologising can be found in the relation of *strong individualised learning* and *strong cooperative learning* in discussions. Theologising helps to find *one's* own interpretation of religious questions, of the traditional sources as well as of the personal reality of life – and, moreover, it helps to find *more than one* interpretation in the sense that different interpretations are perceived and compared with the own interpretation. Firstly, internal differentiation of methods and contents during the learning process offers different ways to support own constructions and meanings. This is not only relevant in ways of learning biblical stories, but in ways of developing interpretations of one's own. Secondly, in a safe confidential space and with a well prepared facilitator, who can lead presentations and meta-discussions, children and teenagers can meet the interpretations and contributions of their classmates. As a result, cooperative learning can be reached at its best, when different contributions and clear criteria to discuss help to make progress in theologising. Both is possible in the best case: In some contexts, clear progress in the ability of judgement can be developed to make a clear distinction between argumentations that differ in terms of content. In other contexts, it is necessary to set the relation between different contributions by means of transdifference that is full of tension and on the basis of their not always unambiguous clear option of differentiation.

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Petra Freudenberger-Lötz

How to develop a perception of children's theological interpretations: Implementing research in daily practice

First of all, you will watch a short sequence[37] from a lesson of religious education which illustrates the challenges of theological conversations with children.

Teacher: Good morning boys and girls. Today I've got a nice story for you.
Linea: I've got an important question. But I can't answer it, yet: Does God have a wife?
Gülsen: How come you're asking that question?
Jan: Well, it's quite important to know if God is alone or if he has got a wife.
Jordi: That's right. And he also has a son.
Tore: Do you think God is lonely?
Selim: No, God can't be lonely. God has created all of us. And to be honest with all that's going on in the world he'll never get bored.
Merle: Why doesn't he calm everything down a bit? He can control us for sure.
Sarah: Maybe he could, but he doesn't want to. Don't you want to think for yourself?
Hannah: I think that God only gives us a little push if we're stuck.
Karla: Does God really exist? Can he really do that?
Kim: I don't know. I don't know. What do you think, Miss?
Karla: Yes, what do you think?
Teacher: Oh! I just wanted to tell you my story.
Maja: Where is our teacher?
Marvin: It's all been so exciting and I didn't get the chance to speak at all.

37 This example as well as all other texts written by pupils, sequences from conversations or lessons of religious education are based on the results of research workshops conducted by the department of religious education at the University of Kassel.

The children converse with each other, develop creative theological questions and solution approaches. Having reached the climax, they ask for the teacher's opinion. What a pity that she runs away. A conversation could have become quite exciting. But you will certainly agree: It is comprehensible that the teacher is overwhelmed by the situation. Who of us could handle such a complex situation?

The intention of the approach of children's theology is to assist teachers to perceive the theological interpretations of children, to recognise the great potential of a theology of children and to support the religious development of children.

But let's stop here for a second - do children engage in theology at all? In which sense can we speak about theology? Wilfried Härle, a famous theologian of the University of Heidelberg, has intensively worked on this question and published a number of important articles. Firstly, he points out how "theology" can be defined, suggesting that already children are theologians. Härle states that theology serves the "intellectual penetration, reflection and verification, that is the intellectual accountability for the Christian faith"[38]. If we understand theology this way, we can acknowledge that already (young) children practise theology.

They want to recognise their faith. Obviously, their theology differs from scientific theology. Nobody claims that children have to be counted among scientific theologians. Nevertheless, their interpretations are precious. Already Martin Luther emphasised the children's competences when he wrote: "Every human being who is a Christian is a theologian. And especially children develop smart thoughts…"[39] Wilfried Härle underlines that children bring variations and a fresh taste into theology with their radical questions

38 Compare Härle, Wilfried, Was haben Kinder in der Theologie verloren? Systematisch-theologische Überlegungen zum Projekt einer Kindertheologie. In: Bucher, Anton A./Büttner, Gerhard/Freudenberger-Lötz, Petra/Schreiner, Martin(Hg.), „Zeit ist immer da." Wie Kinder Hoch-Zeiten und Festtage erleben. Jahrbuch für Kindertheologie, Band 3. Stuttgart 2004, 23.

39 Härle, Wilfried, Was haben Kinder in der Theologie verloren? Systematisch-theologische Überlegungen zum Projekt einer Kindertheologie. In: Bucher, Anton A./Büttner, Gerhard/Freudenberger-Lötz, Petra/Schreiner, Martin (Hg.), „Zeit ist immer da." Wie Kinder Hoch-Zeiten und Festtage erleben. Jahrbuch für Kindertheologie, Band 3. Stuttgart 2004, 23.

and thoughts[40]. That is why one can say that children's theology and scientific theology fertilise and enrich each other. Children challenge us to question fixed dogmas and certainties of faith by asking elementary questions and defamiliarising the known. We also have the task to integrate our position comprehensibly into the conversation. It can be really rewarding to perceive the known from a new perspective. That is exactly what children encourage us to do.

Next, we have to ask the question: What is the intention of carrying out theological conversations? Theological conversations should be conducted in a way which allows children to acquire cognitive clarity and emotional security. Cognitive clarity implies that children build up a framework of basic knowledge (biblical narratives, Christian tradition) which enables them to bring their religious thoughts into a certain order. They also make use of this knowledge when debating in a theological conversation.

Emotional security implies two different things: The atmosphere of the conversation should encourage children to say what they really think and to reveal what they are moved by. They should not feel obliged to state things only the teacher wants to hear (or what they think the teacher wants to hear). Furthermore, the following aspect is important: Basic theological questions are existential questions which can render children insecure. As a result of this insecurity, the children in the film we have watched ask the teacher for her opinion. Theological conversations should enhance the children's emotional security since children experience how they can arrive at sustainable answers. It is an important aspect of a theological conversation that all of the children's answers are preliminary and can be developed further.

Let us have a closer look at the particular questions which can cause such emotional insecurity. And please have a think for yourself: Can you spontaneously find an answer? And do you think that everyone in this room will develop the same answer?

40 Compare the article mentioned in the second annotation.

How old is God? How old does God get?
Where is the kingdom of God? Is God always with us? Does God really exist?
Why do children fall ill and die?
How can Christians firmly believe in God without having a definite proof?
What will happen after life is over?

In religious education different types of questions have to be distinguished: Questions of knowledge differ from questions of sense and faith. Questions of knowledge are questions which can be answered relying on universal rules. We can intersubjectively verify the answers to questions of knowledge. Questions of knowledge can be simple or complicated questions. A question is a question of knowledge if different people who have access to the same information choose an appropriate solution process and arrive at the same results. A certain result can be judged as either right or wrong.

Questions of faith can also be answered. But the answer is in no case a universal rule; it cannot simply be judged as “right” or “wrong”. The answer depends primarily on the freedom of our choice. We are responsible for our choice. Those basic theological questions which are discussed in theological conversations are questions of faith. We can answer them; in fact we have to answer them in order to reach emotional security. Moreover, we can evaluate these answers. We can ask: Is this answer plausible and coherent? Which reasons are employed? Which frame of reference is the answer based on?

P.e.: When trying to answer the question of what might happen after death, pupils will certainly develop answers which can be ascribed to different frames of reference: Some answers will originate in the field of a theology of reincarnation. Others may be attributed to philosophical traditions and eventually some answers may be based on the Christian hope for resurrection. We should not be telling the children what is right or wrong, but it is our task to help them to put their religious thoughts into a certain order. And I´m sure: We want to show them that we´ve found in our life the Christian hope for resurrection.

Furthermore, answers to questions of sense and faith can be evaluated with respect to their potential to give hope and encourage LIFE. Tobias asked his question of why children have to die because of an existential dismay concerning his sister's death. We will have to evaluate Tobias' answer, examining its potential to give him hope and to encourage his zest for life. Our demanding task is to support children, so they can acquire competences which enable them to find sustainable answers.

In conclusion it can be stated that children learn to take their own views through theological conversations. Although the children's views have to be regarded as preliminary, they should be able to present them in an authentic and self-confident way.

In the following part of the presentation, I will refer to particular results of empirical research. The primary question will be: Which theological competences can we expect from children of different age groups? It is important to have detailed knowledge about these results in order to establish appropriate connections with the children's theological interpretations.

We have to distinguish between three different phases: Preschool age, primary school age and adolescence (puberty). We can learn from developmental psychology that knowledge and competences are related to specific areas. The development of competences in each area depends on how much experience children gain. Therefore: The development of theological competences depends on how much experience children gain concerning questions of faith and which quality these experiences have. I will show how smart and creative children of preschool age can be, using Clara as an example. Clara is four years and ten months old. She paints a picture of God.

On the one hand, Clara's picture shows God as a human figure, but on the other hand this human figure includes character traits which are beyond all that is humanly possible. God is "up above a human being and down below air", Clara says. Consequently, her picture expresses tension between the visibility and invisibility of God and between divine distance and closeness.

“Up above” means heaven and “down below” denotes earth. Heaven and earth interact with each other. This interaction becomes visible when looking at the original picture. Thin blue lines reach down onto the ground. Moreover, it is visible that Clara’s picture exceeds a concrete depiction because Clara does not only integrate the tension between closeness and distance into her picture, but also God’s care for every human being. According to Clara, God succeeds in having an eye on every person and in communicating with all of them with the help of his enormous ears and numerous mouths. Her picture is thus marked by a high complexity. Children’s pictures – as well as pictures of children of preschool age – transgress the borders of the concretely descriptive to the symbolic. Furthermore, immanence and transcendence are connected, which can be observed in a picture Clara drew a couple of weeks later. Inspired by the children’s TV show “Löwenzahn” [“Dandelion”], in which the host Peter Lustig arranges different mirrors in such a way that they mirror each other infinitely, Clara draws a picture of God which demonstrates that God accompanies every human being. She also employs the idea of mirrors. From Clara’s point of view, one can bring the presence of God into the picture of every human being through mirroring God’s figure infinitely.

She is well aware of the fact that she has integrated something into the picture “that you can’t see”. That’s why I tried it like this and like that”. Clara depicts God as a woman and states: “God is like a mother”. These are impressive testimonials of a child’s religious competences; however it is necessary that these competences are challenged consciously and developed continually.

Clara grew older. She is nine years old now. Primary school age is marked by a hybrid worldview which implies that interpretations from natural sciences and religion can parallel each other without problems or can be integrated creatively.[41] Views from preschool age are developed further and preliminary human statements about God can be integrated.

41 Compare Freudenberger-Lötz, Petra/Reiß, Annike, Die Lebenswelten von Kindern und Jugendlichen. Religionspädagogisch-katechetischer Kurs, Lehrbrief 8, Würzburg 2010, 80ff.

Clara's classmate Tim for example writes:

> Nobody knows how it is in God's heaven. Only those who are with God know. We on earth can only imagine heaven. That is how I imagine it: Yellow streets lead directly through it, on the right and on the left side are God's houses in which the deceased live and everything belongs to God.

This text illustrate a number of typical attitudes towards faith and competences of children of primary school age: Certain reservations are voiced clearly. Although Tim articulates his concept of heaven precisely, he emphasises that it is just a sort of thought experiment. Tim knows that our thoughts are human thoughts. He expects our thoughts to have some truth in it, but only those who are close to God will recognise the full truth. In spite of reservations mentioned in the text, a fundamental trust in God's care and loyalty is expressed – even reaching beyond death. God prepares heaven, so the deceased can feel comfortable there. Human beings are so precious to God that he creates heaven in an orderly way and in a shining yellow. For Tim, yellow is a colour to express heaven's extraordinary qualities.

The next two pictures and short texts were painted and written by Matthias in two consecutive lessons of religious education. The first lesson was about different images of God, whereas in the second lesson the question of the kingdom of God was addressed. Using these two pictures and texts I would like to show the following: Depending on the question, children develop their own thoughts and draw individual pictures. Everything a pupil creates has to be considered as the depiction of one single moment in time and strongly depends on the context. It is surprising that Matthias' thoughts are so diverse. The first picture shows God on the cloud holding the world in his hand. God is anthropomorphised in this picture because he is depicted as a human being. But does Matthias really understand his picture in such a concrete way? Matthias laughs: "No, this is supposed to show God's power and his strength and that God protects us. I don't really imagine God on a cloud". From this follows that anthropomorphic images of God can contain symbolic statements. There is so much more to these pictures than we can

perceive at first glance. It is important to begin a conversation with the children on these pictures. Matthias' second picture is accompanied by the following sentences:

> "I understand it like a child who cries and who is consoled. If friendship rules during war and reconciliation takes place after an argument. God's kingdom begins where hatred and violence end and where love rules".

This text is very poetic. It locates the kingdom of God in the here and now and makes it possible for the human being to experience God's actions. If I ask my university students how old they think these children are, they tend to assume a huge age gap between those two texts. According to them, the text on the left stands for a child at primary school age and the text on the right for a teenager. But this is not the case. The example of Matthias shows us how "rich" a child's foundation can be. Depending on the question, children can draw on an abundance of thoughts.

Children develop differently. Their interests also differ. It is normal that children might show a lack of interest and that critical questions are also asked at primary school age. Critical questions are important for the children's further development. They should be taken seriously and worked on. This is the only way a differentiation of faith can be enhanced.

The children's faith can learn to handle challenges caused by reflection. The two following texts written by pupils serve to underline this aspect of heterogeneity.

> God protects everybody. And he catches you, if you fall. You can pray to God, if you are alone. God is always there.

> Is there a God? That is my question. If I can't see God, how do I know that he exists? I think that God doesn't exist. Almost all of my friends believe in God, but they can't explain to me why. How am I supposed to believe in God?

While the first text is marked by a basic trust in an accompanying and protective God, the second text focuses on God's invisibility and the question of provability. Imagine a conversation between these two children: The chance of a mutual exchange and learning from each other is quite obvious. However – and this challenge is obvious as well – it is necessary

that the children are accompanied in a qualified way. Teachers have to possess certain competences in theological conversations with children in order to be able to perceive the different interpretations and integrate them into the conversation. Additionally, they have to encourage the children to think further.[42]

If you want to start on theological conversations completely new, there is a good way to find out more about your learning group. You should be interested in what their current state of knowledge is, which questions are important for them and which thoughts they have.

You could try the following. It is quite a simple idea with enormous potential.

Do you know Calvin and Hobbes? It is a comic. In Germany you can find it in the weekend editions of many daily newspapers. You have to know that I think about the question of God a lot. I ponder on it very often indeed. And did you know that Calvin also asks the question of God? When I saw this comic in the newspaper, I cut it out.[43] It is so small that it fits into any pocket – and whenever I meet people I can talk to them about the question of God. It also works with children and teenagers.

If you decide on using this comic when working with children you will be surprised. The children will start to discuss why thinking about God calms Calvin down, why he has to think for such a long time and why it is so hard for him to put his thoughts into words. Is the question of God a question so hard to answer? Can God be the topic of a conversation among friends at

42 Therefore, the professionalization of university students in theological conversations is a major aim of teacher training at the University of Kassel. Students may participate in seminars and acquire a certificate. Compare: http://www.uni-kassel.de/fb02/institute/evangelische-theologie/fachgebiete/religionspaedagogik/theologische-gespraeche.html.

43 I have slightly altered the text inside of the speech bubbles. For further information compare Carolin Pfeil's publication "Facetten des Gotteskonzeptes: Kinder einer 4. Klasse schreiben in Briefen über ihre Gottesvorstellungen. Kassel 2012".

all? These are the matters the children will discuss in a theological conversation. The course of the conversation will give you information on how present God is in the children's everyday life and how important the question of God is for them. And: Which answer could we give to Calvin?
If you ask the children to write a letter in response to Calvin, you will witness an active phase of theological thinking. The children's letters will reveal the diversity of their thoughts. You can observe what exactly they concern themselves with, how they formulate their thoughts, where they have open-ended questions, and which perspectives they develop.
You can create a mind map of the children's thoughts and use it to work on new impulses for conversations. You will recognise what it is that the children trust in. You can see what they have doubts about and what leaves them perplexed. The perception of theological questions and their interpretation is the key to any successful conversation. This is the point where you have to establish connections with the children's interpretations.
Now, let us have a look beyond childhood. According to developmental psychology, a change of paradigms occurs. This change characterises puberty. Young people call their childhood faith into question and frequently a breach in faith takes place. K.E. Nipkow has intensively researched into this topic during the 1980s.[44] His findings can still be considered as valid today.

- Religious statements are questioned by means of logical thinking. Teenagers start to suspect religion to be an illusion. They ask themselves: "Did human beings only make up God in order to delude others?"
- A disproportionate increase of knowledge about natural sciences can be observed; thus a conflict between faith and natural sciences arises. Young people state: "If God's existence was proven, I would believe in it".
- Finally, the question of theodicy can arise as adolescents experience a lack of divine intervention in human suffering. Young people ask: "How can God allow for that?" And they conclude: "God cannot exist!"

44 Compare Nipkow, Karl Ernst, Erwachsenwerden ohne Gott? Gotteserfahrung im Lebenslauf, München 1987, 53-78.

Karl Ernst Nipkow labelled these issues „breaches“ in faith. I would prefer to call them “challenges of faith”. The specific topics mentioned above are challenges that every person must face. They are for the first time the centre of reflection during puberty, but these questions last for life. It is our lifelong task to develop answers.

This also becomes visible when looking at the next slide. You can see possible answers to questions of sense and faith which are derived from different perspectives. The question of truth is located at the centre. Many young people frequently think only one universal perspective exists. Consequently, our goal should be to point out that multiple perspectives are possible, which can interact in a dialogue.

A study was carried out in Germany which arrived at the result that most teachers avoid these topics during puberty. It seems to be rather difficult to enter into dialogue with young people. This is quite unfortunate since we miss a great opportunity.

During the time of puberty the synapses of the brain are interconnected anew. Areas which are used intensively can create persisting interests. Areas which are not used completely cease to exist. We have to continue asking questions of faith – otherwise the interest in them will disappear. This happens very often. What does holding on to questions of faith entail? Do we need to attract the interest of youth?

Let us have a look at Natalie. What does she say about her faith and her development of faith?

> Natalie: Well, earlier I believed a little more in something, maybe not in God, but in something that stands above us and protects us. But the older you get the more experience you gain in life, good things as well as bad things. And the more experience you gain the more you get to realise that you are responsible for your life all by yourself. Somehow you have to make the best of it.
> Ruben: I think, in former times people believed more in God because they didn’t think about it too much. But if you really think about it, you can’t believe in God so much. But there are people who believe in God and people who don’t believe in God. It‘s quite different somehow.
> Teacher: How exactly did you experience this?
> Ruben: Well, I don’t believe so much in God anymore because I have gone through so many things already.

> Natalie: Back to me again, I forgot to mention something. If you make a negative experience - at least this was the case with me – I asked myself some time: If there is some sort of higher power, why didn't that person protect me from something like that? And if he could have done something, why didn't he do it? And that's why I imagine that there isn't anything above us, but that you are responsible yourself and you can't rely on a higher power.

Natalie asks the question of theodicy and concludes that heaven must be empty. Every human being is responsible for his life and cannot rely on a higher power. We can assume that Natalie diverges from questions of faith because they do not mean anything to her anymore. Certainly, we can understand her attitude. It is motivated by the adolescents' wish to stand on one's own two feet.

But couldn't it be possible that Natalie rediscovers her faith, although presently enduring challenging phases? Couldn't it be that Natalie needs courage to continue asking questions of faith and could it be that teachers also need courage to enter into these difficult but important conversations with Natalie? I'm sure that's how it is.

Natalie's development towards openness has continued. During four weeks of lessons carried out by university students she was allowed to ask her questions over and over again. Afterwards Natalie stated:

> I think it was really interesting in many lessons, in some more in others less, to see what the others, my classmates, think about their lives, about God and about natural sciences. And I wouldn't have expected some people in this classroom to have the views they had, but exactly the opposite. And I find it interesting how they hold on to their faith and how they can present their views.

Natalie has become more open. She finds conversations interesting, rethinks everything thoroughly and continues to work on the topic. She was told what her classmates believe in and she learned how they handle questions and doubts. She values her classmates' opinions. She expresses the wish that the lessons of religious education should continue the way they began. A positive development of interest has been initiated.

Which conclusions can we draw from all that has been said so far? First of all, it is important to visualise the different tasks of the teacher in theological

conversations. The teacher's perceptual competence is the foundation of every successful theological conversation. Without perceiving what pupils are touched by, which questions they have and which possible answers they find, no theological conversation can be successful. Children are not taken seriously. If we identify the things children are moved by, we have to integrate their thoughts into the conversation, activate as many children as possible, examine the question from different perspectives, structure the ideas mentioned by the children and categorise them. Consequently, we will recognise where we have to implement new impulses which encourage children to think further. Perceiving – integrating thoughts into the conversation – giving impulses for further development.

That is the fundamental triad of every theological conversation. If we wish to accomplish this triad, we have to be sensitive, we have to be flexible, we have to know conversational methods and possess structured theological knowledge. We also have to know which topics are important for children of different age groups in order to establish connections with these topics. Additionally, there is our own authentic point of view. We have to ask questions and be able to reflect on them. We have to be capable of positioning ourselves; although there may be questions we cannot yet answer. Only if we have questions within us, only if a fire is burning inside of us, will we be able to ascribe fundamental importance to certain topics. We have to be curious to hear the children's thoughts which can certainly enrich us. A theological conversation is in the end only give and take, and it is an exciting journey which is well worth undertaking.

I will conclude my presentation with a short story. Imagine you pass a large wood while going to work every day. There is a path on the left side and a path on the right side. You know both paths very well; they are of equal length. Both bring you safely to your destination, but they are a bit boring. One day you ask yourself: Shouldn't I go right through the woods? I might save some time. Or I might discover something new. You manage to find your way through the woods, branches whip your face, and you fall, but you arrive at your destination. And you recognise: It takes you much longer than

usual. Next time you ask yourself again: Shouldn't I go right through there? Better stick to the tried and trusted or risk new things? Yes, you risk it again. And the more often you try, the easier it gets as you create little trails. Your aim is not any longer to arrive quickly, but to discover little things along the way that amaze you. Such a journey creates joy! It is the journey of a theological conversation. Thank you very much for your attention.

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The third meeting of the European network of children's theology took place in April 2013 in Trondheim, Norway. Sturla Sagberg organised this meeting with great care and commitment, and intended to publish the contributions to the conference in a book to make them accessible to the wider public. The approach of children's theology has been specified and differentiated over the course of the last ten years. This book provides insight into the process and results of different European and North American research projects. As the practice of children's theology is linked to the "great questions", which are equally raised by children's philosophy, the range of topics of both the conference and this book are marked by the terms *children's theology, children's philosophy and spirituality.*

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