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8. Vollversammlung der Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa  
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# Education for a Future

**Educational work of Protestant churches**

**in South, Central and Eastern Europe –**

**A study by the Southeast Europe Regional Group in  
the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe**

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Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE)  
Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)  
Communión d'Eglises Protestantes en Europe (CEPE)

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**... and wisdom is rejoicing in his presence (Proverbs 8:30)**

Preface by OKR Rev. Michael Martin, leader of the CPCE Southeast Europe Regional Group

“And here, right beside the church, is the school,” the Eferdingen pastor proudly tells us, the members of the Regional Group Southeast Europe. What at first glance seems perfectly natural is not so at all. The roots of the Eferding congregation, located near Linz, reach back to the Reformation. In 1783 a dilapidated house was bought and patched up as a prayer house. It was not until 1830 that the congregation received permission to build a church, and they built a new parsonage and school building at the same time. And in 1924 they extended the school.

Church and school, worship and teaching – how closely they are linked in the history of Protestantism, not only in Eferding. And this also goes back to the Reformation. Next to the reformer Martin Luther stands Philipp Melancthon, the Praeceptor Germaniae (teacher of Germany), who was actually a Praeceptor Europae in view of his Europe-wide networking and his scholarly contribution to Protestantism. Or let us think of Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670), who began as a teacher, became bishop of Unitas Fratrum (the Moravian Church), had to flee across Europe during the Thirty Years War, and became one of the first modern educators in Europe. Or just remember that the ministry of teachers is firmly anchored in the Reformation tradition, and that one of their tasks, according to the Geneva Church Constitution (1541/1561) largely drawn up by John Calvin, is “to instruct the faithful in the salutary doctrine, so that the purity of the Gospel will be clouded neither by ignorance nor by false doctrines”. And as a special service: the “encouragement of young talents”.

This close connection between church and school, or church and education, still characterizes Protestantism today with its many shining but sometimes also somewhat darker, regimented sides – even if we are not always aware of this connection. With the study “Education for a Future” the Southeast Europe Regional Group has asked questions about the ties existing between church and school, between worship and classes today – in short: about the importance of education for Protestantism.

We have discovered enormous educational diversity in our churches, a wealth of educational institutions, of theological and pedagogical approaches, of modern forms of teaching and learning. Where today education is flourishing, learning the catechisms, reading the Bible and preaching (*publice docere*) were, in Reformation times, the Protestant form of the teaching profession. This area of activity has emerged as an indispensable element in communicating the gospel. ‘Faith formation’ became a good key word in this context. And we have rediscovered an old insight. What role does education play in church life? One answer for us is: a similar role to that played by wisdom before God – its “rejoicing” opens up scope for faith in the world.

## **1. The study and its context – Introduction**

### **1.1. The study project “Education for a Future” in the context of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)**

#### **a) CPCE General Assembly from 20 to 26 September 2012 in Florence**

In European Protestantism, education has always had an identity-forming significance. It represents an outstanding field of work of Protestant churches in Europe. Protestant educational activity should be deepened in the context of developments in the European educational area, and in cooperation between the churches and their educational institutions. In order to do so, we need to address political, social and scientific educational processes in Europe. That is why the General Assembly of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) in Florence passed the following resolution: “The General Assembly requests the Council to commission a study investigating the subject ‘Education for a Future’. The General Assembly proposes that the Southeast Europe Regional Group be entrusted with this task.”<sup>1</sup>

This resolution is closely linked to other CPCE topics and issues that were worked on up until the General Assembly in Florence. Examples are the study “Training for the Ordained Ministry in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe”<sup>2</sup> (presented at Florence in 2012), likewise the publication “Religious education. Passing on faith in European Protestantism”<sup>3</sup> or the symposium “Education for the Future. Between qualification and orientation. Protestant perspectives for a European area of education” (Tutzing, 2011).<sup>4</sup>

#### **b) Council meeting of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, Vienna, 15-17 February 2013**

In February 2013 the CPCE Council, meeting in Vienna, took the following decisions:

“1. The Council decides to make 'education' a priority in the working period up to the next General Assembly.

2. The Council requests the CPCE Southeast Europe Regional Group to conduct a study on 'Education for a Future' in accordance with the resolution of the Florence General Assembly. This study is to be submitted to the next General Assembly.

3. The Council decides, in cooperation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (ELCB) and the Academy in Tutzing, to establish a 'Forum on Education in Europe' for the entire

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<sup>1</sup> Final report 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Florence, 2012, 3.6.

<sup>2</sup> Die Ausbildung für das ordinationsgebundene Amt in der Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa, in: Michael Bünker / Martin Friedrich (Hg.), Amt, Ordination, Episkopé und theologische Ausbildung (Leuenberger Texte 13), Leipzig 2013. “Training for the Ordained Ministry in the CPCE” was translated by Alasdair Heron.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Friedrich / Hans Jürgen Luibl (Hg.), Glaubensbildung. Die Weitergabe des Glaubens im europäischen Protestantismus, Leipzig 2012.

<sup>4</sup> See the report on the symposium by Hans Jürgen Luibl: Bildung der Zukunft zwischen Qualifizierung und Orientierung, in: GEKE *focus* 14 (2011), 3.

work period and thereby to harness the momentum from the Education Forum in 2011. The Forum will take the form of an annual consultation and will primarily aim to involve experts and church leaders in the member churches with responsibility for educational questions.

4. The Council asks Klára Tarr Cselovszky to convene the project on Education and to clarify the financial and organizational requirements for implementing the project in negotiations with the ELCB and the Tutzing Academy.”

### **1.2. Preliminary considerations for the work in both CPCE subprojects**

The aim is a *theological and pedagogical understanding* of a common gospel-oriented notion of education that would correspond to current educational theories. Many approaches can be found in the history of denominations and churches that cannot be unified into a single educational model, but they may be bundled into guidelines that open up some future perspectives.

Each church has developed *its own ways of doing church educational work* and has expanded its own priorities. Appreciating such priorities, sharing them in friendly solidarity, and developing them further in the context of European challenges will pave the way to a common Protestant understanding of education.

Finally, education is a pan-European issue, but it develops in national contexts. It is therefore all the more important to consciously consider the respective *national, regional and cultural challenges facing educational activity*. That will help us to better understand the specific educational challenges to the individual churches and their responses, and to make them fruitful in discussions among the churches.

A central question relates to the profile and contribution of Protestant educational action in the European educational area. Especially in view of the educational activities of European bodies (Council of Europe, EU), even more attention needs to be paid to church responsibility for education in the international context.

### **1.3. The project “forum bildung Europa”**

A “forum for education in Europe” was founded in order to enable an exchange between CPCE churches and their educational institutions and to work on common issues. It also aimed to develop guidelines for the educational action of the CPCE churches. Meeting annually in the Protestant Academy in Tutzing (Germany), the forums took up the topics:

- **Focuses and profiles of Protestant educational action in Europe, 26–28 October 2015, Tutzing Protestant Academy (Bavaria, Germany)**

- **Europe as a foreign homeland. Migration and Identity from the post-war period to the present – challenges for Protestant educational work in the church and diakonia**, 5-6 December 2016, Schloss Fürstenried, Munich (Bavaria, Germany)<sup>5</sup>

Despite common topics, the project “forum bildung Europa” and the study “Education for a Future” must be clearly distinguished from each other. The forum is advertised throughout Europe in the context of the CPCE churches and deals with various topics on an annual basis.

The study “Education for a Future” is a project of the Southeast Europe Regional Group, which worked on this topic during the entire period between the General Assemblies. Of course, the questions are also linked. The results of the forum, designed to lead to guidelines for CPCE educational action, were therefore also received and discussed in the Regional Group. Members of the Regional Group were involved in the forum’s work. CPCE president Dr Klára Tarr Cselovszky, who had taken over the management of the educational projects according to the Council decision, linked up the two projects in terms of personnel and content, and ensured that they remained aligned with Council decision-making.

#### **1.4. The project “Education for a Future” of the Southeast Europe Regional Group**

The main approach of the Regional Group is dealing with the current experiences and challenges facing the Protestant understanding of education, and educational action by the churches in the region. The core of the project is a number of significant case studies illustrating Protestant responsibility for education. Its aim is to identify the profiles and priorities of churches in the region.

A theological and pedagogical reflection is indispensable here, as far as it serves to explain and optimize educational action in church and society. This involves looking at the results of CPCE’s educational activity to date. The basic question is how faith and education are linked in the different Protestant traditions and how they reflect the understanding of education in the whole of society.

The study seeks to develop perspectives and guidelines for Protestant educational responsibility in the European educational area, and introduce them to the CPCE.

#### **1.5. Structure of the study**

The aim of the study is to raise awareness of the diverse educational activities of the churches of the Regional Group. This relates to the question of defining Protestant educational action and its role in the further development of our churches in various educational settings. Finally, the study develops ideas on the form Protestant educational action should take in future.

The study is divided into the following topics and sections:

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<sup>5</sup> On the Forum 2016 see the documentation of the meeting, prepared and edited by Sylvia Losansky, Erlangen 2017, [www.bee-erlangen.eu/content/forum-bildung-europa-2016](http://www.bee-erlangen.eu/content/forum-bildung-europa-2016). Contributions to Forums 2016 and 2015 are available at <https://www.bee-erlangen.eu/content/forum-bildung-europa-2016>.

Section 2: If and insofar as education is a basic function of the church, it must become more clearly visible as a part of church action based on faith. This means exploring the biblical foundations, the formative role of piety in the historical development of Protestant education, and the theological reasoning. Section 3 names the secular European challenges for education within which Protestant education is taking place and relates them to the question about what the role of the church in the European educational area could be. Section 4 presents the priorities of Protestant education in case studies, setting out insights and challenges. Finally, section 5 presents guidelines for church educational action in future.

The study focuses on a systematic examination of case studies from the member churches of the Regional Group – hence it is neither a theological case study in the classical sense nor simply a study of theological education. The use of language presented interpretational challenges of a special kind. Under the keyword and phenomenon of “*Bildung*” (education, formation), this study brings together both theological and pedagogical terms and thought forms; we encounter educational traditions shaped differently in church and society that need to be put in relation to one another. And since education is in the responsibility of countries and federal states throughout Europe, the individual regional contexts with their distinctive traditions and legal frameworks must also be taken into account – this again represents a special challenge for the work of interpretation.

### **1.6. Practical concerns**

The theological work done by the Regional Group and its reflecting on the case studies has led to deeper insights into the fundamental interrelationship of church and education and the relevance of the topic of education for the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. The Regional Group would therefore like to introduce the following practical concerns for the further work of the CPCE:

- a) CPCE’s ecclesiological processes of self–understanding must also take account of education as an essential feature of the church. The CPCE should therefore be understood not only as a teaching community but also, and more comprehensively, as a learning community. A study process on the topic “The CPCE as a learning community” should explore how to understand this within the framework of the CPCE doctrinal talks on ‘the church’ and on ‘church communion’, and how it may be imagined for the future of CPCE.
- b) CPCE churches need to improve communication about their educational activities, and to network more intensively between their educational institutions.
- c) The “forum bildung Europa” should be continued in order to promote this networking.
- d) *Herzensbildung* (emotional education) *Glaubensbildung* (faith formation) could do with more research as guiding concepts of specifically Protestant educational activity. This could happen at Protestant educational institutions, theological faculties and academic conferences. Cooperation between the CPCE and academic institutions has already begun on some issues and could increase for this purpose.

## **2. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Proverbs 9:10) – biblical and theological assurance**

### **2.1. “But Mary treasured up ... and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Protestant education, faith formation and religious studies**

Protestant education comprises many different educational acts. By definition it takes place in Protestant responsibility and out of Protestant faith. Its goals and content, however, are determined by its target groups and institutional contexts.

An essential field of Protestant education is faith formation.<sup>6</sup> This is the complex process in which “a person and faith are integrated”.<sup>7</sup> Believers understand and live all aspects of their life from faith. They understand faith in the light of their own life within all its social relationships. This process varies according to the individual. It may be continuous, but it may also include ruptures, new beginnings and doubts.

This process of faith formation includes the ability to talk about one's faith with other people, to be articulate and to understand others in their faith. Education takes place in dialogue, faith is formed through relationships. Humans amaze each other, alienate each other, or challenge each other to respond. They enrich each other by telling about their lives (in faith) and sharing their longings, their wounds and their hopes. People often speak indirectly or only hint at their faith. They search for their own way of expressing it. This calls for sensitive listening and a space of trust.

Integrating faith and life means placing one's life in the light of the gospel, living from the Gospel, and exploring its meaning together with others. Faith formation is an open process. Important elements are participation in worship, listening to the gospel, receiving the Lord's Supper together, praying together and alone, religious art and religious rituals. Faith formation takes place in everyday situations and in formal education, in friendly conversations and in Bible studies. It may happen in lectures or writing workshops, in ecumenical discussion groups or through helping to organize social events in the parish – these are just a few of the possibilities.

Important elements in this process are participating in worship services, listening to the gospel, sharing in Holy Communion, praying alone and together, religious art and religious rituals. Faith formation takes place in everyday situations and in formal education, in friendly conversations and in Bible studies. It may happen in lectures or writing workshops, in

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<sup>6</sup> Hans Jürgen Luibl introduced the concept of *Glaubensbildung* as a central concept of a Protestant theory of education: Hans Jürgen Luibl, *Glaubensbildung als Zukunftsweg? Glaube & Bildung in nachmodernen Zeiten*, in: *Forum Erwachsenenbildung* 1 (2009), 12–16.

<sup>7</sup> Eberhard Harbsmeier, *Glaube und Bildung – Glaubensbildung. Historische und systematische Annäherungen*, in: Martin Friedrich / Hans Jürgen Luibl (Hg), *Glaubensbildung. Die Weitergabe des Glaubens im europäischen Protestantismus*, Leipzig 2012, 48–69, here 52.

ecumenical discussion groups or while helping organize a social event in your local church – and there are many more possibilities.

Faith formation as the integration of faith and life thus always contains a reflective aspect: “Faith formation reassures itself of its ground and its own development; it is a process in which we consciously, reflectively relate to religion and our own religiosity.”<sup>8</sup>

Protestant Christianity has often been particularly sensitive to recognising the respective, real-life educational challenges. For this reason, the individual churches have in the past set very different priorities in their educational theology and in their actual educational action. Many congregations and individual Christians are intensively and creatively engaged in educational activities. Where that happens, we must be truly grateful. Furthermore, we should acknowledge what a high proportion of church activity is devoted to education. Education is a fundamental mission of the church because its mandate to preach the gospel always calls for, and sparks education. Consequently, the church is always also an educational institution.<sup>9</sup>

By contrast with faith formation, *religiöse Bildung* (here translated as ‘religious knowledge’) means knowledge about religion and religions in their diversity but also empathy for religious interpretations of life, independently of our own religious or non-religious orientation. Understood this way, religious knowledge should be part of general education and lifelong learning in pluralist societies.

What do I do with this fact, God, that it was you who formed me?

You formed Adam out of earth.

And you formed me in secret. From almost nothing.

From two tiny cells.

And a breath.

So little and so much is a human being.

Made in your image.

What is your picture of humans?

And what do I think it means to be human?

What is my picture of the other and of myself?

Do I fit the picture others have of me?

And do I reflect your image in me?

<sup>8</sup> Hans Jürgen Luibl, *Glaubensbildung als Zukunftsweg? Glaube & Bildung in nachmodernen Zeiten*, in: *Forum Erwachsenenbildung* 1 (2009), 12-16, here 16.

<sup>9</sup> See Michael Bünker, *Der europäische Protestantismus. Eine Lerngemeinschaft des Glaubens und das Entstehen einer europäischen Bildungsgesellschaft*, in: Martin Friedrich / Hans Jürgen Luibl (Hg), *Glaubensbildung. Die Weitergabe des Glaubens im europäischen Protestantismus*, Leipzig 2012, 19-33, here 28.

Into what can I be formed and re-formed?  
 Does it really form me – every book, every newspaper?  
 Can a person be de-formed through images on screens?  
 What are you forming, God, from all that in us?  
 How are you continuing to form us, God?

You are an artist, God.  
 Your handicraft is visible  
 In the unending formative landscape of eternity.  
 Sometimes I sense it, your formative plan for me.  
 Sometimes I notice them, your assistants at my side.

I would like to be like clay in your hand, O God.  
 You, my maker, my creator.  
 You are the potter who makes me into a vessel  
 that can hold your Holy Spirit.

Andrea Aippersbach

## 2.2. Biblical dimensions of Protestant education

The following considerations came out of the discussions of the Regional Group. They make no claim to a systematic development or complete depiction of biblical educational thought and action. Instead, central Old and New Testament passages open up biblical horizons for education. The idea is that closely connecting them can reveal biblical formative processes initiated and sustained by faith.

### a) God creates life – relating to God, accepting ourselves as creatures and understanding creation

**20** When your children ask you in time to come, „What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the LORD our God has commanded you?“ **21** Then you shall say to your children, We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. **22** The LORD displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household. **23** He brought us out of there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. **24** Then the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case. **25** If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right.

Deuteronomy 6:20-25 (NRSV)

Where does education begin in the Old Testament? It begins in a story of liberation by God, with his wonders and deeds. The central act of God for the People of Israel is their liberation from slavery and entry into the Promised Land.

This primal scene of divine action is repeatedly recalled in order to gain strength for the future. This memory is double: on the one hand it is Passover in its ritualized form; on the other, it is the narrative of exodus, preservation and land-taking. The memory leads to a consequence connected with the experience and knowledge of liberation: the right knowledge of God and right action.

This is the primal scene of education: it starts with a divine act and thus forms 'God's' people and its identity. This action is experienced and made known through ritual - and it opens up knowledge of God and the world. What is important here is that God acts first and addresses the people of Israel. The individual is drawn into this event: Education is an 'in-forming' (*Ein-Bilden*) into this story: we are drawn in, able to join in the celebration, learn to understand. Education is holistic, but always oriented towards God's action and always relating to the fact that the individual can be drawn into the People of God and thus into God's will to salvation.

**23** For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you: that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. **25** In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (NRSV)

This New Testament text referring to Jesus' last meal also expresses the idea that God's action opens up experience and knowledge, people learn what is going on and are enabled to participate in salvation.

What is particularly exciting now is the keyword of *paradosis* ("transmission"): "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you." What is learnt here is not a matter of transmission or tradition, but of God himself. God gives the educational mandate, or in other words: the educational action is part of divine action. The central event of divine action, the *paradosis*, the handing over of life to death, which contains the handing over of death to life, coincides with the *paradosis* as the handing over of this message. So also from the understanding of words we see: the salvific event creates its own form of transmission, education as a formation of the new world.

**b) Teach, learn, obey and follow the Torah ("law") – conscience, orientation and responsibility**

The primal scene of biblical education has taken on certain shapes throughout history. The exile constitutes a break. Here, the Torah becomes Israel's new place of learning with

circumcision as a ritual assurance. The Torah must be taught and learned. This is what the repetition of the Torah, Deuteronomy, stands for. This is connected with a twofold goal: to do justice to God and to live rightly. That is why the Torah is holy, because it is the way of salvation.

To the extent that salvation focuses on the Torah, teaching and learning the Torah becomes central. Knowing the Torah is the way to salvation. That's why the Torah should be taught to the children, it should be inculcated into them so that they are familiarized with its depth and complexity. Torah learning becomes a lifelong learning – the Torah is not self-explanatory. It was and continues to be the subject of reinterpretation and commentary. One grows into the Torah as a great web of salvation. People should be encouraged to continue to interpret the Torah for themselves even in the present. The learning act consists of two parts: understanding and following.

If education is cognitively narrowed, we may also raise critical questions: Where is the liberating element of education and upbringing? The biblical texts remind us that learning also includes smelling and tasting, experience and primary adventures. Education and learning don't exhaust themselves in reproducing biblical texts. They call for ownership and liberated creativity. Education does not exclude anyone – rather, it unites different people in the experience of God's gift of salvation.

**14** Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned to Galilee. The news of him spread all over the area. **15** He taught in the synagogues and everyone spoke of him with the utmost respect. **16** So Jesus also came to Nazareth, where he had grown up. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue as usual. He stood up to read from the Holy Scriptures, **17** and the synagogue servant handed him the scroll with the words of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus rolled them up and chose the place where it says: **18** “The Spirit of the Lord has taken possession of me because the Lord has anointed and empowered me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to announce to the prisoners that they should be free, and to the blind that they will see. I shall bring freedom to the mistreated, **19** and proclaim the year in which the Lord will turn graciously to his people.” **20** Jesus rolled up the book again, gave it back to the synagogue servant and sat down. All in the synagogue looked at him curiously. **21** He began and said, “Today when you hear this prophet’s word from my mouth, it has come true among you.”

Luke 4:14-21

Jesus is presented here as a Torah teacher – but in a very specific interpretation: there is no teaching of some topic, no instruction about some matter, but the special teaching is the fulfilment of what is to be taught and learned.

When Jesus teaches, he not only interprets the wording of the Torah, but proclaims the will of God and proclaims salvation. Teaching is the disclosure of God's presence. Education is the visualization of God as participation in salvation.

The teacher of salvation does not simply have students who learn to follow the Torah, but this one has followers who participate in salvation. So learning is itself the discovery of salvation and a salutary process. Here we may also see a connection at the end of Matthew's Gospel.

**16** Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. **17** When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. **18** And Jesus came and said to them, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

Matthew 28:16-20 (NRSV)

“All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth – therefore go and *teach all nations.*” We may derive a Great Commission from this: the mission was to proselytize the peoples, to make them Christians. Like this English translation, Luther’s translation used to be “and *make disciples* of all nations” but it now reads “teach all nations” (Lutherbibel 2017). We need to read more carefully though: they should become disciples, followers, learners of salvation. This passage expresses a salutary concept of learning and a liberating understanding of education. And that has also proved itself: education opens spaces of salvation and liberates.

### c) Wisdom and its limits – shaping life and dealing with the world

In the post-exile, Hellenistic times, another accent of knowledge and awareness comes into faith formation, and that is wisdom. It comes from experience. It collects up empirical evidence to serve as orientation and open up living spaces. In a second step, this orientation knowledge is then transferred onto the relationship with God. Wisdom is also an option to understand God and divine actions. In some texts, wisdom itself is personified. It becomes the first birth of creation, is the sister of the Spirit, the alter ego of the Logos.

The fascinating thing about the concept of wisdom is that secular knowledge is thus absorbed and becomes knowledge for religious orientation. You can watch, consider experiences, and understand your own world: God has given the world divine wisdom, and people can understand God and the world by their own wisdom. Here, education is comprehensive knowledge for orientation. So far that approach had prevailed: understanding the world from the perspective of God's actions and the Torah. Now the focus is on understanding the divinely created world by ourselves and in this way learning to understand God.

**22** The LORD created me as the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. **23** Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. **24** When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. **25** Before the mountain had been shaped, before the hills I was brought forth – **26** when he had not

yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. **27** When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, **28** when he made firm the skies above, when he established the foundations of the deep, **29** when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he measured the foundations of the earth, / **30** then I was beside him, like a master worker and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, **31** rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. **32** And now, my children, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways. **33** Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. **34** Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. **35** For whoever finds me finds life, and obtains favour from the LORD. **36** But those who miss me injure themselves; all who hate me love death.

Proverbs 8:22-36 (NRSV)

In the New Testament we find wisdom and wisdom teaching in the form of parables. Jesus, the wisdom teacher, uses them to lead people into the coming, and growing, of the Kingdom of God. The point here is not that you could interpret something from the world that is simply there, but rather that there is something in the world that refers to another world. The parable tells of the leap out of this world into the Kingdom of God. The process of transmission takes humans rooted in this world into the Kingdom of God. Whoever listens to the parables is not simply instructed, but – similar to the teaching of the Torah – transferred into this new reality. The parable is the original form of education: it enables transfer, it creates freedom and counts on the dialectic of success and failure.

Wisdom includes knowing one's own limits and those of wisdom. In the Bible, wisdom and knowledge point to God's love, which is all in all. Paul expresses this definition of the relationship between wisdom and love in this way:

**8** Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. **9** For we know only in part, and we prophecy only in part; **10** but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. **11** When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; but when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

1 Corinthians 13:8-11 (NRSV)

Knowledge is piecemeal and remains bound to earthly life. Full knowledge, holistic cognition is only possible after the end, through God. But where God recognizes us as adults, full knowledge can already be experienced to some extent - not as *gnosis* ("earthly knowledge"), but as love. In biblical parlance, recognition as *ginosko* is also a holistic, a carnal and erotic event, even more: being attracted, perceiving and touching. The right knowledge is love and happens in response to love.

#### d) God's image from clay and breath – dealing with time and eternity

**7** Then the LORD formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. Genesis 2:7  
**26** Then God said, Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. **27** So **God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.** Genesis 1:26-7 (NRSV)

The basic history of education expresses an action of God: it is the forming of humans from clay and God's breath. As persons God is forming towards communion with the divine self, we are made in the image of God. Master Eckhart took up this idea of formation and from it developed his theory of education.

Education is a double event: it begins with the formation from clay. Therefore, the task of education calls for engagement with fragile creatureliness, which is always interpersonal and imagined socially. This connection with the body is possible through the mind and shows us that education is an intellectual event.

Accordingly, education is a basic human act and a lifelong process. This education is and remains God's task and gift. God educates humans to live. Education is a tedious, strenuous work of upbringing. The fact that raising children here has to do with discipline and chastisement, with punishments and suffering, has found its way into educational work in a problematic way, especially into Protestant education in the modern era.

**5b** My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him. **6** For the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts. **7** Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? **8** If you do not have that discipline in which children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children.  
 Hebrews 12:5b-8

What has been lost here is the idea that it is not human beings who chastize and toughen each other but that life with and in God also leads through suffering and hardship, which people sometimes interpret as punishments by God. What has been lost is that the context of upbringing is love, that education is an intense personal relationship, that – arguing biblically - all education serves human salvation.

That is why we need another text to conclude: the knowledge of God and of the world coincides with the knowledge of Christ.

**1** Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. **2** By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. **3** For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome **4** for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith.

1 John 5:1-4 (NRSV)

### 2.3. Education in the history of Protestant Christianity

Education has always played a central role in Reformation Christianity. Many European educational institutions owe their existence to Reformation initiatives. The theological justification for education, and the practical commitment to it by churches, vary greatly according to contexts, historical situations and current challenges. Protestant efforts for education have always been linked to efforts to reform the church and society.

A prerequisite for a mature attendance of church services in Reformation churches was the readiness to learn. The sermon aimed to impart knowledge of God and the Bible. Catechesis was not only for children but also for parents and, as in school lessons, it was very much about teaching and knowledge. No life without teaching! "Believe me... the Church of God can never hold its own without catechism,"<sup>10</sup> Calvin writes in 1548.

Both Luther and Calvin link the catechism with the prospect of life-long learning, in order to achieve a reasoned faith. You can only love and serve God if you know God and that is only through understanding God's Word. Being a Christian entails the right and duty to be capable of judging the Christian teaching served up in the sermon.

Calvin succeeded in productively combining knowledge and knowing God. This was brought about by a culture of reading. The claim to a direct relationship with God (originating from Calvin's covenant theology) no longer wanted to see people as objects. They were subjects in the face of God, who could freely develop their individuality and personality with the help of educational offerings. Therefore, going beyond the knowledge of faith, education aimed at a family and social life based on biblical standards - in responsibility for the family, the neighbour, for work and vocation.

Three roots of theological educational thinking have had a particularly strong impact: scholastic-mystic traditions of the Middle Ages, Reformation inspiration from the 16th century, and concerns from the Enlightenment and Pietism.

In the Middle Ages, Master Eckhart developed a theological concept of education based on the idea that humankind is made in God's image. For him, education means becoming the image of God. Education consists of action by God alone, who forms the image of Christ into

<sup>10</sup> Letter by John Calvin to the Duke of Somerset of 22 October 1548, in: Johannes Calvins Lebenswerk in seinen Briefen, Band 1, edited by Rudolf Schwarz, Tübingen, 1909, 323.

the human soul so that it can come closer to God in a lifelong process. By letting God fill it more and more, the soul becomes more and more like God's image.

In all its different movements and formations, the Reformation was also an educational movement. At that time, just as today, this aspect played an important role in the self-understanding of many Protestant Christians. The close connection between Protestantism and education has also been highlighted in recent years by non-theological research, in the disciplines of German studies, education and history.

This relationship is due to some complex factors. On the one hand, these are theological motives and, on the other, they stem from the history of ideas. In its beginnings, the Reformation was also strongly connected with humanism and humanistic concerns, and integrated many of these humanistic ideas. In addition, there are socio-historical and media-historical factors relating to the Reformation movement. The Reformation started off as a literary movement communicated by means of leaflets and treatises, which primarily reached and appealed to the educated circles in the cities. At the same time, it was only with the Reformation movement that a literary public emerged outside the academic world of universities.

The reformer Martin Luther battled with theological arguments when pursuing specific goals, such as introducing and implementing universal compulsory education for girls, financing and organizing schools by the municipal authorities, or getting all citizens to give financial support to schools.

Luther presupposes that Christian life involves participation in God's two forms of governance, the secular and the spiritual. Both regimes require education. The better this education is, the better Christians can fulfil the secular and the spiritual estate.

Philipp Melanchthon wrote: "Life as a whole must have two aims: piety and education."<sup>11</sup> Melanchthon pressed for changes in the school organization. He emphasized the importance of language training for the entire educational process. Latin schools were established in Nuremberg and Strasbourg based completely on Melanchthon's Reformation educational approach.

Melanchthon was also a source of inspiration to the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Transylvania, whose educational approach was clearly oriented towards the transmission of faith and knowledge. Transylvanian reformer Johannes Honterus (1498–1549) was a well-connected European humanist, an outstanding universal scholar and a gifted teacher. In 1543 he published the Reformation Booklet, which sets out the basic lines for the implementation of the ecclesiastical reformation in Transylvania. In the same year the booklet appeared in Wittenberg, with a preface by Philipp Melanchthon. On top of that, Honterus also published rules for schools and devoted himself purposefully to transforming the Transylvanian Saxon school system.

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<sup>11</sup> Philipp Melanchthon, *Pietas et eruditio*; quoted from Martin Greschat, *Philipp Melanchthon. Theologe, Pädagoge und Humanist*, Gütersloh 2010, 77.

The other reformers, from Calvin to Zwingli, from Bugenhagen to Bucer also promoted intensive educational reforms. In Geneva, compulsory education was introduced in 1536. In 1559 Calvin founded the Geneva Academy. The Reformation initiated school reforms in many places; especially in rural areas, an orderly school system developed for the first time ever, even if the results did not always meet the high expectations of those responsible.

The Huguenots established their own church education system, with elementary schools so that as many (Protestant) children as possible could learn to read and write. They also founded colleges and academies<sup>12</sup> for the study of theology, philosophy, law and medicine.

In the United Kingdom, John Wesley made a strong commitment to improving the education system by raising money for schools and setting up public libraries.

From the end of the 17th century, Pietism and the Enlightenment increasingly shaped Protestant church life in Europe. Pietism was seeking a new reformation, which would reform not only teaching but also life. This included an intensive study of the Bible and a strong lay participation, especially of women. Striving for the reform of life meant the lives of individuals but always the reform of social conditions as well.

In a completely different context, the quest for the reform of life, for a solid faith formation and emotional education, appeared to be a necessary measure against the Counter-Reformation.

Towards the end of the 17 century Transylvania became part of the Catholic Habsburg empire and Counter-Reformation tendencies became visible. The Protestant church opposed this endeavour with a broad educational programme for children and adults. Designed by Markus Fronius (1659-1713), a Transylvanian Saxon theologian, this programme was based on a specific belief: a Christian way of life and broad knowledge of Scripture would suffice to withstand action taken by the Counter-Reformation.<sup>13</sup>

Moravian theologian Jan Amos Comenius strove to improve the world by changing people in the Christian spirit. Comenius related world improvement to a universal reform covering the world as a whole, i.e. a reform covering all areas for really all people. In his view, humankind, by nature, has the capacity for knowledge, morality and love of God (religion). It is part of human nature that it unfolds gradually. But a learning process is necessary for gradual development. This learning process needs external stimulus and content, i.e. teaching. So education is intended by God's creative action. Anyone who refuses education to people denies human nature and rebels against God's will as the creator.

Pedagogical questions took on central importance in Enlightenment theology and Pietism. The whole of world history was interpreted as God's pedagogical action with human beings, and in this respect God's action with individuals is also educational. At the beginning of the 19th century Friedrich Schleiermacher developed an explicit theory for teaching religious

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<sup>12</sup> See Eberhard Gresch, *Die Hugenotten. Geschichte, Glaube und Wirkung*, Leipzig 2005, especially 39–48.

<sup>13</sup> See Daniel Zikeli, *Ach schläfst du Siebenbürgen noch? Der siebenbürgisch-sächsische Pfarrer Markus Fronius. Leben und Werk*, Bukarest 2007, 317 ff.

knowledge and general pedagogy. He focused on education as the development of individuality in interaction with others and the world. "Human beings form themselves and are formed in the tension of receptivity and spontaneity, of dependence and freedom, of remaining inward and emerging to the outside. The tension between you and me, isolation and community, peculiarity and generality, the individual and the supra-individual is also decisive."<sup>14</sup> Love is constitutive for the process of forming oneself: "No education without love, and without self-education no perfection in love; complementing one the other, both grow inseparably."<sup>15</sup>

The diaconal efforts to address the social question of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also included educational programmes for disadvantaged children and youth. In Germany, for example, Johannes Daniel Falk (1768–1826) built centres for orphaned young people in order to give them an independent future and a Christian life through education and vocational training.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century many theologians were sceptical about the concept of *Bildung* (education, formation) because, on the one hand, it seemed to be linked to a problematically optimistic view of humankind, and, on the other, it was too individualistic and insufficiently community-related. The term *Erziehung* (upbringing) was preferred and the focus moved to questions relating to the school system.

Our present day is marked by intensive debates on education, which refer to these traditions and also to the endeavours of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Friedrich Schleiermacher.

The topic of education has always been particularly relevant for churches and theology in times of crisis. Although the situations of the Protestant churches in Europe vary greatly, almost all of them have the same a basic experience: people are turning away from the church and congregations, many baptized children no longer grow up in congregations, and families no longer cultivate religious traditions. Much that is precious is being lost, and what will come in the future is still open. Education stands for the hope of shaping the church's transformation processes in a forward-looking way. But there are also fears of education further promoting secularization and the distancing of people from the church. The church debates on education offer opportunities for revisiting the issues and new beginnings, but are also associated with fears and scepticism. It is therefore important to reflect theologically on church educational action, to focus on it according to the situation of the particular church, and to exchange ideas among the churches.

#### **2.4. Systematic theological reasoning behind Protestant education**

The Protestant churches agree with the social consensus that education is a precious commodity and decisive for the future of individuals and society. Every person, young or old, male or female, rich or poor, has a right to education. The Universal Declaration of Human

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<sup>14</sup> Joachim Ochel (Hg), *Bildung in evangelischer Verantwortung auf dem Hintergrund des Bildungsverständnisses von F. D. E. Schleiermacher. Eine Studie des Theologischen Ausschusses der Evangelischen Kirche der Union*, Göttingen 2001, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Monologen*, in: KGA I,3, 22.

Rights of 1948 declares education a human right and explains the principles of education as follows: “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” Article 26, UDHR.

Although education is undisputed as a human right and social goal, it is nevertheless important for the churches to justify education not only ethically, pedagogically or culturally, but also theologically. The *theological reasoning* behind education helps to decide *how* churches shape education. Thinking about this in depth is a task for all theological disciplines.

‘Education’ is not a classical dogmatic theme. But it plays an implicit or explicit role in many areas of doctrine that can thus shed light on it. These reasons should be understood as complementary to one another, not as alternatives. They are open to further points of view and differentiation.

In the following, we will unfold some important theological perspectives, identify their challenges, and outline the way in which they can motivate future educational action in the churches.

### **a) Education and likeness to God, education and creatureliness**

The theological explanation of creation may be articulated in two different lines of argumentation: either via the idea of humans being made in the image of God and their God-relatedness, or via the idea of human creatureliness. Christians believe humankind was created in *God's likeness*. Our inalienable purpose is to become God's image. In the Ancient Oriental context, likeness to God was attributed solely to the king. When in the Old Testament (especially Genesis 1:26 f.) all people are decisively awarded likeness with God, this expresses not only their equal dignity but also their royal assignment of working for justice and peace. This requires education in a broad sense. In order to responsibly shape life and the world, people need knowledge about the world and for orientation. They need practical abilities, communicative and social skills, and above all the quality of critical reflectiveness.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Christian churches associated the biblical conviction that all people are made in the image of God with philosophical talk about human dignity and human rights.

The idea of education is also closely linked with human creatureliness. We are created as socially related individuals and as beings of finite freedom. As such, every human being needs education because responsible freedom requires an awareness of other people, of the world and of our own possibilities and limits. Education is education for self-education.

The theological explanation of creation draws attention to the universal need for education and the human capacity to respond to it. Every person needs education at every stage of life,

so that they can develop individually and contribute their abilities. This concerns human life in all its dimensions: physical, emotional, intellectual, communicative, cultural and political. Education is never just about content; it is always also about the form and design of educational processes. Many Protestant educational institutions are increasingly striving for the aesthetic dimension in education. The spaces and places of education are becoming important, but also the use of language, sound and silence, staging and movement.

Because Christians regard all human beings as creatures of God, many Christians are passionately committed to education worldwide - for girls and boys, for young and old, for the sick and the healthy, for Christians and non-Christians. Christians are, like many others, concerned that the illiteracy rate is alarmingly high worldwide, even in Europe, and that many children still cannot complete or even attend primary school. This particularly affects children and young people who are fleeing or living in refugee camps. Providing them with an education is an urgent task.

The church, which is committed to the education of all and to school education, attunes to God's love for all people. In so doing, it is a church at the service of others.

### **b) Education and human sin**

Hamartiology (the doctrine of sin) has provided grounds for education more often in the Lutheran tradition, but they have become rare in recent decades. Education and sin are connected in two ways: education is necessary to limit the effects of sin. Education can contribute to greater peace, justice and prosperity in a community, thus reducing the consequences of sin. But education itself is also perverted by sin; it then becomes an instrument of exploitation and self-improvement, of arrogance and exclusion of others. Then education exacerbates sin and education as such is equivocal and ambivalent.

Protestant faith must critically address the ambiguity of education: education can deepen the good, but education can also stabilize injustice. Knowledge can improve living conditions, but knowledge can also be used for purely destructive purposes. A central theological criterion for differentiation is: does education serve to set ourselves apart from others, or does it help to unite us with others and to assume responsibility?

In the face of sometimes overly great expectations of education, this theological perspective may reveal the limits and illusions of education. Education alone does not lead to social justice, peace and tolerance. Education is not a panacea. Therefore, the church's commitment to education always includes critique of education, and insight into its limits.

From a Protestant perspective, it is important to be aware of the limits to education. Theologically speaking, the renewal of humankind cannot be a goal of upbringing or education attainable by human means alone. Renewal is to be understood comprehensively and is reserved to God, otherwise humankind would be the almighty creator of a 'new human'.

**c) Education and justification**

The connection between faith, justification, salvation and education requires important distinctions.

Education cannot bring about or teach faith, but education can lead to and prepare for faith. In particular, education can help to ensure that openness to faith is not blocked and that obstacles are removed. So education is not part of the constitutive context of faith, but belongs to its life context.

Protestant faith strives for education: being able to read the Bible independently, to understand our own faith, to take up responsibility for it, and to communicate it. Living faith is formed in struggling for our own understanding and individual expression. Personal formation is the process in which people seek their own way with, and in, faith. Freedom of faith and the social communication processes belong together.

It is faith understood as a new constitution of the person that enables processes of education and development. Faith gives freedom for education, to personal formation. In faith, we are newly related to God, to our fellow human beings and the world we share: this relationship is discussed and reflected upon in education. It turns people into mature Christians.

**d) Priesthood of all believers**

Every believer is also a priest, together with all other believers. This includes all the dimensions of personal development as a person of faith. And this is the basic event of faith formation. The priesthood also includes the proclamation of the gospel, that is, the communication of faith, both in the community of believers and to non-believers. The proclamation of the gospel requires education as the ability to express faith. Articulating faith can take artistic, ethical and political forms as well. The priesthood of all believers also shows itself in judging the preaching and teaching within the church to see whether it corresponds to the gospel. Such discernment matures in a person's own confrontation with questions of faith, in reading the Bible, and in the exchange with others. Here it remains important to emphasize that faith and the priesthood of all believers are not premised on education but themselves initiate education.

One of the great challenges is how to shape education in such a way that its individualizing power does not isolate Christians but unites them in a living community. Another challenge is to keep a balance between the church opening itself educationally to everything that concerns people on their personal (faith) journey, and yet remaining recognizable as a church.

The church also needs the public proclamation of the gospel and various other ministries. Therefore, the appropriate training for these tasks is a central concern. What these tasks

require in terms of competence, knowledge and gifts depends on the constantly changing real-life challenges that churches deal with, trusting in the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup>

It is becoming increasingly important for people to be involved in the communication and decision-making processes of their church. For this to succeed, everyone involved must learn, practise and experiment a lot: the staff, the volunteers, the church leaders, everyone who works in the church and for the church. Education counteracts authority understood wrongly or unilaterally, but education can also tempt people to develop a problematic sense of their own authority or a negation of any form of authority. Here, too, the decisive criterion is: does education serve to distinguish us from others, or does it serve community and responsible action? Responsible action includes criticism and questioning, but also new ideas and creative impulses.

A church concerned for the continuing education of staff and volunteers will particularly focus on its self-understanding as *ecclesia semper reformanda*. It is a learning church that trusts in the workings of the Holy Spirit in church communication. In order to change, churches need educational processes that spark transformation processes at every level. A church is thus essentially a learning community.

### **e) Education and public theology**

In contemporary societies, education itself becomes the bridge to public witness to the Gospel, bringing Christian perspectives into dialogue, and having an impact on society. This represents a particular challenge for Protestant churches in a minority situation, be it in relation to a society marked by a secular structure or by another denominational majority. Public opinion and civil society are also very differently structured in the various European countries.

In the course of the modern era, education in connection with culture has become a formative approach to life for many people. Education has taken on functions that actually belong to religion and faith: providing holistic orientation, meaning to life, crisis management. This happened in the Renaissance, then increasingly in the Enlightenment, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and is still happening in the present. Education seems to compete with religion; high (formal) education and distancing oneself from religion even seem to some people to belong together. This makes it all the more important that Christians clarify how education and religion can be combined, and why they have something to do with each other. The topic of education can become a focus in order to bring Protestant Christian perspectives to areligious, pronouncedly secular societies. This may open up new opportunities for dialogue for the churches in Europe.

This is a common task, especially for the CPCE. Questions of education, social and ethical issues are challenging us to give Protestant responses. Many of these questions concretely concern the individual states or regions, but only pan-European solutions can be found for

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<sup>16</sup> See CPCE documents, footnote 2.

most of the problems. Public theology, which addresses this and other issues, requires educational processes involving the European context and the CPCE church communion.

#### **f) Education and justice**

Education must also, and essentially, be justified ethically. Recent ethical outlines focus on justice. Education and unequal educational opportunities should also, and primarily, be seen as a problem of justice. Christian commitment to justice must then include the commitment to educational justice. Fairness in education means that people, irrespective of their social background and gender, have educational opportunities, disabled and non-disabled children learn together, and lifelong learning is possible for all people.

There is a close connection between inclusion, integration and education. Commitment to educational justice is becoming more and more urgent, as participation in society and politics is increasingly dependent on education and a competent access to modern media. There are great differences within and between European societies in terms of educational opportunities. To address these injustices politically is an important task for the churches, especially for the CPCE.

However, education is not only an important topic of ethics - it is also the prerequisite for Christians being able to express themselves publicly on ethical issues. The problems discussed in society, ranging from bioethics and sustainability issues to peace and security policy, are highly complex, so that only those with sufficient expertise, conceptual differentiation and communicative competence can position themselves convincingly.

#### **g) Education and religious-cultural diversity**

Pluralist societies increasingly need religious education. Conflicts may arise about various religious practices (circumcision of male infants, church bells and muezzin calls, wearing headscarves, religious symbols in public spaces). Only with religious education can such conflicts be discussed and resolved constructively and peacefully with public relevance. Religious pluralism is often associated with cultural diversity. Interreligious and intercultural learning therefore belong closely together.

Churches advocate for religious education in this broad sense in many ways. In the numerous Protestant communities of migrants, the churches themselves represent such intercultural learning spaces. The CPCE churches sometimes differ considerably among each other, with regard to their political orientation and in their social-ethical positions. East-West and North-South differences play a role alongside denominational differences. In CPCE as a whole, together with ongoing theological discussion processes, there is also a process of mediating understanding between Christians from different cultural contexts. In this way, it is making an important contribution to European peace and solidarity. It is practising European hermeneutics. A European church public is emerging in and through the CPCE.

In conclusion: For Protestant Christians, education is connected with all aspects of their faith. The multi-faceted nature of faith also corresponds to a wealth of educational focuses:

the multi-dimensionality of education, lifelong learning, inclusion, the inter-subjectivity of educational processes, the political and social dimension of education, informal education and everyday education.

## **2.5. The profile of Protestant education**

The Protestant understanding of education is specifically Christian and especially Christological.<sup>17</sup> It is not primarily about the development of natural potential. Rather it seeks the unfolding of humanity in communion with Christ with the goal of perfection: “It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Colossians 1:28).

Education is always a process towards perfection – without any claim that it will reach this goal. Education itself remains work in progress - it is both capable of and in need of improvement: According to the biblical understanding, education does not aim to perfect human beings, their skills or abilities – its goal is to form a relationship with God: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48).

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Johann Amos Comenius reflected about the nature of a perfect education.<sup>18</sup> For him it seemed attainable: “Then we demand that man be instructed not in one respect alone, in few or in many things, but in all that really makes human nature perfect.”<sup>19</sup>

Not only Comenius was optimistic, the whole age was optimistic about the human capacity for improvement. With the development of science and technology from the age of Enlightenment, people were gripped by the idea of a constant, infinite perfection of humans, technology, society and even nature. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this optimism also permeated the church and theology.

However, the idea of perfection changed into an enlightenment–rationalistic, purpose–oriented idea of a better world, which the ever more perfect human being was to build with the help of science and morality. This was linked to the idea of a more perfect society built on better scientific and moral foundations. As a result, modern education has increasingly led to the specialization of individual areas, disciplines, subjects and competences. Perfection was meant to emerge as the sum of many independent improvements. Where this idea became real, the consequences were destructive rather than anything else, and a perfecting of modern technological society has proved to be a threat.

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<sup>17</sup> Christoph Marksches, *Zur Freiheit befreit. Bildung und Bildungsgerechtigkeit in evangelischer Perspektive*, Frankfurt/M. 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Johann Amos Comenius, *Pampaedia, or Universal Education*, translated into German and published by Klaus Schaller, Sankt Augustin 1991.

<sup>19</sup> *Op.cit.*, 13.

This mistake of the project of modernity became obvious after the world wars, and the fragmentation of reality has, conversely, triggered a search for comprehensive (holistic) education – always in danger of a new, forced perfection of reality.

A holistic education that brings people to perfection is one, or even *the* characteristic of a Protestant approach to education. What distinguishes this Protestant concept of perfection from such ideals of perfection that have proved problematic? What are the characteristics of this education aiming at an overall perfection? A verse from the letter of Ephesians may serve as a guideline “...until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

Four basic elements follow from this:

**a) Universality as a basic orientation**

Perfection (*teleiotes*) is wholeness, is a life with respect for the totality of creation. Communion with Christ is communion with all creation and responsibility for it. This orientation remains as a horizon of hope even where it has not (yet) been fulfilled in reality.

**b) Inclusivity**

Because creation is a living whole (not a highly complicated machine), Christian education must not be exclusivist. It must be open on principle. In possible disputes, the focus should be more on common ground with other persons responsible for education. Education for perfection can only be found and developed under the joint responsibility of all educational institutions.

**b) Justice and mercy**

“To do justice, and to love kindness ...” (Micah 6:8) is part of the claimed perfection. The claim and the promise of justice in all human relationships and activities is sustained by the gospel, but it is not an exclusive perspective of Christianity alone. And mercy, on the other hand, is much less popular in a secular context, but plays a central role in Christianity and thus in Christian education – this too is a contribution of Christianity to the necessary education of society today.

**c) Humility**

Although the goal of Christian education is perfection in communion with Christ, the knowledge and understanding of sin make us aware that education will not bring about ‘harmony of creation’ and will not redeem the fallen creation. This evokes human limits and the salutary limitation of education by education. It enables educational action that teaches new ways of dealing with ruptures and boundaries.

‘Perfection’ as the goal of education, which means growing into communion with God, can also be formulated in general categories, for example under the keyword ‘value-oriented education’ in specific areas of learning. For Protestant education, the following are central: the orientation towards freedom in responsibility, the Christian view of humankind, human

dignity and human rights, and orientation to the common good. Protestant education affirms democracy and civil society; it sees itself as part of civil social processes. Protestant churches never pursue education only for the sake of denominational self-preservation or to set themselves apart – it is for the sake of people. Protestant educational action is therefore open to cooperation with other educational institutions, relies on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and is glad of educational initiatives that feel similarly committed to these values.

### **3. Education as a lead medium of post-modern society – challenges for the churches**

#### **3.1. Education in transition**

The historical snapshots of the different fields of educational action have shown that, on the one hand, it is a classical field of work, but on the other, it is precisely here that something new is being created and people are taking notice. The heightened attention to education is also a signal of increased sensitivity to changes in church and society. One of the essential questions is what role education plays in situations of change, to what extent education is a motor of transformation processes in church and society, and in what way education is thus also changing in terms of its content. In the following, we outline some upheaval situations as models in which education has been of particular importance and has simultaneously also changed.

##### ***3.1.1. Between the Middle Ages and modernity – the educational programme of the Reformation***

The Middle Ages and the early modern age had a rich educational culture. Humanist education grew up in addition to that of the monasteries, and numerous educational initiatives developed before and alongside the Reformation.

The Reformation placed particular emphasis on education, and thus gave Protestantism an essential characteristic. The Reformation began with the upheaval of Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and helped to shape the transformation processes. It discovered faith as a fundamental way of existence, which it represented universally and accomplished the coexistence of secular and religious institutions, of attitudes to the world and values. Education was not primarily the transmission of the faith tradition, but developed from taking on and shaping the transforming processes. The Reformation acted in the tradition of the church from its beginnings, activating its foundation of faith. In short: education became an essential feature of the Reformation. In most countries and churches, education was becoming a central Protestant profile. This gave rise to freedom, maturity, knowledge and decision-making abilities. Right from the beginning, Protestantism was an educational movement that discovered faith in its form of existence, generated education as knowledge for orientation, and thereby drew on all this expertise to institutionalize and professionalize educational processes.

Reformation and education are also closely related since, in times of upheaval, faith in God asks questions again about its own rationality. It looks for a reliable formation of faith, one which at the same time opens up knowledge for orientation and coping with social and biographical changes. Catechisms enable people to speak before God, and to articulate their faith in the church and in the world, thus enabling responsibility right down to the ethical sphere. Catechisms often had an alphabet printed on the first or last page, so that people could learn to read with the catechism, and then the Bible. This developed into a literacy programme of Protestant churches.

The confidence of being able to read the Bible and thus to answer for their faith went hand in hand with the idea of the readability of the world and the responsibility of the mature person. In different historical constellations and upheavals, education based on faith allowed both church and society to develop further – not least through the formation of emotional intelligence in Pietism, or diaconal education, which influenced social policy.

### **3.1.2. Education as, and in, a transformation process – the example of Germany – from an educational emergency to an ‘education society’ and ‘education church’**

However, this does not mean that the relationship between Protestant churches and education has always remained free of conflict. In Germany, in the upheaval phase of the 1960s, student unrest led to demands for social changes – they came from a new university-educated elite and led to a political offensive for education. First of all, the "educational disaster" came to the fore - there were too few schools and teachers, but also not enough suitable teaching materials and methods. As a result, a contingency plan was developed to secure the framework conditions for education.

In this context, education in, and as, a process of transformation also became an issue for the Protestant churches, with the issue being ambivalently received and evaluated. The first study on church membership of the Evangelical Church in Germany in 1972/74 spoke of the "dilemma of education".<sup>20</sup> The second study in 1984 stated: "The educational dilemma of the *Volkskirche* (church representing all of the population): The survival of the *Volkskirche* is increasingly dependent on a factor that also threatens it most – namely education understood as a debate and a reflective approach to handing on tradition."<sup>21</sup> Expressed negatively, education dissolves the traditional structure of the church. Expressed positively, education helps the church to find a new place within social change. The Protestant churches have been slow to recognize and expand their educational potential.

Today (according to German Chancellor Angela Merkel) there is a call for an "education republic". In Protestant churches the idea arose at the same time of an "education church". But important as these initiatives are, they run the risk of functionalising education. First, they try to expand education from an economic point view, primarily as training and further training. This deprives education of essential dimensions of humanness in an aesthetic, ethical and religious sense. Furthermore, the economic functionalizing of education is reinforced by empirical coverage of educational matters. Thirdly, questions of educational justice are neglected in non-value-based education, and finally: non-value-based educational action opens up education as an unlimited process of self-perfection of people and society. This puts at risk the notion that education is especially important at the boundaries of life, in order to be able to deal with ruptures, suffering and the irreversible.

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<sup>20</sup> Wie stabil ist die Kirche? Bestand und Erneuerung. Ergebnisse einer Meinungsbefragung, herausgegeben von Helmut Hild, Gelnhausen und Berlin 1974.

<sup>21</sup> Was wird aus der Kirche? Ergebnisse der zweiten EKD-Umfrage über Kirchenmitgliedschaft, herausgegeben von Johannes Hanselmann u.a., Gütersloh 1984.

In all these developments, Protestant churches, in particular, are called to develop an independent educational approach. In this they are not alone, but close to all those educational approaches that aim for freedom and individual maturity and holistic education. Since education policy is the social policy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the churches can and must take part in educational debates out of their responsibility for society. Europe needs forums and places to discuss different understandings of education, its goals and values. The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe can be such a forum.

### ***3.1.3. The upheaval in Europe – the Lisbon process***

Education has been booming in the European context since the end of the 20th century. The strongest impetus for the development of a European Education Area was provided by the Lisbon Process. It was launched by the EU heads of state and government in early 2000 with the aim of making the European Union a world-class economic centre by 2010. The aim was to "become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".<sup>22</sup> At the heart of this is the idea of creating a European Research Area (ERA) to overcome the current fragmentation of European research, and to develop new approaches for the development of a competitive common European research landscape. The EU strategy here reiterates the conviction that knowledge is power, and sees this as hope for a knowledge-based economic growth that is to be able to create jobs and strengthen social cohesion. Research networking and the concept of lifelong learning are meant to help here. With the Lifelong Learning Programme, the European Commission supports the Council's course. It is seen as the key to ensuring social integration and equal opportunities. A similar concentration of education on learning is to be found in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.<sup>23</sup> The right to education is set out in Article 14(1): "Everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training."

Europe will gain a future through education from a very specific perspective: as research, learning, knowledge, as schooling and vocational training, as continuing education. But that raises the question of whether this understanding of education under EU law really meets the requirements of European transformation processes which have to be organized in communication between the EU and its member states. Another question is whether that is really education in the full sense. The Protestant churches are challenged to present a European concept of education and integration that extends beyond their own national and confessional boundaries.

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<sup>22</sup> Lisbon European Council 23–24 March 2000, Presidency Conclusions, para. 5, [www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm).

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf).

## **3.2. Trends in education and challenges for the future**

### ***3.2.1. Trends in education and society***

Modern education ties in with normative premises as well as social trends: autonomous and self-confident persons are to be prepared throughout their educational career to act independently and, at the same time, together. The central social trends in modern society include demographic change with the necessary cooperation between aging social groups and the younger generations. They also include climate change and environmental change, high complexity due to the differentiation of social groups, and the ongoing trend towards more technology that is challenging forms of work organization and further training. Not to mention the change in values towards individualization, globalization with the simultaneous need for regional, local and individual adaptation of knowledge, and the ongoing digitization that permeates both professional and private areas of life.

And yet, education would be inconceivable without a concept of lifelong learning as was promoted in the 1970s by UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the OECD. Heuristically we can state that

- The motivation and ability to learn can be awakened in early childhood, or this does not happen in learning worlds with little stimulus,
- basic skills are developed in childhood and adolescence on the basis of compulsory learning,
- in young adulthood, specialized skills must be developed in vocational training,
- knowledge can be passed on in older adulthood, but that concurrently relearning and new learning is necessary due to technological, work organizational and cultural changes, and
- the elderly can acquire skills through learning and education so that a self-organized way of life is guaranteed for as long as possible.

If we relate education to approaches to social theory, we find that very different social theories are currently under discussion:

- the knowledge society requires, above all, strong problem-solving skills, practical intelligence and creativity,
- the risk society aims to secure identity within the framework of highly flexible and fluid life histories,
- the work society asks how to achieve higher professional skills and prevent unemployment through training,
- civil society calls forth participation competence and solidarity, because every individual develops the ability to form social networks,

- the immigration society addresses religious orientation and tradition specifically so that we are able to experience intercultural competence,
- the adventure society appeals to special lifestyles, the challenges of consumption and the habitual behaviour, always in distinction to other social groups,
- the society of long life addresses demographic change and the trend towards the extension of age but also work phases while maintaining a work-life balance, and underlines the trend towards intergenerational learning.

### **3.2.2. Educational research and future planning**

Planning the educational system requires clear, empirically unambiguous findings on early childhood education, general education, vocational training, extra-curricular youth education, higher education and, finally, continuing general, vocational and political education. On the basis of serious educational reporting, it is possible to inform the interested public about trends in education and to better orient educational planning and educational practice. However, it is not possible to derive indispensable concrete guidelines and social technologies from empirical knowledge. That requires rational action, which, following Max Weber, is conscious of the fact that the setting of goals and purposes in democracies lies in the hands of practical politics, but that science can exert a certain influence on these goals and purposes through education monitoring.

Recent debates have focused on the notion of skills and competence development. This involves the development of broad professional abilities, and methodological and learning competence that enables the individual to independently collect information. It is about developing strong social competence, personal and general cultural competence. The competence-based approach in education assumes that these areas of competence only make sense if they can be translated into a capacity to act, i.e. into experience-related knowledge and practical life.

Empirically, it can be assumed that academic education will become increasingly significant, which can be attributed to the higher demands of the employment system, on the one hand, but must also be interpreted as a generational change, because parents often expect the same or higher educational qualifications from their children than they themselves achieved. In addition to university education, continuing education has also been very expansionary in recent years, with the continuing education rate only declining from the age of 60. The third area of strong expansion is early childhood, because a high demand for support for young children has also been identified. Factor influencing this particularly strongly are family development and the situation when both parents work for their living.

Due to demographic change, the education of older people (45 to over 80) is of growing social and societal interest. The educational interests of older people can be classified, for example, as a social and emotional type of education that primarily aims at social contact through education; a type of public welfare orientation that primarily supports voluntary work and the improvement of social care; a utilitarian type that is strongly oriented towards

their own educational needs; and a self-absorbing contemplative type that primarily expresses a need to catch up on education.

The specific competency measurements in adulthood show that older people in Germany, but also in the overview of OECD countries, are less able to read and calculate than younger age groups. This should not be interpreted hastily as an effect of age, because it is quite possible that generational effects are also reflected here. Older people, as a post-war generation, had less education (especially women) than is the case for the younger generation.

Modern practice-oriented educational research also shows a social milieu orientation. Social milieu orientation means that educational research brings together people who differ from others in their social situation (vertical differentiation according to income, educational level, etc.) and according to values, views of life and lifestyles (horizontal differentiation), but who are highly homogenous within a milieu. In a sense, social milieus, from the traditional milieu to the performer milieu and the expeditive milieu, constitute social units expressing very different educational needs and interests. A similar differentiation can also be made with migrant milieus, distinguishing between traditional migrant worker milieus with religious roots, uprooted milieus, adaptive migrant milieus very willing to integrate into society and also hedonistic milieus. The discussion sometimes fails to sufficiently consider the fact that there are also intellectually cosmopolitan and multicultural performance milieus among migrants with an extremely high level of education.

### ***3.2.3. More than professional competence!***

Education is always more than just professional competence. Of course, the mastery of the lingua franca, basic arithmetic and foreign language skills, information technology competence, and the self-regulation of acquiring knowledge are a basis for all other forms of encountering the world. But a concept of education in modernity has also to consider that

- beyond the acquisition of basic skills, it is also a matter of normative, evaluative examination of business and society, and this can be conveyed through history, economics, politics and law,
- there is an aesthetic-expressive encounter and design of this world, which is enabled through subjects such as language, music, painting, fine arts and sports,
- there is a cognitive and instrumental modelling of the world, taught through mathematics and the natural sciences, and
- it is, and this should be emphasized, also a matter of dealing with the problems of the constitutive reality, and for this philosophy and religion are absolutely necessary.

We therefore have to warn against a too limited concept of competence; instead, of great importance in the curriculum vitae are interdisciplinary competences such as learning competence, life competence, moral and political competence, media competence, intercultural competence, and artistic and aesthetic competences.

In summary, it can be said that education certainly refers to finding the cultural identity of each individual, but that education can, and must, also address economic demands, political and public components, the challenge of the social community, cultural abilities and the mediation of values.

Relating educational research to educational planning, we find the following issues today:

- expanding early intervention
- promoting future-oriented school learning by imparting solid specialist knowledge and interdisciplinary competences on the basis of educational standards
- strengthening all-day schools due to changes in family life
- maintaining the dual system (alternating theory and practice) and full-time school-based vocational training, while still increasing the proportion of graduates
- shaping lifelong learning, i.e. strengthening further training and adult education, always promoting the quality of teachers as the key to educational development
- trying to ensure that women and men participate equally in the education system, in order to avoid and reduce exclusion and thus promote inclusion, and
- reducing the number of those dropping out of the education system, which also means educating and training migrants.

Education therefore focuses on individuals' potential for personal development throughout their entire life span, but also on coping with social trends and social change

### **3.3. Europe, the churches and education**

#### ***3.3.1. Education in transformation processes***

Transformation processes are essentially educational processes. The formation of Europe as a political process and education in Europe as a learning process are closely linked and intertwined.<sup>24</sup> This is all the more true when the political education process has to cope with changes. Education in the pedagogical sense becomes a medium for self-assurance, for the development of competences, for understanding and surviving transitions, and for acquiring the orientational knowledge needed to shape changes.

Education is not primarily the canon of knowledge that is conveyed, but perceiving and shaping deep-rooted change – necessary knowledge is generated here. This can be demonstrated for all large and small European transition processes. What is thought of collectively here also applies individually: education mainly appears in life processes that require reorientation.

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<sup>24</sup> Recalling a phrase by Klaus Schleicher, editor of the three main textbooks "Zeitgeschichte europäischer Bildung 1970–2000" (Münster et al. 2000/2002).

### ***3.3.2. Farewell to old Europe and its educational ideals***

European integration developed from the Enlightenment to the present day in the context of nationalization. Protestantism was also oriented towards this nationalization with the discovery of e.g. the mother tongue as a medium of communicating the gospel, and with the devising of a church structure corresponding to the national system.

Since the end of the Second World War, the lack of integrative power of nationalism has led to new forms of integration, e.g. in the different attempts to found transnational institutions. Protestantism has remained an ambivalent phenomenon in this context. Firstly, it continues to be nationally based, like the political sphere.

Secondly, there are Protestant forces (people who initiated the European integration process and worked for reconciliation beyond the borders of postwar Europe etc.), who thank and work in a cross border and integrative spirit. The CPVE, with its precursor the Leuenberg Fellowship, is a late-comer in this process and an attempt to strengthen transborder responsibility on the basis of its own mission. We could speak here of the aim – 500 years later – of completing the Reformation project, which has narrowed itself down nationally and thus remained unfinished.

### ***3.3.3. Education, the Europeanization of Europe and the unfinished Reformation project***

In the last few decades – and at the latest since the Lisbon process started in 2000 - it has become increasingly clear that education plays an essential role in the context of European integration in order to generate the knowledge necessary for coping with the various transformation processes – social, political, economic and religious. So far, Protestant churches have only been timidly involved here. Two challenges have to be met.

On the one hand, it is necessary to generate the orientational knowledge that helps people to perceive and shape changes out of faith. Here, the churches have some catching up to do. Curricula, for example, are still nationally oriented – the experience gained at the local level is hardly taken up (we travel around Europe as in our own country, but that remains confined to leisure activities; Europeans from other countries are increasingly present locally – without really being perceived by the church; work-related mobility from university to employment are realities that are seldom addressed by the church). Europe is Europeanizing from below (beyond political institutionalization), but these places of learning lie fallow within the church. If we took this approach of grassroots Europeanization, which starts from new experiences, then a new understanding of faith and of faith formation would develop. Faith formation (language, thinking, forms of expression) is itself subject to a process of transformation that the church is loath to approach.

On the other hand, it is important to gain orientation through knowledge in order to be able to understand and shape political changes. This knowledge may come from the good experiences of European exchange in and through churches – keyword ‘the work of reconciliation’. But it does not seem to be possible at present to translate these experiences into a policy. The CPCE has a theo-political guiding idea - unity in reconciled diversity - which,

however, needs to be practised through education. What is true for faith formation applies here as well: transformation processes also change church formations – and what could be called change management is lacking.

Protestant churches, in particular, can contribute their traditions and their experiences – both painful and positive – to the European educational area. Something could be made of the Europeanization of Europe, with visions and new limits: a new education for a new Europe. The CPCE would be the ideal ‘learning community’ for this.

### ***3.3.4. Protestant educational action in the European Education Area – fields of tension***

At first glance, it seems that developments in the European Education Area determine Protestant educational action, but not vice versa. However, we must bear in mind that the European Education Area is not a self-contained system but is itself in the throes of radical change. It is transforming itself in response to social changes: knowledge society, risk society, work society, civil society, immigration society, adventure society, society of long learning (3.2.1.). Just like education in the secular space, the church must also find answers with its educational action – and thus it will become part of a comprehensive, differentiated educational activity with various accents and profiles for shaping this educational activity.

The analysis of societal educational action also makes it clear that church educational activity can, at least in principle, meet the challenges, because it addresses especially Protestant issues.

#### **a) Lifelong learning and the whole catechumenate**

An essential element in the perception and design of education is the view of broader educational processes under the heading ‘lifelong learning’. Education cannot be limited, either biographically or institutionally, to certain stages of life or certain institutions, but must focus on the transitions (between stages of life and learning phases / institutions) and sharpen our perception of the entire process. This will again clarify the concept of the whole catechumenate, rooted in church tradition, as lifelong learning designed by the individual to meet his or her needs. The fact that within the framework of the educational development of the European Union, lifelong learning is reduced to work qualifications and mobility, and thus to economic terms, again restricts the basic approach.

#### **b) Civil society engagement and the priesthood of all believers**

Civil society involvement is becoming increasingly important for late modern societies. There needs to be increased education for this civic or voluntary activity. With the guiding idea of the priesthood of all believers, the Protestant churches in particular have a good approach for voluntary commitment in church and social contexts, and at the same time a long tradition of training and supporting people in voluntary service, who with their charisms (which are more than mere competencies) can participate in educational action and act on their own responsibility (see 2.4.).

**c) Informal learning – learning on occasion**

Besides formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is increasingly perceived as an essential part of educational action. This does not mean pedagogizing everyday life - on the contrary, it means taking a more serious look at experiential learning as the basis of educational processes. Church education does not only begin where the catechism is learned, but where (it) is prayed, where there is preaching, where the brass band agrees on, and practises a new song, where diaconal and aesthetic activity is 'formative' for congregations, etc... The combination of experiential learning with explicit and organized learning processes also gives the latter a special accent: they serve as a guide for everyday learning.

**d) "Education is more than professional competence" (see 3.2.3.)**

This is a saying that does not come from outside to secular educational activity, but is a new perspective resulting from the logic and dynamics of secular educational processes. Protestant educational action can build on this if it knows how to make the added value of its own education understandable within a social context.

**e) Professionalization and the ministry of teaching**

An essential element of the European educational development is increasing professionalization and training. This first sounds like a kind of additional task that would have to be performed by the society and thus also by the church. However, it ties in with the Protestant understanding of education and church educational organization. In the Reformed area there is the ministry of the teacher, who is especially qualified to educate the congregations and the faithful.

However, the fact that Protestant churches can connect to the challenges of secular educational action with their own understanding of education does not necessarily mean that they can easily meet the associated challenges. Protestant educational activity can learn here from political, scientific and secular insights. Discussion forums are extremely important for this, bringing together theological and secular educational approaches, church and school, teachers of religion, pastors, candidates for the ministry and students of religious education. The "forum bildung Europa" and CPCE student conferences can clearly promote this in their special way.

**f) Educational qualifications and reports**

An essential element of optimizing educational action in the secular sphere is the instrument of an education report, which opens up steps of further development by analyzing the standards of educational activity, communicates and introduces them, and in turn evaluates such 'learning progress'. Churches are taking this path with new educational models. One step in this direction could be the instrument of an empirical education report. But first there is the basic question: what are the criteria by which successful learning processes can be described and designed?

**g) Building educational landscapes**

Networking educational processes means increasingly building up regional educational landscapes in order to guarantee local education. For churches, this would mean understanding and organizing themselves as a specific part of regional educational activity – to avoid the risk of sectorally closed educational activities – and internally linking various educational processes more closely together.

**h) Development of a Protestant understanding of education**

In order to make Protestant educational action socially plausible, we need an understanding of education rooted in theology, pedagogy and ecclesiology. For this purpose, education must occupy a special place in the church's activity, and at the same time be organized as a cross-cutting theme. The Reformation made specific use of education, needed education to open up Protestant prospects for life and action, and thus shaped education in church and society. The Protestant understanding of education today should be the attempt not to define education in principle as Protestant, but to develop Protestant ways of using education. This Protestant understanding of education would then have to be communicated socially, in order to be able to act in the context of the educational institutions and in cooperation with them.

The special contribution of Protestant educational action within the social context is usually seen in the fact that education under Protestant sponsorship means responsibility for the individual in their educational development (education on a human scale, emotional intelligence, personal learning, learning from role models, etc.) and thereby strengthens the idea of holistic education. With regard to the educational processes, we note the freedom of education in general as well as of learning processes (against utilitarianism) and the limits of educational activity (against the logic of educational perfection).

Often the specific contribution of Protestant educational action is seen in a specific value orientation resulting from the communication of the gospel. However, it must be borne in mind that there is no self-contained canon of values in social education - values are pluralized and are part of social discourse. Church values do not stand opposite a closed secular world of values, but are part of the discussion of values, i.e. the added value of Protestant education is part of the discourse itself, and the discourse is a value in educational action. This makes it necessary to have learning locations where the differences in values become clear. In this regard, there are different traditions in Protestant churches.

**i) Places for learning and institutionalized formats of Protestant educational action**

The Leuenberg Agreement was not drafted in the meeting room of a church office, but at an academy where new ideas were thought of and agreed upon, away from day-to-day business. Academies are among the outstanding places in Protestant educational tradition. In recent years, more and more city academies have joined the centres in the countryside.

Places with a specific programme – such as churches of culture and art, Protestant schools with a proven learning culture, but also parish facilities for broad sections of the population and for church (religious/confirmation) education – are indispensable for the Protestant educational landscape. Within the church as a learning community, special formats of educational action have also become institutionalized.

Current topics in the church learning community and educational action for society are dealt with in discussion synods (open consultations for church employees, volunteers and others interested in the Reformed churches of Switzerland), study days (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria), student conferences (cf. 5.3.4.) or study-abroad years (as at the Centro Melantone or in Sibiu), as well as within the framework of regular synods or Protestant lay gatherings (e.g. the Kirchentag).

## **4. Focal points of Protestant educational action – case studies**

### **4.1. Six learning fields – a selection**

Six fields of action are particularly important for the churches of the Regional Group in their special situation as minority churches:

- Training and continuing education of staff and volunteers
- Responsibility for education in schools and kindergartens as church bodies (places for learning) and religious instruction in public schools
- interdenominational, interreligious and intercultural learning
- Family education, early childhood socialization
- diaconal education
- Faith courses, ability to talk about faith in the face of a break in tradition.

This selection is deliberately a selection – not everything that is indispensable for Protestant faith formation could be included, for reasons of space alone. We will deal with those learning fields that are changing significantly and where the churches of the Southeast Europe Group are working intensively to reform them.<sup>25</sup>

Musical and art education is also important for Protestant educational action, from the Reformation as a singing movement to the formation of choirs, and to church music as part of culture. This area has remained open for reasons of limiting areas of study, not for fundamental considerations. Moreover, it seems to be an area of Protestant churches and Protestant educational action that remains very stable even in times of upheaval.

Another focal point of Protestant educational action is education in the digital age. Not having explicitly taken up this topic is an expression of the great disparity of approaches and issues and the few reasoned policies in this regard in the churches of the Regional Group. Digitization has found its way into the communication of the Gospel – starting with homepages of the congregations to text messages of the daily watchwords up to Facebook groups for mourners or conversations about faith.

Especially in diaspora churches where the parishioners live far apart, new media are useful for communication, education and celebrating common identity. It is clear that new forms of community are emerging in virtual spaces, which represent an alternative to direct, face-to-face communication. The ecclesiological consequences, educational implications and theological interpretations seem open at present. As an example, is a service where chat

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<sup>25</sup> One of the traditional fields of Protestant faith formation has not been mentioned - confirmation classes. To compensate, we refer to extensive Europe-wide research projects and publications, like "Confirmation Work in Europe. Empirical Results, Experiences and Challenges. A Comparative Study in Seven Countries" and "Youth, Religion and Confirmation Work in Europe. The Second Study", both edited by Friedrich Schweitzer et al., Gütersloh 2010. The two volumes appeared as vol. 4 and vol. 7 of the series "Konfirmandenarbeit erforschen und gestalten", edited by Volker Elsenbast et al.

members meet virtually, where they partake in the Lord's Supper and all equally shape the worship service, an appropriate form of Protestant worship? Is the Word bound to certain realities or, because word-bound, is worship communication in virtual spaces also 'real' worship, which relies on the effect of the Word and on a God who as such is the virtuality of being?

In the following, the above-mentioned six selected learning fields will be examined from the point of view of what is currently happening in the churches, where the particular challenges (problems and opportunities, weaknesses and development potentials) lie, and which perspectives are emerging. These are always individual perceptions and assessments from the churches presented, and they do not necessarily express a consensus.

The selection is based on prioritization by the Regional Group, but largely coincides with the fields of action in education mentioned in the education plans of other churches.

The case studies are usually oriented in such a way that the experiences of larger churches are compared with those of smaller ones, experiences of churches from western Europe with those from eastern central Europe. We also attempted to reflect the denominational breadth of the member churches. The question of whether there are educational specifics in the denominations within Protestantism arose, but this could not be clarified on the basis of the material contributed. This would require a separate study. We begin each time with a thumbnail sketch of the church in which the case study originates. The authors are listed in the appendix.

#### **4.2. Training and continuing education of staff and volunteers**

When we talk about education in Protestant churches, we often focus primarily on the training of staff, but increasingly on the continuing education of volunteers as well. And with a new intensity, we are now looking to link the training of staff and volunteers. The examples from the Reformed Church in Hungary and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia show this in an exemplary way. In the case of voluntary ministry, their service during worship is of prime importance (lay preachers and readers), but they also serve in congregational leadership (on presbyteries, church councils). There is accompaniment, counselling and training of volunteers in many different functions in the congregation (from the visiting service to accompaniment of the dying and mourning) – this is what the volunteer model from Switzerland stands for. What is important is that continuing education in and for voluntary ministry is not a mini-form of training for the pastorate, but is oriented towards the experiences, abilities and skills that volunteers bring with them, and is designed to develop them for their own areas of responsibility – in order to be able to do what does not fall directly under the tasks of pastors. It is interesting to see that meanwhile a new group of employees in the church needs further education, e.g. administrative staff (the example from Romania).

#### **4.2.1. Continuing education of pastors and lay people in the Reformed Church in Hungary**

The Reformed Church in Hungary has 27 seniorates in four districts and 1.15 members (600,000 of whom are active parishioners) in 1,249 parishes. It has 1550 pastors in service. Rev. István Szabó is the presiding bishop.

##### **a) The historical and societal background**

The right and duty of pastors to undergo training and continuing education came up in the Hungarian Reformed Church almost with the introduction of the Reformation. The reason is that the Reformation doctrine placed the pastor in a completely new role: instead of celebrating a rite or mass, the teaching of Scripture was to be put into a (hermeneutic) connection with people's life experience. This was a spiritual and especially an intellectual challenge, which required an academic education and continual training. According to the resolutions passed by the Synods of Erdőd (1555) and Debrecen (1567), the pastors who were unwilling to teach and learn were to be removed from office. In terms of content, this learning referred to the regular reading of Holy Scripture and the Bible commentaries, and was examined by church leaders during the visitation of the congregations. In the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the content criteria for further and advanced training were expanded: their strictly (1) theological content was to be supplemented by other (2) knowledge of the humanities or natural sciences if possible, and (3) competencies for popular education (i.e. education of parishioners) were to be acquired, a circumstance reflected in the curricula of the traditional ecclesiastical colleges, i.e. universities. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, interest in theological-ethical reflection on world events began to emerge. After the Second World War and during the period of totalitarian and communist regimes (while the churches were brought into line), the official advanced training events served as 'horizon-widening seminars' or ideological training courses aimed at making the pastors loyal to the state and the official church leadership. This latter system for a long time overshadowed the work in further education, so that it recovered only slowly after the changes in 1989/1990 and has been filled with new content only during the last 10 years.

##### **b) Shifts of emphasis in church and religious life**

After the end of the East-West divide the concern of continuing education for pastors was confronted with various requirements, calling for new emphases:

- The rebuilding of church structures and institutions and thereby assuming the functions of the church in society (e.g. in the area of social diaconate, religious instruction in public schools, pastoral care in the military and in hospitals, etc.) led to a shift of accent in the pastors' self-perception and role identification. These changes require the acquisition of new theoretical and practical knowledge in pedagogical work, pastoral psychology, management and leadership.

- The perception of the churches and pastors (and religious dimensions) on the part of the secularized or no longer-church-going strata of society requires a reinterpretation of the pastoral ministry (as an actor of religion with expectation of spiritual content);
- The pluralization of lifestyles (changes in family life and partner relationships), the change in values and the relevance of innovative scientific knowledge and progress for our own lives (e.g. with regard to medical ethics and bioethics, or services in this area) arouse the claim for theological-ethical reflection and opinion-forming.

### **c) Reorientation for the content of continuing education**

In view of the above-mentioned changes, urgent questions have arisen, along with the need for a reorientation of continuing education for pastors:

- How much and what theology needs to be taught, learned and deepened in order for the pastors to be able to cope with the structural and content-related challenges facing them from the changes described above?
- How should we evaluate the shifts in the role and self-perception of the pastors? Must the theological, kerygmatic function of the ministry be maintained consistently, or should it be reinterpreted in view of the required social, communicative, psychological, economic etc. competences, and the educational content designed accordingly?
- How do the two main requirements – ‘personal attitude of faith’ - and ‘good theology’ relate to each other?
- Differences must be addressed as a function of the cultural character of a church community and the segmentation of church membership; the pastors also need to mediate between different group expectations. What skills are required here and what is the relation between empiricism and theology?

### **d) Harmonising pastors’ continuing education with that of the ‘lay people’**

Continuing education of church employees must also be carried out in order to fulfil the churches’ broadened social functions. Social diaconal, legal and economic, pastoral and counselling competences are needed here. And as in the case with pastoral training, the correspondences between theological and non-theological teaching content must also be analysed at this level.

In general: If we want to do justice to the basic Protestant (and especially also the Calvinist) conviction regarding leadership in the church – i.e. achieving ‘collegiate cooperation’ instead of a parity of ordained and lay leaders – then the education and further training of church office-holders is of considerable importance. It is inconceivable that the various ministries in the parish (and in the church-owned institutions) could work together without deepening the competences acquired. It is not simply a matter of looking at ‘Christian education’ as separate and isolated from other ministries, but, rather, of integrating it interactively in order to do justice to ‘the church’s job’.

*God does not want to build his church without people*<sup>26</sup> and this knowledge must be acquired in the awareness that we are a *gift-oriented church*<sup>27</sup> (Calvin). In concrete terms, this means that pastors must see themselves as part of a team and therefore not do and decide everything alone (even if their ministry as preachers is a special one). The congregation also needs people who enrich the church with their gifts and abilities and see themselves as part of a team. In order to exercise the gifts and skills on both sides competently, knowledge, education, further education and training are required, as well as substantive discussions on an equal footing. The 4th Barmen Thesis says: “The various offices in the Church do not establish a dominion of some over the others; on the contrary, they are for the exercise of the ministry entrusted to and enjoined upon the whole community.”<sup>28</sup> This is typically Protestant – and not only in Hungary.

#### **4.2.2. Training for the preaching ministry – training opportunities for lay preachers and pastors within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia (ELCR) consists of two churches (Ev. Lutheran Church in European Russia and Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Urals, Siberia and the Far East) and has approx. 20,000 confirmed congregation members. 173 pastors and lay preachers serve 208 congregations. Archbishop Dietrich Brauer in Moscow is head of the ELCR.

##### **a) Motivation for the project**

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the former Soviet Union it is fairly difficult to find the way to an appropriate theological training.

For many years the training concentrated on the Theological Seminary in Novosaratovka (near St. Petersburg), where the main emphasis was on fulltime on-site training for future pastors. With the development of churches in the last few years it has become clear, however, that the focus must now be different.

Recognizing all the positive aspects of traditional seminary formation (and in an effort to facilitate ‘full’ theological training in other ways), it is seen that the church needs more opportunities today for the training of lay preachers and specialized clergy, for ordained pastors, and the more distant communities where the congregations wish to engage in missionary activity. The central vision for the Training for Preaching project is therefore to offer maximum access to quality training opportunities in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia through a programme that is to be jointly planned, flexible and decentralized.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Barth, KD I,2 (§ 21), 741–830, in particular 778.

<sup>27</sup> John Calvin, Inst. IV,3, 1–2.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.westpresa2.org/docs/adulted/Barmen.pdf>.

## b) Implementing the project

In the two years since the programme was launched, significant progress has been made in achieving the goal of bringing beneficial education to the various places, including remote areas in this vast country. Hundreds of participants have not only acquired skills and new knowledge, they have also had additional opportunities for spiritual development through fellowship with other participants and teachers. All this is very cost-effective, as the teachers are taken to different locations rather than gathering a large number of participants in one central location.

Some of the first results of the programme were surprising – in various areas (especially in Siberia), events planned during the seminars have not only influenced life in participants' own congregations, but proved to be ways of initiating contacts with other denominations and representatives of other religious communities.

A less positive experience, however, was to see how difficult it was to organize events in the geographically remote places of the church – the communities themselves are often so isolated and lacking in self-confidence that they are unable to do the necessary organizational work on site. To a certain extent, the programme has strengthened the existing initiatives there; however, no completely new activities have been established. Ultimately, however, this result could be regarded as a change in expectations and not necessarily seen as only negative.

Since the church sees this project as an opening for new possibilities, it becomes clear that in future this programme will be more and more limited to producing well-trained preachers. In this sense, the programme will lose some flexibility, but will bring benefits in terms of organization and focus on training highly competent lay preachers.

### ***4.2.3. "Go out at once into the streets ..." (Luke 14:21) – faith formation for non-Protestant parish workers in the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania***

The Evangelical Church A.C. in Romania (ECR) is divided at the regional level into five church districts and has 12,241 members. 38 pastors serve 239 parishes. Bishop Reinhart Guib in Sibiu is its leader.

An essential challenge for the Protestant congregation of Bucharest, as for every parish in a large city, is the complex field of administration. In addition to coordination, the many administrative tasks require above all specialist knowledge and professionalism. It has often become apparent that people in the congregation are not always willing to enter this arena, due to emigration and the open labour market. Ultimately this means that action must be taken according to the Protestant principle "Go out at once into the streets" (Luke 14:21). Competent employees are sought outside the community, either by recommendation or through an employment bureau. This in turn has a double consequence: once highly

qualified employees are found, they first have to understand how a Protestant congregation operates and acts.

On the other hand, there is also a language barrier, because church life is mainly in German, while business life is conducted in Romanian, the main national language. Two realities thus confront one another within the same congregation: the classical congregation with its demands for pastoral and spiritual life, and the 'administrative church' with its qualified staff. The latter is mainly made up of people with different denominational background. For them to work in a Protestant congregation, they must first learn about its tasks and church profile. This also raises questions about the actual content of faith. Consequently, we see the inevitable and often unconscious development of an educational task consisting of training the different denominational and ethnically different groups of employees and motivating them to understand the interests of the congregation. Often the aim is to break through a barrier, namely that of the ordinary church official. Working in a Protestant parish is more than just working eight hours a day. It means compassion, sharing in the various tasks, selfless commitment and participation in spiritual life.

However, it is not an aim of the church to play a missionary role. The new co-workers are invited to participate in the various church events, are expected to attend services and devotions, but are not invited to convert in any way. The ecumenical principle prevails of recognizing Christian baptism and the priesthood of all believers. Certainly there are cases in which, after some time of activity in a Protestant church, employees perceive differences over against the other denominations, raise theological questions and have practical experiences that are sometimes so convincing that they lead to a change of denomination, but this is not the rule. Through specific encounters, discussions and excursions, the non-Protestant staff are encouraged to get to know the Protestant church, read the Word of God, lead a more intensive prayer life, experience real-life Protestant spirituality (church music, teaching, festivities, church year, diakonia, etc.) and participate in the activities of the congregation.

This makes the congregation itself a place of education. Every home visit or time spent at a sickbed becomes a deep experience for the Orthodox employee of the diaconal centre. Every attendance at a worship service or a parish festivity becomes a lasting experience for the Catholic administrative staff. The image of a Christian community changes. A new image emerges, which consists of mutual respect and help from fellow believers. It is not about huge numbers - every individual gains in importance and requires attention and affection. This is an attitude that is particularly sought after and expected in the big city. Such experiences also change people's perception. It often happens that their own Christianity is questioned and a passive Christian becomes an active Christian.

A Christian community has a public mission that it must carry out, and for this it needs competent people who can also implement this mission. It does not only call on its own church members but also the 'other' employees who want to get seriously involved.

Certainly there are also employees who persist in their simple civil servant status and remain unimpressed by the whole congregation life. As time passes, they are also retiring. The others who stay gradually identify with what they do. They are enriched in their own experiences, deepen their faith and thus contribute, often unconsciously, to a part of the Kingdom of God. Above all effectiveness there is the apostolic encouragement:

"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

#### **4.2.4. Guide to volunteering for Reformed church communities in Switzerland**

The Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (SWK) is the union of the 24 Reformed cantonal churches, the Evangelical Methodist Church and the Église Évangélique Libre de Genève in Switzerland. The Federation of Churches thus represents around 2.4 million Protestants. 1050 parishes are served by 2350 pastors. 450 of them are employed in other ministries. The SEK Council President is Pastor Gottfried Locher.

In the summer of 2015, the Reformed Churches of Switzerland published a new Guide to Volunteering.<sup>29</sup> The front page says "Without volunteering, society stands still ... and the church too". Volunteering is less and less for the honour of it, but is increasingly seen as a necessity for the church to function. When churches run out of professionals, they try to find volunteers and provide access to church vocations through flexible external training courses.

This was the angle from which the Swiss Reformed churches wrote their guide to volunteering. The way in which volunteers are treated, it recommends, testifies to what is expected of the people who work here. It distinguishes formal voluntary work within the church organization from informal voluntary work in the private sphere. Here and there one is also inclined to ask critically whether it is appropriate to treat volunteers in the church formally as employees – with professional personnel management, clear framework conditions, a contract and supervision – or whether they do not simply want to participate as "actively involved persons or enthusiasts" in the church.

#### **On the understanding of voluntary work**

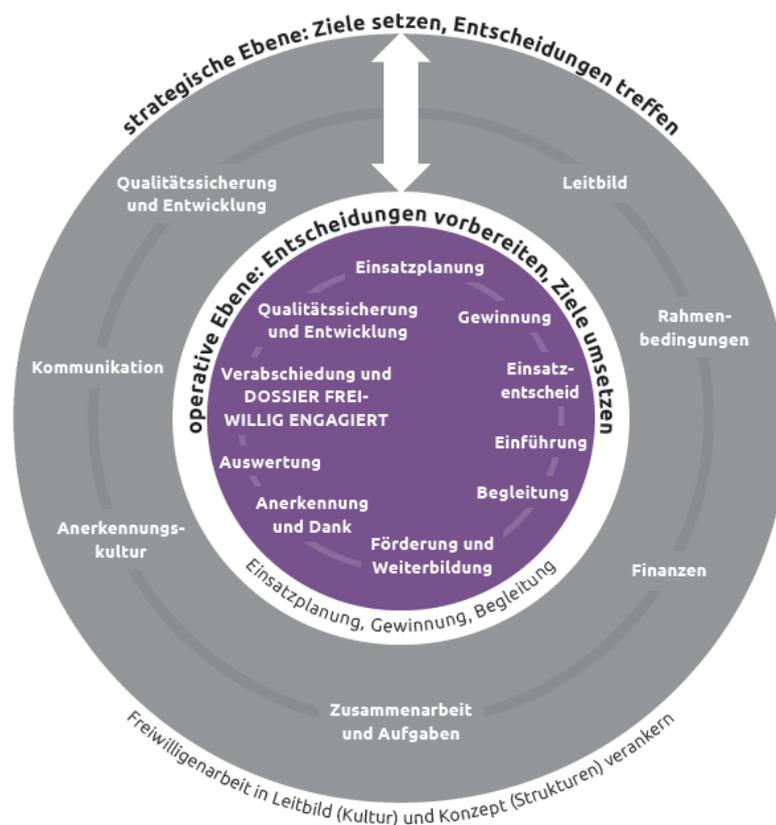
The guide defines work in an honorary capacity in four points:

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<sup>29</sup> The Swiss context use the term "Freiwillige" for volunteers, but this author prefers "Ehrenamtliche".

- “The commitment is voluntary and excludes tasks within the core family and gainful employment. This means that overtime is not volunteering.
- Volunteering is free of charge. Neither working time nor performance is remunerated financially. The reimbursement of actual expenses, contributions to further training and gifts expressing appreciation are not considered financial compensation within this definition.
- Volunteering should supplement paid work, and be limited to an annual average of six hours per week.
- Voluntary commitments are self-chosen and not tied to any legally binding employment contract. The committed persons participate in determining the type and scope of their tasks. Agreements made may be amended in consultation.”<sup>30</sup>

Following the definition comes a theological reference to volunteering. This again sets itself apart from the initially described necessity to secure the future of the church. “Volunteering in the context of the church is solidarity lived in the form of social or diaconal action in church and society.”<sup>31</sup> And with reference to Matthew 22:37–39, the guide names a flourishing of humanity as the motivation for voluntary action.



<sup>30</sup> “Ohne Freiwilligenarbeit steht die Gesellschaft still ... und die Kirche auch! Leitfaden zur Freiwilligenarbeit für reformierte Kirchgemeinden, herausgegeben von der Reformierten Landeskirche in Aargau u.a.”, 3rd revised edition. 2015, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 7.

The diagram<sup>32</sup> gives an overview of the tasks of staff in the parishes when working with volunteers.

Compared to the effort put into the recruitment and management of volunteers, little or no attention is paid to giving them support and training. Some churches do offer free training to volunteers as part of their culture of recognition. The paragraph on continuing education in the guide says: “Volunteers need contacts, especially in the beginning and in difficult situations. ... Support includes encouraging volunteers through spontaneous feedback, personal discussions, exchange of experience and continuing education. This allows volunteers to deepen their skills and develop personally. Especially committed people with demanding tasks appreciate it when their parish finances external continuing education courses.”<sup>33</sup>

#### ***4.2.5. Insights and challenges***

It comes as no surprise that education – as basic advanced and further training of staff and volunteers and church co-workers – places a key role in the churches’ educational action. After all it is about the personnel of the church as an institution, who must be trained in the best possible way. It may come as a surprise, however, that continuing education is understood to be a constitutive component of the further development of the church. Social developments are also reflected here: management positions and positions of social responsibility in society, business and the area of civic engagement are increasingly defined by qualifications that must be continually renewed. Here the question arises as to whether and to what extent the church can really provide the qualifications necessary for employees and whether the continuing education system meets the challenges.

The example from Romania - of continuing education in the administrative area - is a good example of the tension involved in continuing education: on the one hand, it is about reliable basic knowledge, and on the other, it is about special qualifications and professionalization for individual functions. It can be observed that especially in this area of ‘technical’ qualification and professionalization in voluntary work, if possible also with a certificate, church action becomes social action in education. What you learn in the church is so good that it also promotes civil society commitment. So the church invests in qualifications that are also used outside the church, and thus sometimes ‘loses’ trained personnel for social work.

In this way, the church remains attractive for voluntary or civil society involvement, and thus indirectly participates in social education. In some churches, academies are being established that are on purpose open to people who are looking for quality further training for church or society, or simply for themselves. Conversely, it remains to ask how the church could make better use of qualifications acquired in the secular sphere.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 12

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 14

If we see (Protestant) churches as part of civil society, we are bound to note that the understanding of civil society in the countries of the Regional Group varies due to history. It is not yet possible to speak of a uniform European civil society or one comparable in all countries.

“The complexity of civil society and its manifold connections ... to business, the state, culture and other institutions such as the family or the media allow the setting of different priorities. Two of these are central: a more individualistic perspective that emphasizes individual values, behaviour and public participation, with civil engagement and social participation moving into the middle ground; and a more institutionalist approach that looks at the size, structure and functions of civil society organizations (non-profit or third sector, including foundations, associations, confederations etc.). In the social-democratic countries of Scandinavia, civil engagement and social participation are usually most pronounced; least in the southern European and former socialist countries; the corporatist countries lie between. However, they are characterized by a greater role for service providers in welfare state sectors, typically in the social, health, education and cultural areas. This function is hardly developed at all in the Scandinavian countries.”<sup>34</sup>

#### **4.3. Passing on faith publicly – church schools and kindergartens; religious education at state schools**

The public transmission of the faith in church schools and kindergartens, on the one hand, and religious instruction in schools, on the other, represent a broad field of work, which the churches of the Regional Group deal with very differently. This depends on their own traditions and country conditions (again differentiated by the cultural sovereignty of the German regions [*länder*] and the autonomy of the Swiss cantons). This variety is almost impossible to represent in the following. As starting points for a comparative overview in discussion we offer the questions:

- Who finances church schools and kindergartens?
- Is there a conflict between religious education in the churches and as taught at school – or do they complement each other?
- How important are Protestant schools and kindergartens for the development of the congregations?
- Where are religion classes given? In school, in church or in both?
- Who teaches religious education (church staff or state teaching staff)? Is there a tension here?
- How are curricula created? What is the responsibility of the churches?
- What is the relationship between denominational classes and non-denominational religious education?

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<sup>34</sup> Helmut K. Anheier, *Zivilgesellschaft in Europa*, herausgegeben von der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2014 ([www.bpb.de/politik/wahlen/europawahl/71376/zivilgesellschaft-in-europa](http://www.bpb.de/politik/wahlen/europawahl/71376/zivilgesellschaft-in-europa)).

- What interest do parents have in their children attending religious education classes at school?

#### **4.3.1. Protestant schools and religious education in the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia**

The Evangelical Church A.C. (ECAC) in Slovakia consists of 14 seniorates in two districts (West and East) and has 316,250 congregation members. 366 pastors serve 320 parishes. Bishop General Miloš Klátik is the leader.

The school system is of particular importance for the Evangelical Church A.C. in Slovakia. Since the Reformation, the church has sought to establish a school in every congregation so that it can educate its children. It should be remembered that before the communist dictatorship (1948) diaconal activity and the school system were in full bloom. Almost every parish had at least one fully functioning primary school. After 1948 the church education system was completely destroyed, no church school remained intact. Teachers and educators who confessed their faith were persecuted, many could no longer exercise their profession. Only those who testified that they had finished with religion were admitted to study education at university. After the fall of communism 25 years ago, the church was finally able to exercise its vocation freely in society. This was not easy, because there were very few areas in which the church was able to continue or develop its fields of work.

In 1990 the school system in Slovakia had to be rebuilt. Although the church regained many school buildings in the restitutions, these were in a dilapidated condition and did not meet the demands of today's school system. Many repairs were necessary. It was also difficult to find good teachers with a religious background. Other problems and challenges were: a lack of plans and programmes for church schools, a lack of funding for building maintenance, repairs, equipment and personnel. In addition, the parents were suspicious because they no longer had experience with the church school system.

Despite all the problems, the blessing of God was felt in the foundation of the church schools. Today Evangelical Church A.C. runs 10 kindergartens, 6 primary schools and 7 secondary schools in Slovakia. Unique in the whole Republic is a special boarding school for deaf and blind children. The number of church schools shows an – albeit slow – upward trend.

Religious education is held today on the basis of an agreement between the Slovak Republic and the registered churches. Through this agreement, religious education classes can be held denominationally in public, private and church schools. Religious education is a compulsory subject for public schools in the state education programmes in all years of primary school, in all lower secondary schools and also in higher secondary schools. Religious education is

taught for one hour a week. On the basis of the above-mentioned agreement, the church can establish its own schools.

Religious instruction in the public state schools is mainly given by the pastors, but there are also teachers of religion. A separate centre and various educational programmes exist for their in-service training. The school system is financed by a basic amount paid per pupil. However, the financial security is unequal between state and church schools, or schools that are financed by self-government. In church schools it is only 80%.

In the church schools religion is taught for 2 hours per week. Religious education at all schools is financed from state funds. Apart from this school subject, the congregations also hold two years of confirmation classes. In some congregations, religious education starts in the kindergarten. At present, there are textbooks and workbooks for all years of religious instruction. Methodological manuals are also being worked on.

A church school does not only mean more religious education lessons. The basic task here is to create a spiritual environment for the growth of faith, while maintaining a high standard of teaching. That is why every school has a spiritual director who has had theological training and is ordained – i.e. a school chaplain or a school pastor. This person's task is to hold devotions, Bible studies, religion lessons, prepare various events and regular services. It also includes contact with the teachers. Experience shows that, taken together, this has a great impact on the life of the whole school. It is very important that the church not only places great value on the education of children, but also on the spiritual life and biblical training of its teachers. Of course, the church also trains its own teachers – because the spirit of the school is always formed by its teachers.

It is also very important that the school cooperates with the parish where the school is located and where the children who attend the school come from. Good cooperation is also reflected in the community work with the children and youth.

Not everything is ideal. Life changes, just as students, teachers and pastors are changing. But the goal remains the same – the focus is on young people who need a solid foundation for their lives. They need a good education, the result of which is wisdom, but not just any wisdom - that from the horizon of religion. They need an ethical and biblical foundation and the experience of love, which is also practical. All this is given by faith in Jesus Christ, the only Lord and Saviour. He guides us, so that we as a church and in education can lead young and old people towards him.

The Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession has a school committee, the Synod Council committee for the field of education. Its tasks are to prepare the documents for the school legislature and to organize all activities in this field.

### **4.3.2. Questionnaire on religious education in schools. Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren / Czech Republic**

The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren is divided into 14 seniorates (districts). 78,299 parishioners in 250 parishes are served by 278 pastors. Synodal senior Daniel Ženatý is the leader.

#### **a) Starting point**

A questionnaire was sent to all congregations (250 in total) to provide an overview of the situation of religious education in the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren in the Czech Republic. One question was whether, and where, religious education takes place in schools. 88 parishes responded.

#### **b) Results of the survey**

- 37 congregations replied that religion was taught in primary schools, sometime after 1989.
- At some point, the majority of the congregations tried to get in touch with the schools, but then stopped trying to get religious education taught at school.
- Less than 10 congregations are still trying to introduce religious education at school, but so far without success.
- The majority of parishes (52) hold religious education only in the parsonage, a minority only in school (5).
- In several congregations there is no religious education at all (not even in the parsonage).

#### **c) Summary**

Offering religious education at school is practised by only a small number of the congregations. Other congregations have tried, but for various reasons are no longer trying.

It is difficult to introduce religious education where there is no tradition. But where a longer tradition is still alive, the number of children participating is increasing. In addition, society's interest in biblical instruction is growing in some places.

The most important characteristic is that the religion class is not a school subject, so it is not compulsory; it is a meeting with the children. Therefore it is appropriate that the term “religious education” is often no longer used.

The congregations have developed their own ways of making religion a living history of the biblical message with interactive elements. This is done in the parsonages. The teaching of Bible stories is usually not offered as a school subject.

### 4.3.3. Religious education in Bavaria

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria has about 2.41 million church members and is made up of six church districts. 1,538 parishes are served by about 2,500 pastors. Its bishop is Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, who is also chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).

#### a) Spiritual background since 1945

After the end of the Second World War, Germany's prime political task was to rebuild civil society. This included the establishment of a school system which, after the perversion and destruction by National Socialism, enabled children and young people to find their way into a democratic society.

The representatives of the state governments and the churches had again to deal with questions of school reform with the Allies. From the perspective of the Protestant churches, the following points were important criteria for the reconstruction: the relationship to the local church community, the gradual development of guidelines for teaching, and the establishment of working groups of pastors and teachers. This was a legacy of the Confessing Church, whose members continued to play an active role in shaping the Protestant educational mission in post-war society.

The US military government wanted to reform the school system in Bavaria in order to enable democratic education for the young population. The Catholic Church had a strong influence on the guidelines for education and cultural affairs. Alois Hundhammer (CSU), then Bavarian Minister of Education and Culture, had been able to support the church's interests in a confessional school system and assert them in parliament. Thus the project of a community school for all children, as proposed by the military government, was off the table.

In agreement with the Catholic and Protestant church leaders, the Bavarian state government had kept the way open for a reintroduction of denominational schools. In the negotiations, Protestant and Catholic church leaders linked up with the Agreement between Church and State of 1924 and the Bavarian Concordat of the same year. The conditions before 1933 were to be restored. Article 135 of the Bavarian constitution of 1 December 1946 also laid down the following legal solution: "Public elementary schools shall be denominational schools or community schools." The denominational school remained the rule. At the denominational schools, teachers were only allowed to teach the pupils according to the principles of the denomination in question. At the request of a parent or guardian, a community school could be introduced in places with a denominationally mixed population.

This basic option for denominational schools promoted a close conceptual connection with the catechetical work in the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria. Kurt Frör, a champion of Protestant religious education, therefore spoke of an overall catechumenate, by which he meant an overall pedagogical responsibility of the church at the places of learning such as congregation and school.

The end of the 1960s saw a groundbreaking ecumenical cooperation: the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria agreed on guidelines for a school reform. These opened the door to the introduction of a Christian community school in Bavaria. After long negotiations, the parties represented in the Bavarian Parliament jointly advocated amending Article 135 of the Bavarian constitution. The public schools became community schools for all primary school children.

Simultaneously with the introduction of the Christian community school in Bavaria, religious pedagogy in teaching and school practice also received new stimulus. With the empirical turn around 1970, religious pedagogy in (then) West Germany developed into an independent discipline, drawing inspiration from its historical roots since the Enlightenment, and clearly distinguishing itself from catechetics. The integration of findings from the fields of education, human sciences and sociology led to an approximation of religious pedagogy to general pedagogy. The theory underlying religious education was now increasingly considered from an empirical perspective.

Karl Ernst Nipkow (1928–2014), a religious educator from Tübingen, developed an integrative model combining both lines of tradition. He described religious pedagogy as a discipline linking pedagogy and theology. Accordingly, questions of religious education must be dealt with equally from an educational and a theological perspective. Nipkow interpreted religious education as an expression of educational responsibility for the church and as the church's sharing in educational responsibility for the social sphere. This paradigm still guides Bavarian religious education in teaching and school practice today.

Fundamentally the present situation is:

Protestant religious education in Bavaria

- is held under the joint responsibility of the church and the state;
- is imparted by church or state teachers who, depending on the type of school, must have a degree in the subject from church or state universities and must have church teaching authority (*vocatio*);
- is basically open to all Protestants and to interested pupils who do not belong to a Protestant church but can apply to attend Protestant religious education.

## **b) New challenges**

In a society characterized by increasing cultural and religious pluralization, religious teachers and the church are facing new challenges:

- At the latest since 11 September 2001 and the events of recent years, it has become clear that religion and knowledge of religion are an important part of intercultural dialogue, the religious dimension of which is gaining in importance in the public sphere. An important challenge is therefore *intercultural education in the school context*. Protestant religious education in Bavaria will, in future, have to aim at enabling pupils to think at the same time about denominational orientation and the increasing plurality of faith and religious education in our society.
- Aesthetic experiences are an essential access to religion for many people. In the media, films, advertising and pop culture we encounter religious motifs. Religious education at school seeks to enable pupils to *learn to interpret these cultural phenomena* so that they can establish *connections to the faith lived* in private and in church life.
- Phenomena of lived religion are very different in the life contexts of people. What unites us, however, is that we are also experiencing increasing *globalization* even in the field of religion. How does change in a globalized world affect people's lives and religions?
- In our society, *new ethical questions are always being raised by technological and medical progress* and students and teachers of religion are faced by this: How do we deal with ethical questions at the beginning and the end of life? How do we evaluate preimplantation diagnosis and the demand to legalize assisted dying, from a Christian perspective? How do we evaluate human life? When does it begin? Are people allowed to intervene in natural processes at the beginning and the end of life?
- An important task in this context is *diaconal learning*. In internships, pupils learn something about dealing with the disabled and sick or old people.
- In view of a decreasing attachment to the church and a loss of religious culture, the religious teachers face the challenge of tapping the sources of the Christian faith with the pupils and pointing out the relevance of faith for people's lives.

#### ***4.3.4. Curriculum 21 as the trigger for a new model of religious education in Switzerland in joint church-state responsibility***

Evangelical Reformed Church in Switzerland (see 4.2.4.)
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Between 2010 and 2014, the German-speaking Swiss Conference of Directors of Education developed "Curriculum 21". With this first joint curriculum for primary schools in Switzerland, the 21 German-speaking and multilingual cantons implemented Article 62 of the Federal Constitution to harmonize school objectives. In autumn 2014, Curriculum 21 was approved by the German-speaking Swiss directors of education. Then each canton decided on its introduction, in accordance with its own legal foundations. There is a Swiss state version of Curriculum 21 as well as the cantonal versions. The churches are directly involved

in the elaboration of the subject Ethics, Religions, Community (ERG). In the canton of St. Gallen, ERG is offered as an elective subject divided into ERG School and ERG Churches.

**a) Differentiating between religious ‘upbringing’ and religious ‘education’**

*Religious upbringing* is primarily the responsibility of the parents. Some of them choose to tell their children religious stories, and explain religious objects and holidays to them. For others, religion is not an issue. But all children develop ideas about religious questions based on pictures, children's stories, television programmes, songs and games. *Religious education*, on the other hand, has the task of clarifying and expanding these subjective ideas and leading them to a common language with regard to religion and ethics, as well as offering pupils some orientation in the plurality of traditions, religions and world views.

**b) Church co–responsibility for religious education at school as a place of learning**

The Evangelical Reformed Church of the canton of St. Gallen and the Catholic Diocese of St. Gallen not only assume responsibility within the church, but do so at various levels for the society and the state as well. They understand religious education not only as inner-church catechesis, but also as religious and ethical education within the framework of the state school system. That is why they are committed to religious and ethical education at school as a place of learning. Religious instruction in school is founded and described functionally. What does religion achieve? Which tasks does it fulfil? What questions does it answer? Religious education in the church as a place of learning, on the other hand, is justified more in terms of content and asks what religious practice means for members of a religion.

**b) The model Ethics, Religions, Community in the cantonal guidelines**

The Education Council of the Canton of St. Gallen (ministry) decided by adopting the primary school curriculum in 2015 that the content of Ethics, Religions, Community (ERG) was to be taught through the elective subjects ERG School and ERG Churches, with teachers provided by the elementary school and the national churches, respectively. The implementation of ERG School and ERG Churches is set out in the Framework Conditions for Teaching Ethics, Religions and Community (ERG) of March 2016.

School as a place of learning		Church as a place of learning
Curriculum 21		
ERG School	ERG Churches	Religious education
The school is responsible based on Curriculum 21	The church is responsible based on Curriculum 21	The church is responsible on its own basis

The principles state that teaching ERG is not religious education within the meaning of the Federal Constitution, but is part of compulsory primary school teaching. It must therefore be designed in such a way that it can be attended by pupils irrespective of their religious affiliation or lack of it, while respecting the freedom of religion and conscience. The basis and aim of ERG teaching is an unbiased, open attitude and a non-discriminatory treatment of religions and world views. ERG is a compulsory elective subject for all pupils from the third primary class onwards: parents decide whether their child attends these lessons taught by school teachers (ERG School) or the regional church (ERG Churches). From the 3rd primary class to the 3rd upper level there is a weekly lesson of either ERG School or ERG Churches. ERG Churches lessons are taught ecumenically. There is no further division into Roman-Catholic and Protestant or Reformation churches. In the Canton of St. Gallen, the curriculum for ERG Churches was drawn up by an ecumenical working group and presented to the public in March 2017.

### **c) The origin of the model**

The ERG model in the Canton of St. Gallen was developed in two steps. At first, Curriculum 21 was drawn up at the national level, in which the churches were also involved through consultations. Then the present model was negotiated at cantonal level between the churches and the canton and adopted by the Cantonal Council (parliament). The central question, which dominated the negotiations between church and state, was whether or not the churches should still be involved in the school as a place of learning for the subject ERG. Strong voices were heard from the cantonal teachers' association against this. The Director of Education (education minister) was on the side of the churches in the matter, but also felt committed to the teachers' association in terms of education policy. It was he who then proposed the current compromise model with shared responsibility for ERG School and ERG Churches. A helpful argument was that Article 3 of the Primary School Act of the Canton of St. Gallen says that public schools shall be managed according to Christian principles.

#### ***4.3.5. Insights and challenges***

Religious education is one of the most important fields of learning in faith, church or religion. Its traditions go a long way back in history. It is becoming apparent, however, that there are new challenges to meet precisely in this field of learning, which is the joint responsibility of church and state. A central question is whether churches will have a say or a right to help organize this field of learning, or whether the state will establish its own religious studies or ethical education (and the churches will concentrate on education in the parishes). Religious education has become an outstanding field of public discourse about religion and church – and thus a profile-building element of Protestant faith formation is at stake.

#### 4.4. Understanding the other – learning in faith

Interdenominational, interreligious and intercultural learning:

- Young people learn together in the Josefstal Study Centre, Bavaria
- Place of ecumenical learning – Centro Melantone, Rome
- Further training for pastors and imams in Württemberg
- Intercultural education in the Waldensian and Methodist Church in Italy

##### ***4.4.1. Intercultural (youth) educational activity – young people learn together at the Josefstal Study Centre in Bavaria***

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (see 4.3.3.)

Protestant youth work in Germany and in Bavaria follows a long tradition of youth education, which is also undergoing change. Whilst in the 1970s and 1980s the political education of young people mainly consisted of heated debates, the situation now is marked by significantly fewer cognitive approaches. What has remained, however, is the relationship to the lives of young people and the social constellations in which they find themselves in today.

Non-formal youth education in Protestant youth work currently faces the challenge of addressing the intercultural situation that young people are experiencing on a daily basis. This applies equally to ‘open youth work’ in the cities and to social work with young people. At Orientation Days taking place in Bavaria at the Protestant Study Centre in Josefstal, the Neukirchen Youth Training Centre and the Pappenheim Education and Conference Centre, it is also becoming clear that the participating school classes include not only Protestant and Catholic pupils but also Muslims and pupils with no religious affiliation. In addition, the number of young people with a migration background is increasing in all groups. This must be taken into account in the planning and organizing of activities.

Everyone active in these areas of youth work and youth education needs intercultural skills.

For the eighth time in 2014-15, the Study Centre for Protestant Youth Work in Josefstal (a registered association) therefore offered long-term in-service training to become an intercultural trainer, in cooperation with the LIDIA association in Munich. This further education combines the topics of intercultural understanding, (anti)discrimination and (anti)racism, as well as democracy and tolerance. It fits into the context of integrated human rights education for a society of immigration.

How to constructively deal with cultural diversity and differences is the core concern of the centre’s approach, which takes religious and ideological orientation into account, as well as other factors (diversity of life plans, gender, age, origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, social milieus, political attitude, etc.). The participants in the training programmes

reflect about themselves in the topics mentioned. They develop conflict resolution strategies and acquire skills in dealing with cultural diversity. The focus is on all levels of society – from the private sector to the institutions.

The competencies of intercultural trainers are important not only in the area of youth work, but also in other fields of social work and education. However, in view of the increasing cultural, ideological and religious diversification of society, which is clearly evident in kindergartens, schools, training institutions and youth (social) work, they play a major role, especially in the education, support and training of young people.

Intercultural competence is not only indispensable for educators and social workers, but young people themselves must also be guided to recognize their own norms and values and classify them in relation to others, to recognize and endure differences, and at the same time to develop ego–strength and accept others/strangers, and to deal with conflicts constructively.

#### **4.4.2. Ecumenical learning – the study-abroad year at the Centro Melantone in Rome**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy (ELCI) has about 7000 members. 15 parishes are served by 18 pastors. In addition, pastoral care for tourists is offered at 16 locations. Its head pastor is Dean Heiner Bludau in Turin.

Protestant Centre for ecumenical studies in Rome / Centro Melantone aims to raise the profile of Protestant Theology from an ecumenical perspective in the European spirit of the Leuenberg Agreement and in the context of worldwide Protestantism. It is run by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy (ELCI) and the Waldensian Theology Faculty in Rome. The governing board of the Centro Melantone is supported by an academic advisory board.

The study-abroad year at Centro Melantone offers an opportunity to students of Protestant theology to spend an academic year (two semesters) in Rome. The students (*Melantonini*) are enrolled at the Facoltà Valdese but can also choose to take subjects at Rome's pontifical universities (Gregoriana, San Anselmo, Lateran University, Augustinianum etc.). The Centro Melantone supports these studies financially and through a director of studies. In addition to study counselling and a language course, this support takes the form of two study trips in Italy, two block seminars, several excursions, guided tours, encounters, etc., as well as regular meetings with students of the Catholic Collegium Germanicum et Hungaricum on topics of their choice. Students discuss and reflect on what they have learned and experienced in internal discussions within their group.

The learning objectives of the academic year include: fostering knowledge of academic theology and competences in the context of ecumenism, promoting articulacy in ecumenical dialogue and widening ecumenical, i.e. interdenominational and global horizons.

Venues are the Waldensian Faculty and the pontifical universities, and it is particularly important for the students themselves to share their views and experiences with each other. Rome is also an ideal place to study, as a city of the ancient world, a city of Christianity and a modern city of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **4.4.3. Interreligious learning – further training for pastors and imams: a case study from Württemberg (and Baden)**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg is divided into 4 prelatures, 47 church districts and 50 deaneries and has 2 million members. Approx. 1,300 parishes are served by about 2000 pastors. Its bishop is Dr. h.c. Frank Otfried July.

The Protestant Church in Baden has 1.2 million members in 24 deaneries. 600 parishes are served by 690 pastors. Its bishop is Jochen Cornelius-Bundschuh.

Since 2008 we have run the following programme in Baden–Württemberg: a joint advanced training courses for pastors of the two Protestant regional churches, and imams and female theologians of DITIB (Turkish Islamic Union of the Institute for Religion). This annual course runs for almost one week, as part of the continuing education of these two regional churches. In the meantime, a great deal of trust has grown. What was once a risk is now regarded as normal.

What are the characteristics of the joint seminars?

- The topics are identified, prepared and managed jointly by the Islamic representatives of the two regional churches and the dialogue representatives of the DITIB in the regional associations of Stuttgart and Karlsruhe (currently Annette Stepputat, Karlsruhe – Fatih Sahan, Karlsruhe – Ali Ipek, Stuttgart – Heinrich Georg Rothe, Stuttgart). It is important: the participants want to learn together, the topics must concern and challenge both sides;
- Shared experiences and living together: an excursion is an integral part of it, as are shared meals, conversations and evenings;
- The topics are theologically demanding and topical. Examples: gender issues in religions and institutions, interpretation of Scripture, pastoral care, responsibility for creation;
- Discussion culture: no topics are taboo, controversies are also discussed. People treat each other with care.

#### 4.4.4. Intercultural education in the Waldensian and Methodist Church in Italy

The Waldensian Church in Italy has about 21,657 members, about 3,000 of whom are migrants. 156 congregations are served by 94 pastors. The moderator of the Waldensian Church Executive is Alessandra Trotta (until August 2019 Eugenio Bernardini).

For more than 20 years, the life of the parishes in the Waldensian and Methodist Church, especially in the northeast and in the large cities, has been determined by intercultural dialogue with brothers and sisters who immigrated to Italy from different continents and countries (Asia, especially the Philippines and South Korea; Latin America; Africa, especially Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon; eastern Europe, especially Ukraine, Moldavia, Romania).

This multifaceted, multicultural situation was accompanied from the beginning by the project *“Essere Chiesa Insieme”* (Being Church Together), for which the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy is responsible. As the name says, it was – right from the start - not only about solidarity and diaconal assistance for immigrant sisters and brothers but about the challenge of knowing that we were together on our journey of faith, despite all differences, and ‘being church together’ in a new, different, multifaceted way.

As a first response to this new situation, the churches have, for some years now, been developing intercultural education programmes in which ‘locals’ and ‘migrants’ learn together and from one another.

##### **a) Laboratorio Interculturale di Formazione e Accoglienza (LINFA)**

The Intercultural Laboratory for Education and Dialogue is currently one of the greatest challenges in the educational activity of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy.

It is co-organized and supported by the Theology Faculty of the Waldensian Church, the Department of International Churches of the Baptist Church, the Faculty of Religious Studies of the Federation of Pentecostal Churches, and the multicultural service of the Adventist Church in Italy. A theological leadership team, in which all these bodies are represented, develops content and methodology. The Italian Protestant Youth Organization (FGEI) is also significantly involved in all topics, and not only those specific to youth. The aim is, on the one hand, to promote and integrate charismatic and talented leaders among immigrants in the now multicultural Protestant communities, and to raise awareness and offer further training for ‘natives’, on the other. LINFA is not a training programme for immigrants, but a common educational and growth process for all who want to take responsibility in intercultural communities. The boundaries between teachers and learners are fluid here: cooperative learning, the use of multimedia techniques, and various interactive methods characterize this innovative and experimental educational approach.

The training takes two years and includes regional and national seminar days and weekends. At the local level, students are accompanied and encouraged by tutors to gain practical experience in their congregation.

More than 70 students from different countries of origin and different Protestant faith traditions have now taken part in LINFA.

The aim is above all to impart knowledge and to learn how to adopt a dialogical and unprejudiced attitude towards 'foreign' spirituality and theology, in order to be able to be one Protestant church together in many different ways.

#### **b) Master's programme in Intercultural Theology and Practice of Faith**

In the academic year 2016/2017, the Facoltà Valdese di Teologia introduced a completely new two-year degree in intercultural theology, intended primarily for pastors and lay people already working in multicultural communities of the Waldensian and Methodist Church.

This project - a Master's degree in intercultural theology from the Waldensian Faculty - arose in response to a very concrete request from the churches, and the need to address multicultural reality in communities and society at greater depth.

The two-year course consists of five intensive weekend seminars annually at the Waldensian Faculty in Rome, which are prepared for and accompanied by individual study and practical experience in the student's own community context. The professors, and external experts, work through the following topics in interdisciplinary dialogue and in various formats:

- Introduction to Intercultural theology and mediation (cross-cultural studies)
- Religion, Immigration and Integration
- "After Babel": languages, ways of communication, translation and interpreting
- History of mission and post-cultural studies
- Church – transcultural and intergenerational
- African/Asian studies
- Ethical challenges in intercultural dialogue.

#### ***4.4.5. Insights and challenges – interconfessional, interreligious and intercultural learning***

In view of the fact that the Southeast Europe Regional Group consists mainly of minority churches, it may be surprising to hear of the intensive demand for interdenominational, interreligious and intercultural education. It does not seem to be the case that minority churches only concentrate on themselves and their survival; on the contrary, they have a strong interest in other denominations and religions, and in the cultural development of the majority society.

It may also come as a surprise that encounters are by no means only ‘official’ events at the level of the church leadership – they are generally sought at the level of the congregations, by the pastors and voluntary workers. It is also interesting that these contacts are essentially for learning, presenting themselves as learning locations. The first step is about knowledge of the other, then follows learning in encounters and learning together from certain challenges, and finally come joint actions – resulting in the three-step process: knowledge, encounter, action.

This learning does not only signal openness to the outside world, it is also an element of internal church developments. This can be seen, for example, in the educational work of the Waldensians: African migrants have arrived in the congregation – intercultural learning thus begins in the community itself, and it brings not only new learning content but also new forms of learning. Global learning has reached the congregations.

#### **4.5. Families – where faith is born**

The Regional Group offers a wide range of different approaches in the field of family education. Even a partial list of them would be beyond the scope of this work. So we will present only two models that outline the overall framework of Protestant family education, clarify differences and common ground, and point out options for action.

##### ***4.5.1. Faith formation in the family from the perspective of the Lutheran minority in Hungary***

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary has about 215,000 members and is divided into three church districts and 16 seniorates. 320 parishes are served by 306 pastors. The presiding bishop is Péter Gáncs.

The family is the elementary place for faith formation in Lutheran theology. The family is considered the smallest unit of human togetherness. It is fundamentally responsible for the upbringing and education of an individual life. This task and responsibility of the family can only partly be delegated to school education and the parish.

The general crisis of traditional Western ways of life, especially of traditional forms of family, is leading to a fundamental conflict with this theological foundation. The challenge is proving to be particularly complex in the minority situation of Lutheranism in Hungary.

The Lutheran Church has a share of 2.5% of the Hungarian population. In this context, two different realities determine its situation: on the one hand, a diverse ecumenical environment (the absolute majority is Roman Catholic also in the sense of the defining Christian–religious culture, Protestantism features a strong Reformed tradition and a diverse neo–Protestant orientation). On the other hand, there is growing Western-style secularization, especially among the young people. Although the majority of the population

still describes themselves as religious (“in their own way”), the proportion of active Christians is limited to about 10% of church members.

Today's situation may be characterized in more detail by some current phenomena:

- According to a representative inner–church sociological survey, the absolute majority of Lutherans (over 80%) believe that the family played the most important role in moulding their own Christian life and church affiliation.
- This result – the leading role of the family in religious and faith formation – is all the more important because these families are mostly multi-denominational as a result of the minority situation. The ecumenical culture that is ‘in the family’ is an essential characteristic that makes ‘Lutheran-style religion’ a positive social phenomenon.
- Several years ago, a choice between ethics and (confessional) religious education at state primary schools (at the age of 6–14 years) was introduced by law. Although the number of practising Christians is relatively low, the majority of pupils – after the parents' autonomous decision – choose religious education. That means that these families have delegated the task of religious education (because of their own lack of competence) to the schools or churches. Furthermore, these decisions show an elementary expectation of religious education. The Lutheran Church has also received an invitation from many ‘unknown’ families to educate their children religiously and thus also to participate in the faith formation of these families.

Considering the times when the Lutheran Church’s work with and for families has been welcomed or positively received in recent years, we see ways to go forward:

- The young grandparents – when they are still actively practising their faith in the church or privately – are at the centre of faith formation in their own families, where they can also set a personal example for the next generation. Special education for them is a priority at congregation and church level.
- A central area of personal religious life and faith is prayer. The culture of prayer came to an end during the communist dictatorship and the ensuing Western liberal culture of commerce. In order to encourage personal conversation with God, the church has published a prayer book for children in order to provide an introduction to this religious world.
- The strategic focus regarding faith formation in the family is family pastoral care. The preparatory talks with young couples before the wedding, and counselling competence in crisis situations are just as important as a normal care culture towards the families ‘in everyday routine’. However, experiences in this area are often negative: Hungarian people want to solve their problems ‘privately’, i.e. without external assistance. Thus the problems are usually not solved at all.

- Lutheran family care in principle has an ecumenical dimension: practical questions (e.g. how to attend church together or celebrate Holy Communion) are much more important than the traditional dogmatic differences.
- One Lutheran characteristic in religious education is that a theological and religious culture of dialogue is connected with the actual establishment of contacts with the local church congregations. In the case of church schools the church has the official expectation that there should always be a parish supporting the school. It is not a central requirement for religious education in state schools, but the local congregations regularly send invitations to the families of these children too.

#### ***4.5.2. The controversial paper on the family of the Evangelical Church in Germany – when forms of family are ‘officially discussed’***

The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) brings together the 20 Lutheran, Reformed and United regional churches in Germany. It comprises a total of 21.5 million members in 13,900 independent parishes. The governing bodies of the EKD consist of the Synod, the Church Conference and the 15-member Council. The Council chair is Bishop Prof. Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm.

The resource material “Between autonomy and dependence. Strengthening the family as a reliable community” published (only in German) by the EKD in 2013 was highly controversial and met with unusually broad discussion in the public media.

After several years, the questions raised by the document have not been answered or, rather, have shifted to the levels of the regional churches. However, the country-wide controversy has, at least, brought out the urgent questions for Protestant work to support families.

The debate focused on the question to what extent the partnership form of marriage should be regarded as the normative model of family life, from the Protestant viewpoint, or whether other forms of family could also have equal status. Adopting a more mainstream church and realistic tone, one side aimed for systematically upgrading various forms of family alongside marriage; it argued that Protestant churches should not continue to allow those families to suffer material and social disadvantages. The other side, with a more pastoral and ecumenical tone, argued that a criteria-based procedure – invoking general virtues such as reliability, responsibility, solidarity, etc. – could not yet result in a contemporary theological assessment of family practice.

Below the central point of contention, however, there are two major issues:

### **a) The weighting of biblical sources texts**

The weighting of biblical source texts on family life and their practical-theological interpretation is more contentious than it previously seemed. Largely ahistorical approaches to family duties and constellations described in the Bible – readings focusing exclusively on marriage liturgy and Jesus' ban on divorce – close the mind to substantial developments in the understanding of the family under civil law. On the other hand, points at which a Protestant understanding of families could link up with the Bible and the Reformation have not been sufficiently developed to date, and accordingly not rendered plausible in terms of practical theology.

### **a) Autonomy and dependence**

The title “Between autonomy and dependence” suggests that the EKD publication ought to talk a lot about education, in particular about opportunities to develop partnership, parenthood and educational justice. But it did not come to that point, educational concerns being only addressed in one sub-point and limited to the child-centred spectrum “from nurseries to all-day schools”.<sup>35</sup> The entire argumentation relies significantly on the *maturity of parents*, especially in terms of partnership,<sup>36</sup> religious family practice<sup>37</sup> as well as in case of hardship.<sup>38</sup> This is new in that clarity. But ‘maturity’ cannot mean naively that parents already know, and can deal with, everything necessary and interesting for them in their families. If it stands for the fact that parents can confidently decide in what form and respect they develop their knowledge and skills, where and in what way they learn, and where and in what way they do not, then the EKD publication at least opens the door wide to family-related adult education.

### **4.5.3. Insights and challenges**

Families as traditional forms of community are undergoing great changes in post-modern society. This also has an impact on the image of the family and the related family education of Protestant churches, in which the family has traditionally been an essential place of life and faith and thus also a place of learning for religious socialization. If we want to see families in a process of change as a continuing place of religious education, we need new forms of family education – as the two examples from Hungary and Germany show in different ways. A key word mentioned in both examples is *cross-generation and cross-location educational work*. Despite all the differentiation and appreciation of each phase of life (early childhood, youth, working life, older generation, the latter again differentiated into

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<sup>35</sup> Zwischen Autonomie und Angewiesenheit. Familie als verlässliche Gemeinschaft stärken. Eine Orientierungshilfe des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, herausgegeben vom Kirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, Gütersloh 2013, para. 138.

<sup>36</sup> Church actors are constantly invited “to recognize the variety of private life forms impartially” (para. 132).

<sup>37</sup> Protestant family work should “...consider that in future people will take the decision regarding their own religion in awareness of and in dialogue with other religions” (para. 142).

<sup>38</sup> It is “...necessary to see low-income families and families with care responsibilities more as congregation members and less merely as addressees of diaconal ministries” (para. 144).

‘young oldies’, senior citizens and the elderly) it will be important to perceive the phases of life in an overall context (educational careers; biographical learning, fed into a new religious and church understanding of the overall catechumenate). In addition, it is important to link the different learning locations more closely together: early childhood education is part of the classical family, also carried out in day-care centres and programmes for families in the congregations, which in turn have to adapt to changing family structures and corresponding needs.

The new family education is merging into the social responsibility of the churches to get involved in policy-making and decisions on family issues. Whether church family education succeeds will, however, be shown less by plans and programmes, but rather by how family-friendly a church is in real life. Educational work then begins with very simple questions: Who supports parents in partnership issues, in care challenges and losses, during their children’s adolescence and when they start work – and also in the difficult relations in educational institutions?

#### **4.6. Diaconal education**

The following two examples from the Regional Group come from the large area of diaconal education: Roma education in the Evangelical Methodist Church in eastern central Europe and, for current reasons, educational work among refugees by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria.

##### ***4.6.1. Roma education in the Evangelical Methodist Church in eastern central Europe***

The Evangelical Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe has about 33,500 members and friends in 16 countries. They hear of God in over 20 languages and use even more to pass on God’s love to their fellow human beings. Its bishop is Dr. Patrick Streiff.

#### **a) A forgotten nation**

Europe is home to some 12 million Roma, most of whom are living in eastern central Europe and the Balkans. Even though most of them are resident, their social integration has failed in many places. Roma are discriminated against and often confronted with prejudice and verbal and physical violence. And they also face other problems: high unemployment (up to 90%) and a low level of education. This goes hand in hand with poverty, poor nutrition and a lack of medical care.

#### **b) The work of the Evangelical Methodist Church (EMC)**

The Evangelical Methodist Church in Eastern Central Europe and the Balkans began working with the Roma over 50 years ago to improve their living conditions. As a result, around 20 communities and house districts were created, most or all of them made up of Roma. On the

other hand, short and long-term social projects were also set up – because it was recognized that the proclamation of the gospel can only be credible if new perspectives for the future are opened to people through practical help.

### **c) A faith that is active in love**

The EMC helps the Roma in various ways:

- School support (start-up assistance for primary school, preparation camp; scholarships for secondary school attendance)
- Reading and writing courses for adults
- Help for self-help (Roma families receive seeds, fruit trees or animals to be able to take care for themselves, or guidance and help to earn a little money)
- Assistance with integration into the labour market through government work programmes, health services and family counselling
- Emergency aid (food packages, medical aid, firewood for the winter, etc.)
- Spiritual help (according to a long-term sociological study in Slovakia, social integration is best achieved where Roma become part of a religious community and where their whole lifestyle changes).

### **d) Practical examples**

Where God's love touches hearts, it affects not only individual persons but also their milieu. Roma from the EMC congregation of Alsózsolca (Hungary) have collected garbage at their location several times in the past. This happened not as a PR campaign, but as an expression of their will to be there for others. The EMC congregation in Jabuka (Serbia) offers Roma writing courses for illiterate adults. The children are coached to get on at school. Roma are often very musical. The church has organized instruments (trumpet, horn, etc.) from Germany for the community. Furthermore, a German music teacher was found to give music lessons. The Roma use these new skills e.g. to accompany funerals with their music.

These examples show how congregations of the Evangelical Methodist Church in eastern central Europe train the Roma and empower them to continue their lives.

#### ***4.6.2. Educational activity with refugees – a snapshot from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria***

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavarian (see 4.3.3.)
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This picture – of a mosque, a church and the Mediterranean with a refugee boat – was painted by Mohamed Ali, who fled from Syria and has been living in Erlangen, Germany for two years.

The photo was taken at the exhibition: "My view of Erlangen" in the context of Protestant educational work. Here, migrants with and without the experience fleeing their homes, and long-established Erlangen residents were asked: What picture do you have of Erlangen? What will you remember forever when you think of this town?

### **a) Context**

The Evangelical Lutheran Deanery of Erlangen has 80,000 Protestant church members.

At present there are 3,500 refugees needing support in the deanery (2,000 in the city and about 1,500 in the rural district).<sup>39</sup> About 14 congregations (Protestant, Catholic, Free Church) are providing sanctuary, i.e. asylum in the church premises – some regularly and others only once. In the area of Erlangen-City alone there are about 80 refugee support initiatives (municipal, associations, church-based ...). In the rural district, a support group is set up in every single community into which refugees move. That means that about 2,000 people are working to assist refugees in a voluntary (unpaid) capacity in the city of Erlangen, and another approx 1,000 people in the rural district. At least 60% of the highly committed volunteers are fully or partially employed, as engineers, lawyers, teachers – and the other estimated 40% are pensioners, students or job seekers). The training courses held (five very intensive and comprehensive courses in 2016, as well as 8-10 short courses on specific topics) attracted 10-60 participants each time.

<sup>39</sup> These and following figures relate to 2016.

The educational work of the Evangelical Lutheran Deanery of Erlangen primarily comprises the following areas of refugee work: accompaniment and continuing education of congregations and volunteers; processes for and with refugees; establishing contacts with other societal groups; policy planning.

### **b) Accompanying parishes and the hands-on work in volunteer groups, contact networks**

Contact persons have now been found in almost all congregations of the deanery and linked up with one another.

Special cooperation takes place among some congregations and groups, within the framework of “FiDE – Refugee Work in the Deanery Erlangen” and other refugee initiatives.

Topics at these meetings or discussions are:

- the organization of refugee care
- legal questions
- implementing ‘church asylum’
- requests for networking or good tips on specific topics.

### **c) Training sessions for volunteers**

The advanced training series “Accompanying those supporting refugees” includes:

- trauma research
- dialogue with helpers from the central reception facility in Zirndorf
- advice from colleagues for volunteers and staff in refugee work.

### **a) Processes that have been initiated**

- Spaces of encounter for / with refugees: the church coordinator invited 50 initiatives, from the ‘old Erlangen’ voluntary group to Caritas, from the migration and integration advisory board to the department for neighbourhood sociocultural activity, to discuss the possibilities and limits of ‘spaces of encounter’.
- Awareness-building processes: e.g. organizing an interreligious commemoration ceremony for the refugees drowned in the Mediterranean with Islamic, Protestant, Catholic congregations and the Jewish religious community. An exhibition “The forgotten refugees of Southeast Europe” showed photos.

### **e) Contact with other social groups**

- Contacts exist in particular with the municipal administration, its advisory council for foreigners and integration, the church sanctuary working group and the Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees (BAMF).
- There are also meetings with politicians from various political groups in the city council.

**f) Policy planning**

This includes:

- applications to finance the work
- FiDE meeting for networking and exchange
- spaces of encounter as a conceptual project
- newly established meetings with other educational institutions on continuing education in refugee work
- multiplier meetings.

**g) Outlook**

This work is necessary in order to cope with the social situation, meet the need for committed persons, and for the church to be able to *constructively* shape the topic of "decent treatment of refugees and empowerment of committed persons". The tasks will increase significantly, because the growing number of refugees also implies a growing need for advice and counselling for volunteers and church congregations.

New priorities could be:

- continuing work on the above
- responding to the increased need for advice from the congregations (this should be sufficient in terms of the number of hours, but in terms of content it is not)
- supporting volunteers by expanding training opportunities
- supporting committed groups in the search for translation/interpretation services (possibly launching a fund for reimbursing their expenses)
- networking among those actively involved in the congregations,
- holding exhibitions on the topic, etc.

#### **4.7. Learning how to talk about faith, raising the topic of faith in conversation**

From the abundance of faith courses offered and conducted in the churches of the Regional Group, two basic models were chosen, rather than individual examples.

##### **4.7.1. Longing for our own language – from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia**

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia (see 4.2.2.)
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Finding a language, starting to speak about faith or at least *wanting* to speak of it in a meaningful language, not only with “unspeakable sighs” – the faithful in Russia must learn this today.<sup>40</sup>

Religious socialization in Russia is determined by several factors. The most important are:

- the legacy of Soviet atheism and a rejection of religion, which has been preserved in one way or another by many members of the society
- today's pan-European processes involving secularization
- the predominance of the Orthodox Church with its characteristic features in religious life
- the global growth of fundamentalist tendencies
- the typical trend towards traditionalism in authoritarian societies - paradoxically, it glorifies both the conservative Orthodox and Soviet traditions
- Growing ideological thinking – a legacy from the Soviet era that is still being actively developed today: everything is attributed to simple and clear systems of statements; to many it seems impossible that there could be different points of view and free thought processes within a single denomination.

This results in the following significant phenomena:

- A frightening ignorance of religious issues (doctrine, structure and practice of this or that church), which also occurs among experts – among historians, philosophers and religious scholars: excellently educated and clever people with much authority often

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<sup>40</sup> See on this the unpublished Master thesis by Anton Tikhomirov: “Sehnsucht nach eigener Sprache. Russische Übersetzungen von Kirchenliedern” (Yearning for your own language. Russian translations of German hymns).

begin to present an obvious ignorance when it comes to questions concerning religion (especially non-Orthodox churches).

- A deep gulf between the church and secular languages, the church and the secular living spaces: the representatives of the Orthodox church hierarchy (and they shape the idea of the church) prefer to speak an 'ecclesial' language in their public appearances, i.e. with many ancient and old Church Slavic words, very rare use of modern words and terms, a monotonous, 'ecclesial' flow of speech. Incidentally, this phenomenon does not only affect the linguistic field. It is also typical of the perception of ecclesiastical rites, church morality and doctrine. A person who considers him or herself to be a believer but is not particularly active will almost inevitably experience a split in consciousness. Life in the church and everyday life hardly touch each other at all.
- A fairly serious polarization between fundamentalists and anti-clericalists. Recently a relatively small but extremely active group of different aggressive fundamentalists has emerged (mainly, but not exclusively, Orthodox and Islamic). On the other hand, educated social classes are increasingly rejecting the church and even actively condemning it, as many questions have arisen about the morality of representatives of the church hierarchy and the social policy position of the Orthodox Church. This rejection is primarily leveled at Orthodoxy but inevitably 'brushes off' on all other Christian churches.
- Separately, we should point out the perhaps secondary but extremely interesting phenomenon of the blind spot. It means that ordinary people simply (quite literally!) do not notice non-Orthodox expressions of churchliness. One of many examples: At a concert in an Evangelical Lutheran congregation, a visitor asks for the opportunity to speak with the pastor. The pastor comes to her. Her question is astounding: "Is this church actually in operation?" She knows she's talking to a clergyman, and they're standing by an altar with lit candles.

For church educational work within the framework of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, everything mentioned above means the necessity of fulfilling a whole series of interlinked requirements:

- The most important thing is to first simply find people who are interested in learning about the Evangelical Lutheran faith. This is not so easy: for people outside the ELCR it is in most cases simply non-existent (even if they come there for concerts, as in the example mentioned), and among their own parishioners there are not so many who are looking for the occasion to speak of their faith. It is a fundamental task to raise interest in faith and awaken the desire to reflect and talk about it.
- When those who are interested have found each other, it is the church's first task to tell them the most important simple facts about church history, practice and doctrine, as well as about Scripture. This includes: the composition and history of the

canon, the classical dogmas, the main stages of church history, the foundations of the Reformation doctrine of justification, the most common traditions in church life and the basis of the church year. The difficulty here is that we have to do this without trivializing the material, yet in a rather rational, positivist language (since this is best understood by people who grew up in the very rationalist, 'mathematical' Soviet educational system). Practice shows that it is not possible to speak of deep levels of religious meaning without the listeners having a secure factual basis. Otherwise what is said is inadequately understood: either as 'babbling about nothing' or, ultimately, as mystical truth. Here, many 'Western' pastors have made a major mistake. For example, confirmation classes have often consisted only of participants engaging in a free association of ideas on some spiritual topics, and there was no actual teaching of 'hard facts'.

- However, we must immediately show that these facts cannot be significant in and of themselves, and that they require interpretation. We need to explain that church doctrine is not yet another ideology – by creating a 'hard framework' but indicating leeway for freedom. People should learn to think independently, but not 'up in the air', rather by relying (possibly even critically) on the main aspects of church teaching about faith.
- The latter two claims and the following are closely linked to each other, without which they cannot be successful. People must learn to read and hear church texts (songs, sermons, speeches) not as a lulling flow of pious words, but as texts that have a certain content and express it. In fact, language must be rediscovered in the church as a means of communication, not as a collection of incantations, as is usually the case.
- The rift between the ecclesial and the secular worlds and the two languages should be gradually overcome. We need to show that we can speak in "normal" language about ecclesial topics. We have to explain where and how questions of church doctrine affect everyday life. It will be necessary to consciously distance ourselves from the Orthodox church language and the expressions of Orthodox piety (especially Orthodox piety understood simplistically). Sometimes this even has to be done very firmly, overcoming resistance on the part of the learners.

But to return to the beginning, we repeat: the main task is to help people to talk about their faith, even only wanting to do so, to clothe their faith and religious experiences in words, in an informative, understandable language connected with normal life, not in the language of incantations and ready-made formulas. If this wish is awakened, that is half the battle won!

#### **4.7.2. Faith courses are changing – an overview of developments in German-speaking areas**

The challenges facing Protestant education today include changes in the church and religious context (loss of tradition and religious renewal) on the one hand, and changes in education (from the knowledge society to the education society) on the other. Two developments for faith courses are of particular importance for church educational work: the loss or interruption of tradition, and the return of religion to public consciousness. Both are important for the specific Protestant profile of faith formation, especially for the development of faith courses.

##### **a) Abandonment of tradition**

The abandonment, or interruption, of tradition is a phenomenon that has been known for some time, in Western Europe at the latest since the 1960s and 1970s. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, we noted that not only the churches in central and eastern Europe had declined during communist times - simple and basic knowledge of faith has also dwindled. Not only do many specifically church-related and theological questions remain unanswered – both in the East and in the West – e.g. to what extent was Jesus the Son of God, or was Mary a virgin. Often quite elementary questions remain unanswered: why Christmas is celebrated or what does the sign of the cross symbolize? This loss of knowledge of faith is accompanied by a loss of subjective expressiveness: individuals do believe something, but are becoming less able to say what they believe and how to connect it responsibly with their own life and actions. This loss of objective and subjective knowledge of faith is accompanied by a loss of trust in the institution that mediates faith, the church.

In addition to this decline, there has also been a new wave of religiosity since the 1980s. Some initially saw in this a new upswing in matters of faith and churchliness. But the religious wave mostly ebbed away outside the walls of the church. There were reasons for this 'return of religion'. Life has become more incalculable, with concerns ranging from job security to internal security against terrorism. Belief in the ability to shape the world in a sustainable positive way – that is, in peace and justice – has diminished. A development can be observed from a 'risk society' in the 1980s to a 'disaster society' and, finally, to a permanent 'crisis society'. Religion is developing in a complementary way to this. However, it is no longer limited to the mediation of religion, for example in and through the churches, which as institutions have a share in the loss of social confidence in the institutions. That is why religion in social and individual responsibility is becoming a phenomenon of civil religion, at least in some regions of Europe. New questions arise here: what kind of religious knowledge is this, how can it be expressed by words and communicated? What significance does it have in shaping our own lives and that of society? Is it separate from everyday knowledge or is it a critical-productive part of a new, thoughtful life development? Does it enter into social educational action? And finally: How does this new religious knowledge

relate to traditional knowledge, but also to the critique of the religious dimension that has been brought back into people's awareness via the return of religion?

The new discovery of religion is further reinforced by an increased public presence of Islam in Europe. This has created a new need for knowledge, but also an additional need for certainty. At stake are both fundamental religious questions about God and faith, and the open question about the socio-political significance of Islam.

### **b) New forms of knowledge**

However, a new formatting of religious knowledge is not independent of society's configuration of knowledge. The European Union has adopted such a configuration within the framework of its Lisbon Strategy, when its goal is to make the EU "the most competitive and dynamic *knowledge-based* economic zone in the world by 2010".<sup>41</sup> Knowledge thus becomes the basis of the economy. However, knowledge is not only a factor in the economic process, it is itself commodified: it becomes information that can be modularized and pragmatized, evaluated and certified. The commodification of knowledge requires a surplus of knowledge and a lifelong learning process. The multiplication of knowledge and the concept of lifelong learning are interdependent. What gets lost here – and needs to be rediscovered – is a new understanding about the function and the limits of knowledge, a certainty about the content and the scope of knowledge, and the associated transformation of a knowledge and information society into an education society that knows how to deal with its stocks of knowledge.

Here, religious knowledge has a critical revelatory function, insofar as it is a different kind of knowledge, orientational knowledge or reassurance knowledge, which – trained in religious borderline experiences – may reflect and accompany social transformation processes and open up other experiences in light of the experience of the other.

### **c) Faith courses – within the church**

Faith formation is an essential and integral part of Protestant identity and an opportunity for Protestant churches to provide internal and external educational programmes. In this context, faith courses can become an instrument to shape processes of change in the church within society. If things go well, these courses will not be a matter of one-way instruction, but the church will learn from people how to find orientation in the changes, and to develop future perspectives. Here Protestants need even more courage to Europeanize faith courses. A standard component of the "basic knowledge of Christianity" faith course offered the *Bayerisches Sonntagsblatt* newspaper is looking at relations within European Protestantism. Internet courses that bring people from different countries together via e-learning are a good option to enable Europe-wide networking. Furthermore, we should consider how

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<sup>41</sup> European Council, 23-24 March, Lisbon, Presidency Conclusions, para. 5: [www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1\\_de.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_de.htm).

“basic knowledge of Christianity” could be combined with similar efforts in Islam or Judaism, and what role this basic knowledge plays in the context of the basic knowledge of society.

#### **d) Faith courses – open to society**

Faith courses, however, are not only instruments of inner-church communication and signs of a learning church. As a form of learning, they are also open to participants without church affiliation. This openness to different groups is also linked to a fundamental openness to the education society. Consequently, faith courses are an attempt to institutionalize both nonformal education and specifically religious education so that they express faith knowledge at the level of the education society and can also enrich the secular forms of knowledge in that society.

Faith courses concentrate religious knowledge in the form of reassurance. In this way, religion can be communicated reflectively, without shrinking into useless factual knowledge and drowning in the flood of media information. Faith courses serve different options of the knowledge society: one option is knowledge, another is reassurance. A further option is the free search for meaning and interpretation, and yet another is being at home in a tradition that has become strange. In both cases, communicating religious knowledge as faith formation limits and enriches a knowledge society on its way to an education society.

#### **4.7.3. Insights and challenges**

Faith courses are booming in the Protestant education sector. This is usually justified with the break in tradition and the resulting lack of knowledge about religious and church topics. As important as the courses on faith are in this objective, they are also in double jeopardy. On the one hand, knowledge of faith threatens to become a purely cognitive phenomenon, and the transmission of faith a modularized learning process. On the other, faith courses could narrow down to become mere compensation for the loss of knowledge.

Against the first threat it is important that faith courses are community learning, learning in and for community, i.e. that they become part of the forming of a congregation. Their community–building elements are therefore of particular importance.

We can best address the other threat of mere compensation for losses by making room for the innovative power of faith formation: it comes down to examining new and existing beliefs in conversation, and making them fruitful for our own lives and for interacting in the community. Faith formation increasingly means enabling participants to articulate their own questions and (!) to find answers, so that all those involved - also teachers, pastors and religious educators - will themselves find a new language for the gospel. Finally, the teachings of the church will unfold from this listening to one another and from the quality of language used in this exchange. In connection with this change in and through faith formation, new locations are also being sought for the mediation of faith in addition to familiar ones.

In this dual orientation, faith courses can also contribute to religious education in a secular society and thus have a missionary effect.

Faith courses must be seen within the broader context of finding a language and articulacy of faith. The issue in future will increasingly be to find new, authentic language for faith. Education here means saying goodbye to an old language that has become isolated, and moving towards a new language of faith that comes from the heart and touches the intellect. Language education is one of the most urgent tasks of Protestant educational action.

#### **4.8. Results and conclusions from the learning fields and case studies**

The six learning fields with their case studies initially show a wide variety and range of Protestant educational activities in the churches of the Regional Group. The educational perspectives of Protestant churches range from family education, schooling and religious education, the training of staff and volunteers, to societal education, for example in diakonia and interreligious dialogue. This was not necessarily to be expected in view of the minority situation of the churches, but shows conversely that even for smaller churches – or especially for them – educational activity is an essential part of communicating the gospel. It is also interesting to see that these areas of education are important in the churches of both the western and eastern parts of the region. Differences can be seen in *how* they deal with the common challenges in the European (educational) area. This in turn depends on their own educational traditions and on the state and societal framework conditions, for instance whether the churches want to become involved in the state school system or not, or how civil society has evolved.

If we disregard this differentiation of educational action due to history and society, it becomes apparent that Protestant churches are trying to deal with the challenges posed by social transformation processes in post-modern Europe, and that education is an instrument, medium or even engine for dealing with these upheavals. Education is understood and organized as an individual and collective process of integration.

This perspective brings out both the strengths and the weaknesses of Protestant educational action, which comes from faith and has impacts on society. The strength is that Protestant educational action is primarily not subordinate to any purposes or objectives, but results from the communication of the gospel, links up with life contexts. It is able to shape places of life into places of learning, and looks to challenges in order to gain orientational knowledge. This endows Protestant educational action with freedom and flexibility. This is also what makes it dynamic in social issues, such as interreligious and intercultural dialogue, in the new issues of migration and integration, etc.

But here lies one of the weaknesses of Protestant educational activity - that it must again and again associate itself explicitly with its own foundation, the communication of the gospel, in order for people to be able to identify and organize it as a differentiated but

uniform field of work of the churches. In so doing, it must resist the temptation to reduce itself to the function of internal church management and retention of members, etc.

The other challenge is that Protestant educational action is quite naturally connected with social educational action but that it must also make itself understood in this context. It must know the thinking and working methods of secular educational processes in order to be able to participate and express itself within them. Changes in secular education will have to be perceived even more intensively in future. Protestant educational action thus includes achievement in clarifying educational processes from the theological foundation to organization in the church and society. The case studies show that Protestant educational work has its own profile here, that this profile is also recognizable and that its special features are a contribution to societal education – from its commitment to participatory educational processes, a criticism of functionalization, sensitivity to the dialectics of educational processes to the salutary limitation of education. Here lies one of the tasks of Protestant educational action.

This widening of horizons from the basis of faith towards the shaping of educational processes is also connected with a critical view of the Protestant churches' own educational structures. If the starting point of educational action is the seeker, and if educational action means enabling people to find their own answers with their undreamt-of possibilities, then this will also be reflected in the organizational structure of Protestant educational action and be allowed to develop in new ways.

## **5. Educational action of Protestant Churches in Europe – suggestions and recommendations**

### **5.1. Theological justification of Protestant educational action**

The basis of Protestant educational action is the action of God with human beings. The basic act of education is the creation of humankind in God's image – *Bildung*, the German word for education/formation (Master Eckart), also contains the word *Bild* (image). And not only here: this linguistic connection also exists e.g. in Serbian. Human education as a constant self-formation and mutual education of all corresponds to this passion for education as being 'formed'. Because of their likeness to God, all people need and are capable of education. Education is therefore an essential part of human life in accordance with creation. All humans have a right to education.

Furthermore, education is an essential part of a Christian life of faith. Protestant education exists for the transmission of faith and for the sake of a deeper understanding of our own faith. Jesus Christ's commission to his disciples is: "Go and *teach* all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

The profile of a Protestant church comes from the close connection between worship and teaching – founded in *publice docere*, the public proclamation of the gospel. A preaching church is a *teaching church* by being a church that listens to the Word of God. This link is the basis of Protestant educational action, a responsibility carried out in a variety of fields and by people and professional groups with a host of different qualifications.

A common theological understanding of education needs to be developed in the CPCE as a guide to action, with educational action by the church being understood as one of its essential dimensions.

## **5.2. The church as a place of Protestant educational action**

### ***5.2.1. Education, pastoral ministry and teachers in the church***

Education concerns the churches with regard to their own ministers. For churches it is important to think over the formation of pastors, i.e. training for ordained ministry, and to constantly align it to the current tasks in the church. Training for parish ministry should include the ability to act professionally regarding education in all phases of life, and learning to cooperate with all other actors in church education.

In this context, it is a particular challenge to recognize not only the pastors but also the other church teachers (catechists, those teaching religious education at schools, university lecturers, etc.) more strongly as part of church educational work, which also takes place in the public space, and to deepen the connection between all church educational actors.

### ***5.2.2. Training lay preachers and readers***

For many congregations it is becoming important for non-ordained persons to be able to lead devotions or worship services. The reasons may be a lack of ordained personnel, a pronounced diaspora situation, or even the desire for more creative opportunities for committed parishioners. This increasingly requires opportunities for liturgical and (continuing) theological training for non-ordained persons.

### ***5.2.3. Education and voluntary work***

The formation of volunteers and church education by volunteers represents a great opportunity for the churches. The many professional and other skills of Christians need to be increasingly integrated into the church's work, and given a lot of scope to develop.

### ***5.2.4. Church educational action and current challenges***

Protestant education is a way of passing on faith and enhances the individual and community life of believers. It fosters an identity capable of dialogue. Especially in diaspora situations, Protestant education strengthens believers' identity as they become aware of their Christian and denominational origins, their special history, and their specific cultural forms of expression. A clear personal identity is a prerequisite for dialogue and openness.

Facing the current challenges, Protestant education has to support people especially in coping with complex transformation processes in the social, political and church field. This includes dealing with heterogeneity, pluralism and ambiguity, inside and outside their own church community. In this way, church educational action is a precaution against fundamentalist tendencies in religion and politics.

### **5.3. Education as an essential dimension of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe**

#### ***5.3.1. The CPCE as a learning community***

Since its beginning the CPCE has proved to be a learning community. Together the CPCE churches come to understand the gospel more deeply when confronted with the current challenges. They learn how to better understand and respect one another in their denominational, regional and cultural diversity.

In the Southeast Europe Regional Group we have experienced how important it is to allow ourselves to be transformed in this common learning process by encountering the other. This willingness is not a matter of course but requires openness to listen, to name and to endure differences. It implies trusting in the Holy Spirit that a change is really possible. For example, the following points play a role in the Regional Group:

- overcoming competition between Protestant churches
- large churches learning from small churches
- bringing out what is specifically Protestant in a diaspora situation
- learning to complement each other.

The aim is for the CPCE churches to learn how they can live their communion even more constructively and fully.

Our proposal is to consider, through a CPCE study process, what constitutes the church as a learning church, what promotes common learning as a church, how understanding between different churches succeeds, and what role the CPCE can play in this. Such a study should acknowledge the CPCE Regional Groups, the gatherings of members of synod and the many regional church partnerships in their relevant specific significance for the CPCE church community.

#### ***5.3.2. Education as an essential dimension of all CPCE topics***

Just as all CPCE theological work always has ethical and ecumenical dimensions, so too it has an educational dimension. More account should be taken of the essential importance of education for the work of the CPCE and for all church action.

We therefore recommend establishing an Education advisory board, structurally comparable to the Ethics and Ecumenism advisory boards.

The Education advisory board would have the tasks: to identify the subject of education as a dimension of many other topics in the CPCE communication processes, to contribute to a common theological understanding of education within the CPCE, to reflect on the development of European framework conditions for education and academic policy regarding their significance for church educational activity, and to advise the Council on all questions relevant to education. An education report to be drawn up for each General Assembly could be helpful in this context.

The Education advisory board could include academic and church institutions from the individual CPCE churches, for example the office “bildung evangelisch Europa (beE)” (located in Erlangen, Bavaria).

Beyond the foundations of a common theological understanding of education, however, the aim should definitely not be to introduce uniform educational approaches in the CPCE churches. Specific educational models must be specific to the respective contexts, e.g. for working with confirmation candidates or training volunteers, and must be oriented to the given challenges, goals, general conditions and resources.

### ***5.3.3. Sharing experience among educationists***

Education grows where people encounter one other with interest and commitment. In this way churches are learning communities. This happens when churches share ideas, models and experiences among each other. We therefore propose that networking between educators in the CPCE churches be further encouraged.

The “forum bildung Europa” could continue to play an important role in this regard, in that experts (educators, educationists) could consult on individual topics. In this context, a close linkage of these experts to their respective churches, especially to the synods, would be desirable.

At the same time, we should strive for an even stronger ‘Europeanization’ of the forum, among other things with regard to the organizational team, to sponsorship and financing, as well as through more intense networking with other organizations, e.g. the Protestant (Ecumenical) Association for Adult Education in Europe, in order to expand the target groups.

In addition to education topics in the narrower sense, the “forum bildung Europa” could also specifically address socio-political topics to which the churches want to respond with educational programmes. Whilst the Education advisory board (see 5.3.2.) would primarily mean giving greater value to the topic of education within the CPCE, the strength of the

forum would lie in the practice-oriented work *towards the outside world*. To strive for both is all the better.

#### **5.3.4. Education as encounter and through encounter**

Churches have a political dimension and impact by their very existence. In their ecumenical, European and global cooperation, churches offer their staff cross-border education and experience. In this way, churches can provide global education and counter nationalist ideas about education. European and global learning is a special opportunity for the churches, because their mindset is universal. The CPCE churches should promote this by facilitating exchanges among theology students (as future teachers of religion, pastors). These could include spending a semester at the theology faculties of CPCE churches, ecumenical study-abroad years (as at Centro Melantone or in Sibiu), but also student conferences (e.g. example those in 2011 and 2013 in Rome).

An exchange of interns e.g. in adult education, should also be encouraged. Here the Southeast Europe Regional Group could be a platform for educational exchange.

The CPCE lives from its communion in witness and service, as well as from actual experiences of encounter. Wherever possible, initiatives for exchange and encounter should be encouraged, welcomed and appreciated.

## **Annex**

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