

Dear Vice-President Professor Karle, dear Professor Jahnel, dear Professor Scheunpflug, dear Professor Jütte, dear Dr. Parlindungan, dear colleagues, dear PhD students, dear all,

as Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Protestant Theology I welcome you all to this Autumn School at the Ruhr University in Bochum. It is an honour to have you all here.

I have specialized in the field of Practical Theology, more specifically in the field of Religious Education. So exploring the “Potentials of Global Learning in Religious Networks” is of high interest to me. And I would like to spell out some resonances.

In Religious Education at schools in Germany, globalization is reflected in three dimensions of the curricula: global responsibility, global Christianity and global religions.

The first dimension is by far the most prominent: The climate crisis with its global ramifications calls for a heightened awareness of global responsibility. What can we do? What do we have to do? And what will the world look like if we fail? However, laying the burden of global responsibility on the shoulders of children and youngsters can also be problematic – because their political influence – as for now – is minimal. But we have seen in the last years that young people take to the streets, speak out and claim their right to a planet that is worth living on.

In a Christian perspective, we might also ask: What does it mean to view the world as God’s Creation? Does it add further to the burden of responsibility or can it make us more confident, trusting that where we might fail there is still hope?

With regard to the other two dimensions of global religious learning, I would like to point out that the representation of global religions in school curricula and school books in Germany has been criticized. It has been criticized for its tendency to present the so-called world religions as more or less independent monolithic blocks. Geographically, these blocks are then neatly distributed across continents and countries: Europe and America are labelled Christian, the near East is linked with Islam, the far East (India and Pakistan) with Buddhism and Hinduism, Israel with Judaism. Africa risks to be left with the label of “indigenous religions”. This means that various Christian traditions in different African countries remain more or less invisible – along with their highly problematic history of colonization.

This misrepresentation of religions in a global perspective – which I have exaggerated for purposes of clarity – does not (only) stem from ignorance on the part of those who are responsible for school curricula and school books. I think it (also) stems from a certain model of global learning that *equates essentialism with didactic reduction*. There is an indisputable need to reduce or simplify (or, as German scholars call it: to elementarize) complex phenomena

in teaching. Curricula must exclude, they must reduce complexity. This does not only apply to school curricula, but also to curricula at university level – and I have seen that my colleague Claudia Jahnel is going to give a keynote address on the subject of decolonizing the curriculum at University level.

The logic behind the misrepresentation that I have outlined is *not* to claim that things are as they are represented. People in religious education know that the world is far more complex than it appears in the classroom. The logic behind the misrepresentation is rather to claim that the representation as it stands allows and enables pupils to move on towards a more adequate perception of world religions and global Christianity as they grow older. And it is this logic – rather than the misrepresentation in itself – that has to be critically questioned.

The educational, didactic challenge, then, is to re-conceptualize the progression from “simple” to “more complex” in global religious learning. We need a new, a different, starting point, a starting point that does *not* recognize essentialism as an adequate form of didactic reduction. What could a simple, elementary representation of global religions and global Christianity look like? A representation that meets the requirements of postcolonial pedagogy without leaving children and young people behind because of its complexity?

These questions that are already being tackled need ongoing exchange between different partners and institutions: universities as well as educational boards and churches. They need networks like this one where different voices from all over the world can be heard and new ideas can be exchanged. So: Thank you very much for coming here!

In the New Testament, Jesus tells us about the sower who went out to sow. Some seed fell on the path, some on rocky ground or among thorns – and perished. The pandemic with its manifold restrictions has put networks at risk. It made the ground barren in the past two years. But some seed, the Gospel tells us, fell on good soil and flourished. If I was asked what my idea of such good soil might be, I would describe a network like this one.

I wish you a fruitful Autumn School: Let it grow, make it grow!

Thank you.

Hanna Roose