

Reflections on the position paper at the conference of the DVRW (German Ass. for Science of Religion), Bayreuth 2023, calling for integrated teaching of 'religion' for all students in Germany

Abstract

In Germany, Austria, and to some extent in Switzerland, denominational instruction in religion or secular ethics at schools is the legally enshrined norm. Considering that these countries comprise about 100 million inhabitants, with Germany being the by far most populous nation in the EU, this is of cultural significance outside of the German-speaking realm too. A philosophy of inclusion of the Churches and recognised religious communities into the social life and education is pursued, that is legally entrenched in constitutions (notwithstanding the religious-philosophical neutrality of the state). This provides for their active inclusion into education on all levels, in forms of cooperation between state(s) and Church. The present (prevalent) structure of compulsory denominational religious instruction, or secular ethics, at choice, and of the academic training of teachers at denominational faculties of theology, or of other recognised religions, reflect his system. It is in force for over one century, now.

This system has come under pressure by the ongoing secularisation that prevents the formation of sufficiently large classes for such separate instruction. As to knowledge about religion, there is also a trend in society for become aware or the role of religion in shaping culture. The presence of large Islamic immigrant communities, has sharpened awareness for differing value systems and mores, between religions and cultures.

These factors of sociology of religion, and of societal change, led to developments towards integrated religious instruction, to the inclusion of perspectives and themes of science of religion in denominational curricula, and to the increased inclusion of themes of religion in secular ethics instruction. In this context, the German Association for Science of Religion (DVRW) endorsed a position paper, calling for an integrated instruction of religion (and ethics) for all students. It also calls for science of religion as regular study requirement to qualify for teaching such an integrated subject. This model is in force in only on state of Germany (and in some Swiss cantons). The position paper thus has aspects of promoting the position of the discipline. This review gives a critical analysis of arguments proposed in this position paper that was debated and endorsed at the recent conference of the DVRW in Bayreuth in September of 2023. My critique of this position paper is based on decades of teaching Protestant Religion at upper secondary schools, with the experience of applying instruction on other religions, on the basis of science of religion – as prescribed by the curriculum, about which I published, as with a teacher's manual for the instruction on Hinduism (including Yoga), and Buddhism,¹ as required by the curriculum. (This manual combines perspectives of science of religion, theological approaches, from the perspectives of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Protestant Christianity, and of history of culture.), by

¹Kleinhempel, Ullrich R. Far Eastern religions in religious education at high school: introduction and worksheets. FID Religionswissenschaft. (Univ. Library of Tübingen), 2018.

Introduction

At the recent biannual conference of the DVRW (*Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft*¹), the German Association of Science of Religion a position paper² was presented by the leadership, calling for the transformation of the present German system of compulsory denominational instruction in 'religion', or in secular

¹Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft.

²German association for religious studies. Bremen; 2023.

Volume 7 Issue 6 - 2023

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Received: November 07, 2023 | **Published:** November 20, 2023

contributing to debate in the field,² and lectures, on didactical consequences of secularisation for religious instruction,³ and professional publications,⁴ also in sociological perspective.⁵

Keywords: science of religion, sociology of religion, denominational teaching of religion at schools, curricula for religious instruction, theological perspectives and science of religion, religion and culture, religion and ethics, concepts of religion, constructivism, religious literacy, cooperation between churches and state in education

²Kleinhempel Ullrich R. Buddhism and Hinduism in religious education in the 10th grade, with a focus on yoga and Zen: reception-historical and theological perspectives on the topic. FID Religionswissenschaft. (Univ. Library of Tübingen); 2019.

³Kleinhempel Ullrich R. *Vortrag: "Lecture: "Contemporary religiosity and consequences for religious education"*. 2016.

⁴Kleinhempel Ullrich R. What do we believe? Contemporary religiosity and the consequences for religious education". In: *Friedrich Fischer Schule Jahresbericht 2021/2022*. In: Bauer Harald, Jörg Nellen, editors. Schweinfurt. 2022;184–187.

⁵Kleinhempel Ullrich R. Contemporary religiosity and consequences for the instruction of religion at upper secondary schools in Germany. *Sociology International Journal*. 2022;6(4):182–184.

ethics, towards an integrated system, including 'religion' for all students. The paper evidently refers to the ongoing secularisation – in a population with less than 50% Christians since recently – that impacts on the institutionalised denominational instruction of religion in schools in Germany. It voices the call for the introduction of an integrated instruction, that combines secular ethics and instruction about religions, on the basis of approaches in science of religion. Such a model exists presently only in one of the sixteen states of Germany, in Brandenburg.

In a political move, the resolution also calls for the study of science of religion – and not of denominational theology – as regular requirement for the teaching of such an integrated instruction of religion for all. (It is a logical motion to secure the status of science of religion in the academic context, by providing secure career options to its graduates.) The authors of the paper base their argument strongly on an opposition to 'theological' perspectives in the teaching and conceptualisation of 'religion'. While claiming non-judgemental neutrality towards religions,³ this argument appears as problematic. It disregards the inclusion of perspectives of science of religion in denominational instruction of religion and presents a too narrow concept of 'science of religion'. A critical assessment will be presented here.

While reference to the changing environment of religious adherence and of secularisation might have been desirable, but is apparently presupposed to be known to the readers, the misrepresentation of the denominational instruction in religion, and the inclusion of perspectives of science of religion in their curricula is not. The paper also shows apparent disinterest in the historical role of religions in shaping cultures and societies, – of Germany, but also of countries from which large immigrant communities in Germany come from, and thus of the aspect of inter-religious dialogue and understanding as a basis for mutual understanding of students for each other in schools and society. The focus, and the concept of 'science of religion' – especially for the instruction of 'religion' at schools are thus to be discussed.

The present system of compulsory instruction either in denominationally bound 'religion', or in secular ethics, in Germany

Instruction in religion or in secular ethics is a compulsory subject in German schools. As to 'religion' the options are mostly either Roman Catholicism, or Protestantism, lately also Islam, Christian Orthodoxy, Mosaic religion and a few others. Parents, later students, can choose between these options, provided a minimum of students enrol. Teachers of the religious subjects are required to have studied the respective theologies for their Masters degrees.

The foundation of religious instruction in Germany is guaranteed by the federal constitution.⁴ It states: "Instruction in religion is a regular subject at public schools ... Irrespective of the governmental right to supervision, religious instruction is taught in agreement with the principles of the religious communities." [In transl.]⁵

This means, that teachers of religious instruction study their respective theologies at regular denominational theological faculties, mostly of state universities, as part of their Masters degrees, which usually comprise two or three subjects, that qualify them to enter training as teachers. The system is thus two-tiered, with general academic standards applied in the studies. This co-operation that combines the theologies of the specific religious communities, and the requirements of state-supervised general academic and curricular standards, in universities and schools.

As education falls into the sovereign rights of the German states (Bundesländer). For Bavaria – where this study is based – the state constitutions are relevant for the way, in which the principles of the federal constitution regarding religious instruction are applied. The systems differ slightly from state to state. Thus, the Bavarian

constitution states: "Art. 136 (1) at all schools the religious convictions of all are to be respected in teaching.

(2) Religious instruction is a regular subject of all elementary, professional, middle and higher schools. It is taught in agreement with the principles of the religious community concerned. (3) ..., (4) Teachers [of the specific religious instruction] must be endorsed by the religious community [church]." [In transl.]⁶

These provisions agree essentially with those of the federal constitution. For those pupils or students who do not belong to one of the major Churches (i. e. mainly Roman Catholic and Protestants), or to Judaism, to which these provisions originally applied, with other attaining these rights too, like Orthodoxy, thus secular children and youth, or Muslims, provisions have been made, constitutionally, for secular ethics, and, recently also for Islamic instruction: "Art. 47 Instruction in Ethics, Islamic Instruction.

- 1) Students who do not participate in Religious Instruction, are obliged to take part in Ethics Instruction or in Islamic Instruction.
- 2) Instruction in Ethics serves to educate students in value-oriented judgement and action. (...) It takes the plurality of confessions of faith and of world views into account.
- 3) Par. 2 applies likewise to Islamic Instruction. It provides knowledge about the world religion of Islam and presents it in inter-cultural perspective." [In transl.]⁷

These provisions react to the rising proportion of secular pupils and students, and to the establishment of sizeable Muslim communities, whose lasting presence in society is thus acknowledged by the provision of denominational Islamic instruction at schools.

The law takes note of the existence of Islam as a faith, whose historical continuity, and whose collective identity – regardless of its theological diversity, – are thus acknowledged, and communicated in the class room. It is indicated here, that both in secular Ethics and in Islamic instruction, basic knowledge about "the plurality of confessions of faith", i. e. of religions and spiritual doctrines is taught. By mentioning Islam as "world religion", 'Islam', as a unified religious entity, existing in different cultures, and countries, worldwide, defined by (sufficient) doctrinal coherence and authority, and defining the self-concept and identity of Muslims, are acknowledged. Implicitly the formative influence of Islam on the cultures in which it is predominant, its distinct value system, and its agreements with the major Christian religion in Germany', as context, are also acknowledged.

The example of the state of Brandenburg, and motions for unified instruction elsewhere, on the background of secularisation

With ongoing secularisation, this system, which is enshrined in Germany's national and state constitutions, has come under pressure. In only one state, Brandenburg, with a mere minority of Christian students, a comprehensive subject for all, is taught, that comprises (secular) ethics and religions. (In Berlin, also predominantly secular, and with a sizeable Islamic community, a unified ethics instruction, with some inclusion of 'religion' is taught. In other states, churches have merged their denomination instruction. The situation and debates are similar in Austria and in Switzerland. It is expected, however, that a shift to such an integrated subject – in which all students have to

³Ibidem.

⁴Basic law for the Federal Republic of Germany Art 7.

⁵Ibidem GG Art 7(3).

⁶Bayrische Staatskanzlei (ed.), *Bayern. Recht. [Bayrische Verfassung]*. Art 136.

⁷Bavarian law on education and teaching (BayEUG). Art 147. 2000.

take part, may occur in other states too. This involves constitutional changes, and the consent of the religious communities affected, whose right to denominational instruction in religion for their student members is guaranteed.

Considering that these countries comprise about 100 million inhabitants, with Germany being the by far most populous nation in the EU, this is of cultural significance outside of the German-speaking realm too.

The position paper endorsed by the DVRW, the German association for science of religion and its critique

At the recent (bi-annual) conference of the DVRW (the *Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft*), 2023 in Bayreuth, a position paper, endorsed by the by the leadership of the society, was presented for debate by the members,⁸ and reflected in some presentations.⁹ The paper expresses a call for a comprehensive subject, comprising religions and ethics, for all students – to replace the present system. Teachers for this new subject would be required to study science of religion. [A central argument is made, that denominational instruction in religion includes 'theological perspectives', deemed 'unscientific'. This may be questioned as artificial and hardly tenable.]

This is expressed as follows: Decisive for the contents of 'instruction on religion ('Religionskunde'), is the definition and framing of its topic. Religion is not simply 'given'. It is being constructed anew socially all the time, and is appropriated individually and societally. (...) 'Religionskunde' investigates these processes of construction of religion from the perspectives of comparative empiricism, and also in analytical perspectives of culture and social sciences. This way of determining its subject is distinct not only from unscientific concepts of religion, but also from theological and philosophical accesses to religion. The latter concepts of religion, and accesses to it, can be topics of 'Religionskunde' but not their didactical framework." [in translation].¹⁰

This passage about the contents contains problematic statements. (It comes across as a programme for the study of science of religion, rather than as anything practically applicable in classroom.) It may be asked, how students – let us say of medium tier 'professional schools' ('Berufsschulen') should be capable of identifying 'processes of social construction' of tenets of the Islamic faith without having a minimum of understanding of what 'Islam is, i. e. of its tenets of faith. Whose 'processes', where? Who would be the unnamed 'agents' of such processes of construction? The notion, that even egalitarian forms of religion, such as Sunni Islam or Evangelicalism, have doctrinal authority, and authorities, that limit the idea of 'constant social (?) construction by anybody', is ignored. (The historical continuity, ad sense of collective identity, that is based on doctrine and forms of practice, is ignored in this 'constructivist' approach, that appears as 'deconstruction' by denying such identities, collective unity in diversity, and which fragments the notion of 'tradition' by isolating changes and developments in religions, that react to cultural and social factors, and that influence them. The impression conveys itself, that the notion of (any) 'religion' is deliberately 'deconstructed' in order to reduce phenomena, tenets of faith, and doctrinal developments to

assumed social and 'cultural' factors – while ignoring the reciprocal relation between 'culture' and 'religion' in any society. On this basis, the meaning of the last sentence in this quote becomes apparent: If 'theological and philosophical concepts of religion' can be 'topics' but not 'didactical frame', then how should a student (or pupil) become capable of understanding tenets of faith ('theological concepts') of any religion, if neither the teacher nor the student is given a 'didactical frame' in which to understand such tenets of faith, and their coherence, that constitute the doctrinal coherence and identity of any faith ('religion')? If the study of the '-emic' aspects of a religion, be it from a theological or philosophical perspective is excluded from the 'didactical frame', then it remains enigmatic, how students should arrive at any comprehensive 'understanding' – in a profound sense - of a minimum of any religion should be made possible. The claim, that the doctrines of any religion would still be 'topics', rings hollow, if thinking along their lines is ruled out – for the classroom, and for the formation of its teachers.

As to religious knowledge – e. g. to give a Roman Catholic or a secular student an idea, what Muslims adhere to as 'Islamic faith', the position paper declares, that such instruction on religion "doesn't evaluate religious contents of practices. Rather, it analyses the different premises of formation of judgements on values. 'Religionskunde' is thus not education in religion, but aims at scientifically based knowledge about religion."¹¹ This means, for instance, when Buddhism is subject, the doctrinal reasons for celibacy or abstention from meat, are not explained doctrinally, or if so, only marginally, but that social or cognitivist reasons may be sought, why Buddhists 'construct' such values. The student will be left with little knowledge of Buddhism as a religion, but much about presumed reasons for such values. This is unfortunately indicted in the position paper. It polemicalises against the concept of 'world religions' as 'essentialistic and as 'based predominantly on Christian concepts,¹² (- as if that were an argument about theoretical validity of the concept of a specific religion). While a view to the specific manifestations and differentiation of religious life and creeds, in different cultural environments is certainly insightful. The rejection of the concept of an a specific religion – such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, or even Umbanda – which is enshrined in binding doctrines and practices, that demarcate the limits and collective identities of their followers, as belonging to this community, is questionable, to say the least. To base common instruction on religion(s) on such a premise that ignores the traditions, doctrinal coherence, and collective identities of such religions, is hardly justifiable, in view of their historical existence and self-awareness. To make a trend in science of religion a matter of principle for instruction on religions, is certainly out of proportion.

This declaration thus comes across as a definition of a specific – social constructivist - approach in science of religion that claims universal validity, regardless of other paradigms in the field – such as the phenomenological, in previous decades, and resurfacing. Instead, a vague polemic against "unscientific concept of religion" is voiced – without giving an example of what is meant, and why. It is a narrow concept, whose practical applicability in the classroom is not reflected. (As to applicability in the practice of teaching: Which teacher, in Bavaria, would be able to identify such 'construction processes, and its agents, e. g. in Egypt? Then, how would such insight be communicated to students? And for which purpose?)

⁸DVRW. Grundsatzpapier zu Religionskunde in der Schule. Bayreuth; 2023.

⁹DVRW. Under Construction – Religion als Praxis und Prozess. Book of Abstracts. Bayreuth; 2023.

¹⁰German association for religious studies. Bremen; 2023;2.

¹¹Ibidem.

¹²Ibidem.

Polemics against denominational instruction in religion, and the ignoring of its inclusion of perspectives of science of religion: with a view to denominational instruction in protestant religion – the example of curriculum for upper secondary schools in the state of Bavaria

The polemics, juxtaposing denominational religious education with integrated instruction about religion, based on science of religion ignores, that perspectives of the science of religion are integrated in the former. Thus, the curriculum for grade 12 of adult education in upper secondary schools ('Berufsoberschulen') in Bavaria¹³ prescribes: "Expectation of competencies: The students

- 1) Consciously perceive different forms of religion, of religions and world views in their life world, and describe the plurality that manifests itself thus
- 2) Distinguish between different concepts of 'religion' (...)
Contents to these competencies
 - 1) Individual and communal forms of religion, religions and world views, facultative their backgrounds,
 - 2) Conceptual definitions of religion, e. g. according to content, form or function (...)
 - 3) The role of religion in forming identity, in the course of a life-time of individuals or of communities
 - 4) An example, as from inter-religious dialogue, tensions between plurality and the claim to truth and authority (like symbols of faith and confessions in public space, opinions on mission).¹⁴

Observably, these guidelines are far more differentiated than what the position paper of the DVRW proposes, as to the aspects of religion. Different approaches of science of religion, reflecting different paradigms, are discernible: like a unified concept of 'religion' as prevalent in the early and middle 20th century, e. g. proposed by Rudolf Otto,¹⁵ a phenomenological approach, as by Gerardo's van der Leeuw,¹⁶ Mircea Eliade.¹⁷ Then, approaches of describing and analysing specific religions, and religious formations in their cultural and social conditions, are reflected, as proposed by Burkhard Gladigow, described thus: "Gladigow's work (...) and its turn away from an ahistorical understanding of religion as sui generis and towards a multi-perspective discipline, which sees ›religion‹ as a fluent field of research, connected with possibly all areas of culture..."¹⁸ This position is discernible in the 'Position paper' of the DVRW, 2023. Gladigow's emphasis on studying religions and their formations in their specific historical contexts,¹⁹ is likewise observable here. However, as Jörg

¹³ISB - Staatsinstitut für Schulqualität und Bildungsforschung, München (ed.), Lehrplan Plus. Evangelische Religionslehre. Berufsoberschule. 2018.

¹⁴ISB - Staatsinstitut für Schulqualität und Bildungsforschung, München (ed.), Lehrplan Plus. Evangelische Religionslehre. Berufsoberschule. 2020.

¹⁵Otto Rudolf. *Das Heilige – Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, Breslau, 1917. English ed. *The Idea of the Holy*. 1970.

¹⁶Johan Figl. *Phenomenology of religions*. Tübingen. 2nd ed. 1956.

¹⁷Eliade Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The nature of religion*. In: Willard R Trask, San Diego, editors. 1987.

¹⁸Grieser Alexandra, Koch Anne. Religion in Culture – Culture in Religion: Burkhard Gladigow's Contribution to the Paradigm Shift in the Study of Religion". In: Auffahrt Christoph, Grieser Alexandra, Koch Anne, editors. *"Religion in Culture and Culture in Religion". Burkhard Gladigow's Contribution to Shifting Paradigms in the Study of Religion*. Tübingen. 2021;11(5):12 p.

¹⁹Rüpke Jörg. Systematische Religionswissenschaft« und

Rüpke states critically: "as a historical disciple, [science of religion] ... may not relinquish a 'claim to systematics' ... to better grasp long lasting constellations ... by heuristics that have been sharpened by comparisons of culture..."²⁰

A 'de constructivist' approach to religion, that investigates (any) religion solely as 'created' by 'actors' in specific circumstances, is expressed in the following passage of the position paper: "To these widespread ... stereotypes ... belongs the so-called 'world religions paradigm.' ... Hereby, generalised statements are made about these religions, e. g. about their faith, religious practice or ethical positions. Such concepts --- are viewed critically in education about religion as 'essentialisations', and 'religion' is investigated in life-worldly contexts instead."²¹ This statement ignores the systems theory approach to the study of religions as auto-referential systems, as expounded by Ulrich Berner.²² It also ignores the organisational continuity of some religions – with the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox, and Oriental Christian Churches, being arguably the oldest organisations existing, with structural, and doctrinal, coherence since over two millennia. It is indeed an 'essential' fact, to be taken notice of, that provides these Churches – as well as other religious communities of similar 'longue durée' and doctrinal coherence, with identifiable positions of statements of faith, religious practice – es encoded in the binding forms of liturgy, over century, and of ethics, despite developments in these realms and variations that are accepted. The polemics against the identification of major (world) religions as such coherent entities, in this context of a position paper, endorsed by the DVRW in 2023, to advance general instruction of 'religion' for all on the basis of science of religion, is thus questionable. (Proposals for instruction of religion at schools, that do not take religions into view, as they define themselves, are understood by their adherents, and exists as coherent organisations with binding doctrines, may find difficulty in attaining public acceptance.)

A brief view shows, that the curricular prescriptions on a multi-faceted study of 'religion' (as such), and of specific religions, in the life-world of students, from 'emic' and 'etic' perspectives, in their role for individuals, and for communities, and cultures, and the issue of positing oneself towards them, and, finally, the theme of inter-religious encounter and dialogue, are to be well considered here. This includes 'theological perspectives' by necessity – for the understanding of other religions, presented in this unit, in denominational instruction of (protestant) religion, - as leading to an individual engagement with the value systems and beliefs of a specific other religion (than the own). It is considered that this challenges a student to become aware of his or her own beliefs, in the encounter with the religiously 'other'. Considering the differentiated approach to the study of other religions, in this curriculum, with includes different perspectives of science of religion, it appears that the polemics against denominational instruction of religion as 'theologically biased', and lacking in 'scientific' approach, is unfounded and somewhat ignorant of the differentiated and comprehensive reception of perspectives in science of religion – beyond the narrowly 'constructivist' – in curricula of Protestant and Roman Catholic religious instruction. It is self-evident, that its teachers, are required to have taken courses in the subject as part of their studies towards their Masters degrees in theology, as requirements for teaching the subject.

»Religionsgeschichte«: Von Wach zu Gladigow". In: Auffahrt Christoph, Grieser Alexandra, Kocvh Anne, editors. *Religion in Culture and Culture in Religion. Burkhard Gladigow's Contribution to Shifting Paradigms in the Study of Religion*. Tübingen. 2021;69–88.

²⁰Ibidem.

²¹German Association for Religious Studies. Bremen; 2023. 2 p.

²²Berner Ulrich. *Untersuchungen zur Verwendung des Synkretismus-Begriffs*. Wiesbaden; 1982.

For historical reasons – as by the formative influence of the Reformation on the history and cultures of much of this realm -- a philosophy of inclusion of the Churches and recognised religious communities into the social life and education is pursued, that is legally entrenched in constitutions (notwithstanding the religious-philosophical neutrality of the state). This provides for their active inclusion into education on all levels, in forms of cooperation between state(s) and Church. The present (prevalent) structure of compulsory denominational religious instruction, or secular ethics, at choice, and of the academic training of teachers at denominational faculties of theology, or of other recognised religions.

A view on debate about proposals for integrated instruction on religion and ethics, as background

The debate on the introduction of such integrated instruction for all has been going on for years. It became charged with political agendas of culture, sometimes also with a bias against Churches and religious communities. They would be eliminated from involvement in the development of curricula, and also from the formation of teachers of the subject, by exclusion of graduates of theology from teaching such integrated subject at schools. This problematic, because students would be deprived of the possibility to study a religion – their own – in depth, and to attain a profound understanding of it – also as basis for a deepened understanding of their historically Christian culture. For Islamic students, as for others, they would be deprived of the possibility to be introduced to their own religion 'from within', enabling an intrinsic understanding. Therefore, these proposals at replacement, have met with considerable resistance, also in Austria.²³ Likewise, the Churches, and religious communities, affected, have firmly rejected such proposals of a secular integrated instruction on religion.²⁴ Interestingly, also representatives of associations for atheists criticised the proposals, because the firmly secular subject of 'Ethics' would be abolished too.²⁵

The proposal for integrated instruction in religion and ethics for all students, reflects the abandonment of the paradigm, that 'religion' is bound to die off, as widely held in the mid-twentieth century. Awareness, that the religions have developed complex systems of morals, and their theory, has been adopted as an argument for the integration of the study of religions in an integrated instruction for all, too.²⁶ With the public interest in promoting ethics by such instruction, and values, the integration of religious communities into the instruction, as content, and in the process of curricular development and training, has received new legitimacy.²⁷ This aspect is missing in the position paper of the DVRW.

Another aspect also requires reflection: The claim of science of religion as 'neutral' and as a science 'describing from outside' – also

²³Willems Joachim. He interweaving of internal and external perspectives in theology and religious studies as well as in religious education and religious studies". In: *Journal for Pedagogy and Theology*. 2009;61(3):276 p.

²⁴Jakobs Monika. Das Terrain der Religionspädagogik jenseits des Konfessionalismus. Eine Perspektive aus der Schweiz". In: *Theo-Web. Zeitschrift für Religionspädagogik*. 2016;58–76.

²⁵Bucher Anton. *Erfahrungen und Schlussfolgerungen aus den Schulversuchen auf der Basis der offiziellen Evaluation im Auftrag des BMUKK. Impulsreferat zur Parlamentarischen Enquete „Werteerziehung durch Religions- und Ethikunterricht in einer offenen, pluralistischen Gesellschaft“*. Wien. 2017;8–10.

²⁶Wurzrainer Robert. *Konfessioneller Religionsunterricht und Ethikunterricht in Österreich aus religionswissenschaftlicher Perspektive*. Univ of Vienna. Vienna; 2015. 62 p.

²⁷Feichtinger Christian. Religionenlernen im Ethikunterricht. Ein Versuch aus der Perspektive einer angewandten Religionswissenschaft. In: *ÖRF*. 2014;22:143–151.

mentioned in the position paper – may be too limited. It has been identified as 'paradox of neutrality.'²⁸ To illustrate: This might be compared to a study of music that excludes the practicing of music as unscientific.²⁹ The inclusion of an interior, perspective, as of faith and its tenets, and of practice and experience, may this be necessary for a more profound understanding of a religion.³⁰ It is a challenge to science of religion to integrate these dimensions too. To exclude the theological perspectives in the studying and teaching of any religion, would be to teach the philosophy of Plato without presenting Plato's world view and gnoseology. It would deprive a student of the possibility of understanding Plato's thought, and to think on Platonic lines. It is questionable, why the same should not apply to the understanding of any religion – and to be deemed 'unscientific' from the perspective of science of religion.

Considering the ongoing secularisation, however, the necessity to the basic knowledge of religions – of Christianity in particular – as basis for the understanding to culture, emerges as a necessity. The inclusion of instruction about religions in secular ethics reflects this awareness.³¹ The 'claim to secularity' as fundamental approach of science of religion³² – also as regards integrated instruction – may thus need some revision. Specifically, the 'theological perspective is to be included.

A 'deconstructivist' approach to religion, that investigates (any) religion solely as 'created' by 'actors' in specific circumstances, is expressed in the following passage of the position paper: "To these widespread ... stereotypes ... belongs the so-called 'world religions paradigm.' ... Hereby, generalised statements are made about these religions, e. g. about their faith, religious practice or ethical positions. Such concepts --- are viewed critically in education about religion as 'essentialisations', and 'religion' is investigated in life-worldly contexts instead."

- 1) This statement ignores the systems theory approach to the study of religions as auto-referential systems, as expounded by Ulrich Berner.
- 2) It also ignores the organisational continuity of some religions – with the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox, and Oriental Christian Churches, being arguably the oldest organisations existing, with structural, and doctrinal, coherence since over two millennia.

It is indeed an 'essential' fact, to be taken notice of, that provides these churches – as well as other religious communities of similar 'longue durée' and doctrinal coherence, with identifiable positions of statements of faith, religious practice – es encoded in the binding forms of liturgy, over century, and of ethics, despite developments in these realms and variations that are accepted. The polemics against the identification of major (world) religions as such coherent entities, in this context of a position paper, endorsed by the DVRW in 2023, to advance general instruction of 'religion' for all on the basis of science of religion, is thus questionable. (Proposals for instruction of religion at schools, that do not take religions into view, as they define themselves, are understood by their adherents, and exists as coherent organisations with binding doctrines, may find difficulty in attaining public acceptance.)

²⁸Wurzrainer Robert. *Konfessioneller Religionsunterricht und Ethikunterricht in Österreich aus religionswissenschaftlicher Perspektive*. Vienna; 2015. 68 p.

²⁹Ibidem.

³⁰Ibidem.

³¹Feichtinger Christian. Religionenlernen im Ethikunterricht. Ein Versuch aus der Perspektive einer angewandten Religionswissenschaft. In: *ÖRF*. 2014;143–151.

³²Schröder Stefan. Secular religious education in public schools. In: *Controversial secularity*. 2020;28(2).

Conclusion

While the position paper formulates the need for a stronger inclusion of science of religion in the formation of teachers on religion, and also of curricula, its polemics against denominational instruction in religion, is questionable. This also extends to its rejection of the inclusion of 'theological perspectives'. It ignores the extent to which science of religion is taught at theological faculties, and forms part of the studies of theology. In view of ongoing secularisation, the proposal for integrated instruction on religion, is certainly well-founded. It agrees with a growing insight in cultural debates about the need for basic 'religious literacy', as foundation for inter-religious and -inter-cultural encounters, as well as of understanding the own (dominant) culture of the Germans speaking countries as historically Christian. That this cultural dimension is rather lacking in the position paper, is somewhat deplorable, but reflects a trend in denominations curricula as well, that focus on values and ethics, rather than cultural history. In view of these deficits, the position paper may be rather regarded as a valuable manifest for further discussion, towards the strengthening of the role of science of religion. It may require, and inspire further

debate to mature towards a more integrated approach, also as regards the other agents in the field, to gain wider acceptance.

To exclude the theological perspectives in the studying and teaching of any religion, would be to teach the philosophy of Plato without presenting Plato's world view and gnoseology. It would deprive a student of the possibility of understanding Plato's thought, and to think on Platonic lines. It is questionable, why the same should not apply to the understanding of any religion – and to be deemed 'unscientific' from the perspective of science of religion.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding

None.