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Enlightened Heterogeneity: Religious Education Facing the Challenges of Educational Inequity

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Abstract: Does religious education contribute to injustice? At the least, religious education operates in a socio-political context shaped by inequality. Educational inequity is a phenomenon that affects society and schools. It is thus a matter for religious pedagogy, which is concerned with the equal dignity of all in their freedom, in the light of the theology of the image of God. Religious education has to take place normatively in the light of freedom towards freedom. This paper aims to show that in religious education, demands for educational equity have dramatically increased in the face of growing heterogeneity. The struggle for identity and justice in the intersectionality of various aspects points to the complexity of the challenges. However, it is evident that religious education cannot override social conditions. Moreover, from a praxeological perspective, religious education contributes to educational inequity and hegemonic orders of difference through mechanisms such as essentialization and othering, and thus runs the risk of becoming aporetic. The concept of Enlightened Heterogeneity developed here counteracts this, correlating identity and justice intersectionally while self-reflexively reflecting on one's own practices.



Keywords: religious education; (enlightened) heterogeneity; educational inequity; pandemic

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The recent coronavirus pandemic has revealed a massive problem in school teaching and thus also in religious education. This is not initially a question of the form of religious education, which, as is well known, is a very special form in the Federal Republic of Germany. Here, on the basis of the Basic Law Art. 7, religious education takes place under the shared responsibility of the state and the religious communities and is usually given on the basis of a confession, even if the aim is not catechesis but education. This confessional religious education, which brings together Protestant and Catholic pupils as well as learners interested in an alternative subject of philosophy in separate learning groups and separates the class group for this purpose, thus constitutes a considerable heterogeneity in school learning. This framework, which is anchored in the Basic Law and implemented differently in the individual federal states in Germany in terms of education policy, constitutes an order of difference between the learners. However, during the pandemic, this separation between individual groups of pupils was often not implemented in this way. Religious education was often canceled in comparison to the so-called main subjects such as mathematics, German and English. But where it was conducted, it often took place within the class. The separation was abolished—with consequences for the teaching-learning arrangement and even for the level of discussion of the topics dealt with. Often, topics could not be discussed in the existential depth that is the case, at least normatively, in denominationally homogeneous or denominationally cooperative groups. But this question of the form of religious education in public schools is not the issue here. It is primarily about the fact that the pandemic has revealed in an unimagined dramatic way the profound deficits of the school system and thus also of religious education, which is part of this school system in Germany. Recently, research in the sociology of education, in the context of educational research as well as educational policy, has pointed to a massive deficit with regard to educational equity in schools. Schools, and thus also religious education, operate in a field of partly massive social inequity. They themselves are part of this system. Social, economic

and cultural as well as religious heterogeneity can be found in every learning group. There is a heated debate about whether schools and religious education are part of the solution or part of the problem. Is school education a way to overcome inequity in society and school? Or does it contribute to it, intentionally or unintentionally (Grümme 2021, pp. 147–67)? These intricate and complex questions have now been massively exacerbated during the pandemic. Existing stratifications, given differences and inequalities, are exacerbated to a dramatic degree. Where children often do not even have the technical infrastructure to participate in digital education, where teachers report that young people are no longer reachable to them, and where doctors and social workers report massively increasing family violence, this problem of equity becomes urgent (Fickermann and Edelstein 2020). Other students, however, who do not have such difficulties due to their middle- or upper-class background, have been able to continue their education. The canceled graduation ceremony could be tolerated. All in all, the pandemic has thus increased the inequalities between learners in an almost dramatic way, and also intensified the heterogeneity between them. Not only inequality has increased. As the number of mentally disturbed adolescents shows, it has very serious consequences for individual well-being, for personal-existential self-perceptions and thus for identities. Surprisingly, the pandemic produces an almost paradoxical result for religious education: On the one hand, it minimizes heterogeneity through the organizational changes of learning in the learning group, and on the other hand, it intensifies heterogeneity dramatically through the intensified stratifications between learners and the consequences for identity aspects.

This dramatization of the situation, of course, also changes the challenges of educational inequity and heterogeneity for religious pedagogy. It has to work critically and constructively with an analytical perception of this situation, in its critical assessment and in the construction of corresponding perspectives for a context-appropriate and subject-oriented religious pedagogy. Following the normative premise that it is concerned with the education and autonomy of students in religious education, religious pedagogy has to stand up to these challenges and open up corresponding horizons. This is also the reason for the structure of the following argumentation: First, the phenomenon of educational inequity (Section 1) is clarified in terms of its manifold dimensions (Section 2), before the specific challenges of religious pedagogy (Section 3) are marked and finally a further perspective (Section 4) is identified.

1. Heterogeneity and Educational Equity

1.1. Education System

According to the PISA study 2019, equal opportunities are “one of the challenges for the German education system”. The dependence of performance on social, religious and cultural background has “intensified” in recent years after the publication of the first PISA study in 2000 (OECD 2018). Educational inequity is one of the central problems in the German school system. In hardly any other country do the “social situation, the level of education, the cultural resources and activities as well as the migration status of families contribute both together and in each case in a special way to the emergence and transmission of inequalities in educational participation and the acquisition of competences” (Baumert and Schümer 2001, p. 379).

1.2. Social Sciences

In the face of the glaring contradiction between the normative self-conception of the education system, which strives for equality of opportunity and participation for all, and the school realities, the high degree of academic examination of this phenomenon is a welcome consequence. Poverty research and inequality research ask about the connections between socialization and inequality in and through education (Butterwegge [2009] 2016; Bauer 2012). The sociology of education sheds light on the questions of equal opportunities and education and the interactions between education and social living situations, social origin, migration and gender (Becker [2009] 2017; Brake and Büchner 2012). Education is

highlighted as a privilege (Becker and Lauterbach [2009] 2016). Childhood research and youth research ask about the conditions of growing up and their effects on educational contexts (Deckert-Peaceman et al. 2010). Educational science and school pedagogy are quite controversially investigating the extent to which not only the environment, not only the educational and socio-political context, but the teaching itself in its manifold, highly complex dimensions is contributing to educational inequity (Tillmann 2010, pp. 38–46; Brenner 2010). Similar research is controversial in terms of identity theory and individual psychology (Pirker 2013, pp. 67–83). In terms of social philosophy and political science, the topics of gender, inclusion and migration are debated in particular (Meyer and Vorholt 2011). In theology, educational equity is primarily the subject of social-ethical research which, from a theology of the image of God on the one hand and social-philosophical perspectives on the other, asserts the intrinsic connection between education and equity, not least against economic instrumentalization (Wiemeyer 2015, pp. 194–200; Heimbach-Steins 2007, pp. 311–16; Bade and EKD 2010, pp. 14–25). All in all, it can be said that educational equity has become a virulent topic of research. In religious pedagogy and catechetics, there are indeed initial research efforts (Bade and EKD 2010; Schweitzer 2011; Könnemann and Mette 2013; Grümme 2014; Könnemann 2019, pp. 42–56; Grümme 2019, pp. 10–27). After the first preliminary steps, fundamental drafts have now appeared that deal with it at conceptual, empirical and operational levels (Grümme 2014; Unser 2014).

1.3. Theology and Religious Pedagogy

Theology, and religious pedagogy in particular, should be concerned with educational equity because of its genuine profile. After all, it is centrally concerned with the maturity and autonomy of the learners. Against the background of a theology of the image of God, a human right to education can be formulated which, although it can be justified in purely philosophical terms, is significantly intensified by the idea of God. Education is once again qualified in a special way as a freedom event by the belief in a preceding liberating freedom of God, which is to be thought of in terms of alterity theory (Platzbecker 2013; Grümme 2007). From another, didactically oriented perspective, there are also insights into the relevance of educational equity for the topic of the question of God in religious education. There are insights that the type of school has an impact on the form and content of God-speech. While secondary school pupils tend to think in deterministic, occasionally fatalistically charged categories, grammar school pupils speak primarily in categories of freedom. Here, God is the liberating counterpart who sets them on their way and calls them out; there, it is rather the blind fate that guides the destinies of the world beyond human influence (Lütze 2011, pp. 150–60). All the more striking, and even more explosive, is the fact that the topic of educational equity overall continues to be a desideratum in religious pedagogy, in the didactics of religion as well as in catechesis. In particular, as far as the inequity-relevant practices of religious education are concerned, there remains “the absence of discourse” (Vieregge 2020, p. 224). In view of the foregoing, it is all the more to be welcomed that in recent times there has been a growing sensitivity in religious education to the intricate and highly complex connections that exist with the interdependence of inequality and educational inequity in schools and religious education. In this context, the recognition that schools do not simply interrupt social inequality and, for example, change the unequal distribution of social resources through family background is of particular importance. Rather, schools seem to “even reinforce them and in turn have an additional differentiating effect—and this obviously in a very specific way, so that educational inequality itself can be characterized as a central moment of (also future) social inequality” and thus also of increasing social heterogeneity (Rabenstein et al. 2013, p. 668). In the following, heterogeneity is understood as the identification of differences and distinctions in relation to a variable (Wenning 2013, p. 133). A school class is heterogeneous in terms of achievement, gender, social composition, cultures, nationalities and religions. In addition, heterogeneity can be related to average values and expectations of normality. Heterogeneity then means deviation from a defined norm (ibid., p. 134).

In order to understand this alluded complexity of educational equity and heterogeneity even more profoundly, it can help to differentiate different levels with system-theoretical hermeneutics. This makes it clear that inequity does not merely enter the classroom from the outside. It is also driven by certain practices and habitual attitudes of teachers against their intention. On the other hand, it will become clear that education alone cannot bring about a just society.

Three levels would have to be distinguished in recourse to school pedagogy: the macro level of the political-social structure, the meso level of the educational system and the micro level of teaching, without overlooking the fact that these levels can interact and reinforce each other.

2. Differentiations

2.1. Social Structures: Macro Level

In the light of the theory of functional differentiation, one section of society can no longer change the whole society. Education cannot be seen as the sole key to analyzing and eradicating poverty or enabling participation. “For example, the ‘school system’ always means a differentiation of pupils according to achievement and thus according to talent. Giftedness is to be promoted. However, talents are always what the children already bring to school. The circle closes” (Wilhelms 2010, p. 161).

This structural view opens up a social perspective that shows the aporia of a concentration on education. This tends to promote the Matthaeus effect of an illegitimate privileging of the already privileged. The more parents invest in education, the more education is functionalized in terms of employability (Möhring-Hesse 2011, p. 194). Education is defended as a property against the educational demands of others and is increased through investment. The pressure of economic competition is thus carried into the educational institutions (Münch 2009).

2.2. Educational System: Meso Level

The category of cultural capital articulated by Pierre Bourdieu within the framework of his theory of habitus reveals mechanisms in the educational system that are both disadvantageous and exclusionary. His analyses of the educational system led him to the conclusion of a mere “illusion of equality of opportunity” that cannot be eliminated by educational reforms, no matter how strenuous (Bourdieu and Passeron 1971). The more inflationary the awarding of education titles becomes, the less value they have for social and labor market participation, so that social reform through education alone is ruled out. All the students’ efforts to achieve do not ultimately help to increase the chances of social participation (Bourdieu 1987, p. 221).

Rather, the educational system serves as a place of symbolic capital accumulation for the reproduction of social inequality. Even more, in the school system itself, social inequalities are cemented by the lack of perception and pedagogical consideration of heterogeneity. By treating all students, however unequal they may be in reality, equally in their rights and duties, the school system sanctions the original inequality towards culture (Bourdieu 2001, p. 39). To put it more pointedly with Bourdieu, school does not integrate, but excludes and eliminates, insofar as the critical consciousness of the subjects is also undermined: “From the bottom to the top, the school system operates as if its function is not to educate but to eliminate. Even better: to the extent that it eliminates, it succeeds in convincing the losers that they themselves are responsible for their elimination” (ibid., p. 21). In this way, the school reproduces the social hierarchies, but at the same time disguises and transports this ideology: “By giving socially conditioned abilities, which it attributes to differences in aptitude, a sanction that presents itself as ‘impartial’ and is widely recognized as such, it transforms factual equalities into legitimate inequalities, economic and social differences into a qualitative difference, and legitimizes the transmission of cultural heritage. In doing so, it exercises a mystifying function. The ideology of giftedness, a basic prerequisite of the school and social system, not only offers

the elite the opportunity to see themselves justified in their existence, but it also contributes to making the fate that society has bestowed on members of the disadvantaged classes seem inescapable" (ibid., p. 46). Thus, provocatively formulated, the concept of education, like the educational system, must be understood as "the central justification factory of social inequality in modern society" (Ricken 2006, p. 155). In a dramatic way, heterogeneity among the pupils is thus exacerbated by the educational system and its institutions.

2.3. Religious Education as a Driver of Inequity: Micro Level

School effectiveness research shows that schools and instruction have significant importance for educational equity. Meanwhile, studies of achievement behavior before and after the long American summer break have shown that school also has a disparity-mitigating function. Primarily exposed to family influences, student skills diverge more during the summer break than during school hours. Children from the upper social classes were able to maintain or even improve their performance, while children from the lower classes lagged behind—an insight that, as mentioned above, is gaining a very depressing realization in the coronavirus pandemic (Ditton [2009] 2017, p. 251). Nevertheless, according to the results of empirical sociology of education as well as teaching and school research, schools are involved in the genesis of inequality through their internal mechanisms to an extent that has so far been largely underestimated. Here, orders of difference are erected that affirm, constitute or even exacerbate inequalities and differences through othering processes. From cultural studies and postcolonial studies, othering is understood as mechanisms through which others are marked as such and declassified as foreigners in the interest of securing one's own identity (Bachmann-Medick [2006] 2016, pp. 180–90; Gruber 2018, pp. 23–37; Scholz 2018, pp. 271–86).

Relevant for such orders of difference are classroom practices in which differences in performance are produced or in which subjects are first constituted with the processes of subjectivizing recognition and declared as capable of participating in instruction (Reh and Rabenstein 2012, pp. 225–46). The point of such a praxeological research perspective in pedagogy, focused on the practices of teaching, thus lies in the exposure of a fundamental aporia of pedagogical practice: Pedagogical practices, aiming at inclusion, justice and participation, performatively undermine their own standardizations through the construction of hegemonic orders, disparities and inequity (Grümme 2021, pp. 35–84).

In this light, teacher action as well as instruction in its didactics and methodology come into focus. Although, at least in Germany, the middle class hypothesis is relativized by the fact that—due to the expansion of education in the mid-1960s—an increasing social heterogeneity can also be observed among the teachers and thus a decreasing strong dominance of the middle class, a middle-class orientation of the school is unmistakable. Through middle-class-oriented codes of behavior and language and corresponding structures of rewards and sanctions, "it was above all pupils to whom these forms of language and manners, largely acquired or 'habitualized' in family socialization, were foreign who were disadvantaged in school and instruction" (Neumann et al. 2014). Language and thought processes of an elaborated code are cultivated, which are not congruent from the outset with the restricted code of less educated classes and milieus. In this way, we can speak of "institutional discrimination", the explosive power of which lies precisely in its foundation in institutionalized rules, routines, practices and conventions (Brake and Büchner 2012; Grümme 2015, pp. 241–52; Unser 2014, pp. 17–26; Grümme and Altmeyer 2018, pp. 248–67). This becomes clear not least from the fact that the school and thus the teachers themselves play a major role in shaping the categories in advance for what is observed, assessed and then individually attributed as achievement (Emmerich and Hormel 2013, p. 141).

In the field of achievement assessment, this is probably nowhere as clear as in assessment errors. Like the Pygmalion effect, they take on an extraordinary, explosive power with regard to the question of educational equity, which works with a secret interaction of preceding insinuation and focused attention (Helmke [2009] 2017, pp. 134–36; Hattie [2013] 2015, pp. 145–48; Terhart 2014, pp. 883–904). A teacher considers a pupil to be gifted

and therefore turns to him or her in particular to encourage him or her. If the pupil then performs particularly well, the teacher feels confirmed and supports him or her all the more. “If, on the other hand, teachers suspect that pupils from poor families are generally less willing to achieve and perform well, the Pygmalion effect could have a significant negative impact on the pupils” (EKD 2009, p. 65).

Moreover, in the field of didactics, a sensitivity to educational equity makes some learning paths, which are currently being pushed in the context of subject orientation in pedagogy and religious pedagogy, come into question. Thus, an open, individualized or constructivist didactics with the favored forms of discovering, self-responsible, self-organizing learning is highly problematic under aspects of disadvantage. Individualization in no way leads to equal opportunities for learners (Rabenstein and Reh 2013, p. 240). Weaker pupils need a tighter methodological framework. Primarily learners with correspondingly high cultural and economic capital benefit from open teaching. In contrast, learners from low economic status tend to perform better in traditional classroom teaching than in open teaching and also develop better attentive and goal-oriented work behavior (ibid., p. 242). Self-directed learning based on constructivism overlooks the fact that it privileges those “who are achievement-motivated, internally guided and acting in an individualistic way, in short: who have a high-profile self-concept. All forms of self-directed learning thus prove to be socially selective, even if the constructivist pathos of self-organization ignores this” (Pongratz 2009, p. 153).

From the perspective of the sociology of education, the concept of competence thus gains a whole new explosive power. Competence-oriented pedagogy contributes significantly to the individualization of achievement requirements and to self-activation. Certainly, such a competence orientation is associated with an increased awareness of individual abilities and skills. However, through the normative demand of continuous work on the self, through the permanent mobilization of resources and the strong “emphasis on the personal responsibility of the subject, a justice of achievement is propagated and at the same time—sometimes more, sometimes less obvious—old, social-structural inequalities are perpetuated” (Truschkat 2010, p. 82). Seen in this light, competence orientation is thus based on a “new rationality of social differentiation”. Instead of changing social power relations and inequalities in education, the focus is one-sidedly on changing the subjects (Lehner-Hartmann 2014, pp. 99–100).

Against this background, it becomes clear that even the most ambitious best-practice examples of heterogeneity-sensitive pedagogy, of school learning culture and school system design not only do not override the social selection mechanisms, but perpetuate them (Dederich 2011, p. 51). Might one not suspect that a strictly subject-oriented learning culture goes hand in hand with an individualization that gives priority to individuals in their initiative and willingness to achieve and puts the weaker ones, who need more support, on the back burner (Grümme 2021, pp. 213–67)?

3. Religious Pedagogy Core Concerns

3.1. Theological Approach

The previous explanations show that educational equity is part of social relations and at the same time an element of pedagogical orders, which are constituted by teaching practices. In this context, it is crucial that it is not only a question of inequality. The processes of othering or hidden discrimination that have been hinted at affect the identities of the subjects to the same extent. Questions of recognition and appreciation come into play. In such experiences of exclusion and violated self-esteem, what one could qualify as ‘humiliation’ occurs (Margalit 2012).

Alone, this problem of heterogeneity and educational equity has so far been marked in the field of pedagogy. But this problem is at least as explosive in the practice of religious pedagogy. However, as indicated above, this brings with it a certain horizon, an option, in the form of the hope in God and a partisan approach to justice.

Such a partisan justice emphasizes the covenantal character of justice. God's justice (*zedaka*) is essentially a category of love, of love relationship, i.e., biblically-theologically speaking, of covenant. God is just as a judge who intercedes for those suffering under injustice. Therefore, God's judgment is invoked by the victims of history. He is not a vengeful God who retaliates according to a rigid formal pattern, but a loving and merciful God out of this covenant relationship. God is a just and therefore merciful God out of his faithful love. This does not mean an exculpation of those responsible but opens up to them through this prior promise to allow themselves to be held responsible. As such, he does not level the difference between perpetrator and victim in an eschatological perspective. Rather, he creates a just compensation for the victims of the history of suffering and injustice. God's justice thus proves to be a justice of love, wedded to mercy, care and faithfulness, and standing in the horizon of his universal will of salvation (Grümme 2014, pp. 48–125).

Paul's theology takes these covenant-theological conceptions of justice and turns them theologically to justification. Righteousness becomes the core of Paul's doctrine of justification, not the law. God's righteousness is not and cannot be earned. Paul contrasts legal righteousness through works of the law with the righteousness of faith, which accepts being justified by God in Jesus Christ through the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. In such a complexly structured concept of justice, faith and politics, mysticism and just practice are intrinsically connected also in the option for the poor. In this anticipatory action of justice, a surplus of promise is articulated for an eschatological completed justice of a universal shalom, which combines the hope for a completed creation and a healed living together (cf. Grümme 2017, pp. 245–58).

This theology of justice is of decisive importance for education. Where education articulates itself as religious education, it is at its primal impulse with its orientation towards the incarnation of a human being before God (Grümme 2017, pp. 174–205). Religious education contributes to the struggle for educational equity the option of a partisan God-justice as a justice for the excluded and the poor. Precisely because it is not only concerned with justice in education, but also to the same extent with 'learning justice', it is insofar challenged to bring form and content together. A learning of justice has to take place under the conditions of justice in order not to become self-contradictory. In any case, this should be a consistent standard against which such impressive projects have to be measured, for example, using the prophecy of Amos to discuss biblical justice in the context of experiences of injustice and massive inequity (Kraus 2019, pp. 344–49; Barale 2019, pp. 350–54).

A religious pedagogy that is aware of these connections between educational equity and heterogeneity, both as a topic and from a praxeological perspective, will accordingly have to ensure that the practices of religious education do not performatively counteract its own normative claims to understand itself as a language school of freedom in which the communication of the Gospel takes place under conditions of freedom (Grümme 2015, pp. 175–206). However, self-enlightenment through praxeology and methodological sensitivity to the deep structures of religious education generated by it can show that certain religious education practices have paradoxical, unintended effects. In practice, they refute what is normatively intended (Grümme 2016, pp. 125–38; Grümme 2021, pp. 13–84). This will be demonstrated in two fields: interreligious education and teacher beliefs.

3.2. *Interreligious Education*

Interreligious education shows exactly such a paradoxical effect. In the light of a well-rehearsed claim to truth, interreligious learning aims to form a mature judgement, a change of perspective and recognition of others in their otherness. It wants to appreciate the foreignness of the other as a prerequisite for respect, tolerance and dialogue (Gärtner 2015, p. 290; Meyer and Tautz 2015; Schambeck 2013; Schweitzer 2014).

Nevertheless, this normative goal is not infrequently undermined in practice, as is impressively indicated with reference to the critique of essentialization in intercultural

pedagogy (Burrichter 2015, p. 155). In the process, some things are taken for granted that are by no means self-evident: Interreligious learning implicitly presupposes that it is not simply religious individuals who encounter each other, but individuals as members of religions. In the process, teachers and their expectations and habitual attitudes create highly problematic definitions. They manifest themselves, for example, where Islamic children are expected to practice Muslim prayer in religious education. This widespread didactics presupposes the attribution of religious practices. A pupil is religiously identified from the group of fellow pupils and removed from the group of peers. In the will to participate, to be recognized and individualized, this naturally leads to attributions, to essentializing definitions and thus to the formation of stereotypes. Intentionally designed for the appreciation of differences, these are produced at the same time. How should foreign-religious pupils be able to represent their religion? What can be brought in here? What criteria are used to select them from among their classmates (Grümme 2017, pp. 174–205)? However, instead of the assumed homogeneity, for the vast majority of young people the Christian religion has become a foreign religion, which they experience mainly from an external perspective. In addition, consideration of socio-economic conditions should be elementary for interreligious learning. The sociology of education has demonstrated in a differentiated way the connection between migrant status and disadvantage as well as a correlation between type of school and migration. In addition, integration into peer groups, and also gender, has a considerable influence. Not taking this interdependence into account allows interreligious education to fall into the trap of culturalism, which fixes interreligious education in the field of culture and differences, but thus overlooks the mechanisms of inequality, which are also effective (Grümme 2017, p. 192).

All in all, this makes a self-reflexive examination of the discourse of interreligious education for its discourse-immanent mechanisms of identification, misjudged recognition, exclusion and power explosive. In terms of religious pedagogy, it should be considered “how—in everyday life, in the media, but also through offers of interreligious learning—categories of the ‘interreligious appropriate’ and above all of the religiously different are constructed and attribution practices are carried out which, even contrary to the intention of the actors, make the religiously different into such in the first place and subsequently describe and stigmatize them in a stereotyping way. In this context, the question should also be asked as to how the Other is simultaneously made in different dimensions (gender, ethnicity, social class, etc.)” (Willems 2015; Grümme 2017, pp. 219–32). In ethnomethodological studies in religious pedagogy, this was recently elaborated on the basis of the headscarf (Herbst and Menne forthcoming). On the other hand, parallel to this critical-self-reflective perspective, the constructive-critical potential of religious traditions and educational processes should also be illuminated, “to what extent they contain power-critical potentials and resources to undermine, criticize and desacralize essentializing and binarizing othering processes” (Willems 2020, p. 12).

3.3. Teacher Beliefs

Research on teacher beliefs is part of an intensifying professionalization process of religious education teachers. In professionalism research, the unreflective preconceptions of religious education teachers are increasingly coming into focus. In these teacher beliefs, action-guiding, meaning-giving and orienting prejudices that shape religious pedagogy practice are examined (Lehner-Hartmann 2014). The interesting thing about this is that these teacher beliefs often run counter to their own explicit intention of a religious education based on openness, participation and dialogue. This can be strikingly demonstrated in the field of denominational self-understanding. Empirical studies have uncovered “subjective ‘prejudices’” (Lindner 2017, p. 377) regarding the epistemic convictions of religious education teachers towards other denominations and religions, which significantly shape their actions and performatively undermine ecumenical understanding. The denominational perspective “runs with it (. . .). Because we live in the denominations, it simply runs along. It is there, it is always mentioned, it is there (. . .). We always talk about

Catholic-Protestant” (Woppowa 2019, p. 229). For example, the North Rhine-Westphalia Religious Education Teachers Study “brought to light that even in post-denominational times, Protestant teachers in the predominantly Catholic Rhineland fear a denominational loss of identity due to minority situations and have ideas about Catholic religious education that characterize it as narrow, rigid and humorless” (ibid., pp. 228–29). Especially in heterogeneous classes, it is of elementary importance for teachers to create a “confessional ‘we’” (Lehner-Hartmann 2019, p. 49). In this way, denominationalism becomes a marker that enables identity in a confusing heterogeneity and, contrary to one’s own self-image, has an exclusionary and stigmatizing effect.

This articulates the aforementioned process of othering, “in which the Other is constructed through certain knowledge production practices that legitimize superiority and subordination (e.g., the Jewish pupil who, with his image of Jesus, is no longer acceptable to the teacher in the 21st century. The fact that Catholic pupils may have an image of Jesus that does not correspond to that of the teacher remains hidden through the focus on the religious Other). From the hierarchical position, which is determined less by the size of the group than by the prevailing Catholic culture of dominance, these epistemic practices appear ‘plausible’ and ‘useful’. In the example mentioned, they help to justify why no dialogue is possible here and the Other is kept at a distance” (ibid., p. 54).

This quote impressively documents how hegemonic order and exclusions work against the intentions and against the professed self-understanding of religious education teachers. Othering processes are evident in the actions and self-understanding of religious education teachers. Making them analytically aware of this and reflecting on it self-critically is therefore becoming increasingly important. These “namely can reveal both hidden constructs of dominance and hierarchy as well as make conscious fundamental and action-guiding objectives for one’s own teaching, for example between the apparent alternatives of religious and confessional identity formation or between transparent positionality and confessional neutrality in confessional majority-minority situations” (Woppowa 2019, p. 229). Obviously, it is the practice itself that produces orders, reproduces knowledge structures, and generates differences; in short, heterogeneity is once again dynamized. With regard to this problem, critical self-reflexivity advances to become an important instrument. Critical “meta-reflexivity” (Lindner 2017, p. 239) becomes an integral part of religious education teachers’ professionalization processes. According to Jan Woppowa, denominationally conscious teaching-learning processes carry a potential danger “if such processes themselves are not once again reflexively fractured” and in particular made transparent with regard to their clandestine power relations (Woppowa 2019, p. 223).

4. Enlightened Heterogeneity: A Proposal

For the sake of its own normative self-determination, religious pedagogy needs to think and act on these contextual challenges in society, school and teaching, as outlined at the outset. For this, it needs a category that has the necessary analytical-hermeneutical depth and normative power to face this increasing heterogeneity. In other words, religious pedagogy has to become capable of heterogeneity in an emphatic sense. This means, firstly, that it has to be able to perceive, analyze and critically-constructively process the aspects of inequality and identity that have been elaborated. Secondly, it has to appreciate their interdependence, which increases their dynamics, and thirdly, it has to self-reflexively examine the practices of religious education and its own hermeneutics. This brings one’s own homogeneity assumptions and othering processes into view, as well as the question of methodology, didactics and the choice of materials, even into questions of justice. For by favoring certain teaching settings, children who are already socially privileged are—as shown—further favored, which in turn allows religious education itself to produce injustice in a non-intentional way (Grümme 2014, pp. 122–58).

In contrast to the concept of plurality that currently paradigmatically determines religious pedagogy, which focuses primarily on questions of identity and pluralization but neglects aspects of inequality, I want to make a twofold proposal in this context: I want

to introduce the concept of heterogeneity (Grümme 2017; Grümme et al. 2021), specify it as Enlightened Heterogeneity and further deepen it through praxeological reflections (Grümme 2021, pp. 361–427).

More so than the concept of pluralism, the concept of heterogeneity seems to be particularly suitable for religious pedagogy, as can be seen in the critical-constructive processing of learning situations, when it comes to the structure and goal guidance and the consideration of the multifactorial conditions of religious educational processes; when it comes to inclusion, interreligious learning and religious plurality; and, last but not least, when it comes to the corresponding didactic and methodological design of religious education. The yield of the concept of heterogeneity for religious educational processes therefore lies primarily in being able to critically and constructively reflect on religious educational processes in the midst of their material and cultural, social and political, economic and religious framings, and to be able to normatively determine religious educational processes according to the underlying dialectic of theory and practice (Grümme 2015, pp. 70–150). Perspectives of justice and recognition, of difference and equality, of power and difference, of inequality and difference can be correlated and reformulated critically in a socio-critical and power-sensitive dynamic (Grümme 2015, pp. 15–50). A religious pedagogy is capable of heterogeneity when it normatively targets the subjects' ability to perceive, speak, judge and act religiously in the light of a contextual rationality and thereby takes a self-reflexive critical look at its own construction mechanisms in the hegemonic structures and implication contexts in their dialectics. Self-reflexivity of one's own actions and meta-reflexivity of religious education practice thus function as decisive key instruments to enlighten religious education about itself, especially in its practices. They are expected to expose and at the same time successively constructively overcome those mechanisms that undermine the normative goals of religious education through their paradoxical logic. In this way, subject-oriented religious education under conditions of heterogeneity becomes possible as a target horizon. Autonomy, religious judgement, and the ability to speak and act require critical self-enlightenment. In this sense, the concept of heterogeneity should be profiled as Enlightened Heterogeneity. In view of the limited framework, to put it extremely briefly: Such profiling, in the light of an alterity-theoretical determination of basic theory of religious pedagogy and its alterity-theoretical reasoning, draws on current reformulations of critical theory and post-structuralist discourse analytics in a critical way and in their mutual critical refraction (Grümme 2017, pp. 150–70).

The category of Enlightened Heterogeneity is sufficiently self-reflexive in this regard because it allows for critical reflection on the immanent tendencies of religious education practices towards reification, misrecognized recognition, essentialization and exclusion, with recourse to an elaborated praxeology. Because of its contextuality, it can never overcome this tension, this dialectic and its own counterintuitive effects. There is no pure observer perspective. In every lesson, in every planning of religious education, in every reflection, this becomes manifest, however twisted. But Enlightened Heterogeneity enables us to clarify this dialectic in an ideology-critical way, to deal with it pedagogically and didactically and, in turn, to let it become an object of learning itself. In this specific sense, Enlightened Heterogeneity can thus become the analytical, didactic and normative basic category of religious pedagogy—and offers itself as an instrument of a religious pedagogy that is contextual and oriented towards maturity and participation under the conditions of increasing heterogeneity in the current transformation processes.

5. So What?

Instead of summarizing the article, I want to conclude with a personal remark which concentrates in an emblematic way on one aspect of injustice and heterogeneity. As a classroom teacher, I conducted a project on “learning to learn” with my new fifth graders at a high school in Hamm, Germany. “How do I learn? How do I create silence? How do I organize my desk?” At the end of the lesson, a girl comes to me crying and says, “I don't have a desk; I don't have my own room; I have to study at the kitchen table with

my two siblings". I had not taken into account that they couldn't organize their learning under the conditions than my own children could do in an average teacher's household. My two children have their own rooms and all the opportunities for support. My students did not have this. Thus, I had fallen into the trap of a typical manifestation of religious education to which one only very slowly becomes sensitive in religious education itself: one's own middle-class orientation of teacher action. Middle classes teach middle classes, as was elaborated above.

To come to terms with one's own unreflective presuppositions and one's own practices, to self-reflexively enlighten oneself about them each time anew, and therein to do justice to the dignity of the individual students in their specific identity: therein lies the task of heterogeneity-capable religious education. The category of Enlightened Heterogeneity wants to make a contribution to enable religious education to do this.

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