

# CONFIDENCE AND DOUBT JUVENILE MUSLIM LIFE-WORLDS, RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION, ISLAMIC THEOLOGY AND EDUCATION IN GERMANY<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

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*The article is based on first findings of interdisciplinary research that is still in progress. It has to be understood as the science-based counter-speech against increasing anti-Muslim racism. Young Muslims are under surveillance of public and media attention in Germany. Islam is being debated in terms of regal and security politics and less within the signature of religion in terms of spirituality, aesthetics, life-world orientation, ethics, morale and religious life-styles. Hence, they are being transformed into a kind of ethnic tribe that needs special treatment. This comes along with the impending deployment of religious freedom as it is guaranteed by the German constitution. Especially right-wing nationalist and folkish consent has it that Muslims serve as a reason for redesigning religious politics in Germany that drifts away from the standards of human rights. The research findings presented here focus on juvenile Muslims as humans, pupils and citizens instead. It aims at a better understanding of their psychological and social framing. This plays an important role with regard to schooling in general and Islamic religious education in special. The findings are based upon the qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews. This contribution also takes theological and anthropological aspects into account. In the end preliminary recommendations for changes in the educational setting are given*

**Keywords :** *Islamic theology; young Muslim; Juvenile; Religious Education; Germany*

## INTRODUCTION

Looking at religious education in German public schools, a significant amount of concepts, researches and publications seems to be at hand. This refers to the common primary and secondary levels. However, with regard to young Muslims in general, a shift in the perception of the matter is needed. Juvenile religious orientation is more intensely influenced by the moratorium between the playground and the work place. The trespassing of the threshold between childhood and *real* life is one of the most challenging enterprises. It is sketched by the vanishing points of two

conflicting perceptions of the self and the world: On the one hand are the given *contingencies*, on the other hand are the imagined *certainties* of life and the promise to young people of playing the leading part in their lives.

As regards the courses in Islamic religion within the German architecture of schooling which are addressed to Muslim pupils, the situation seems to be improving. There are quite satisfying syllabus designs, textbooks, teacher training and sufficient methodological (didactical) concepts at hand. After nearly four decades of repetitive reminder to the educational authorities<sup>2</sup> that Islamic courses are needed, most of them have come up with at least something. The debates about public schools as a player in

<sup>1</sup> This release is part of the LOEWE research programme on religious positioning, modalities and constellations in Jewish, Christian and Muslim contexts at the Goethe University Frankfurt, promoted by the Hesse Ministry of Science and Art.

<sup>2</sup> Germany has 16 federal states which are independent from a national syllabus.

the prevention against Islamist radicalization suggest some educated guess about how to go on with a broader understanding of religious education. However, it seems that religion as a root discipline of the development of the person under the prospect of the formation of the *humanum* (*Bildung*) plays a minor role in comparison to the canon of the other core subjects at school. These predominantly aim at apprenticeship (*Ausbildung*). Teaching religion is not regarded as a central pattern of training in the material sense of entitlement and employability, at best with regard to soft skills.

This case given, Muslim communities in Germany are striving for a recognizable institutional shape. This has a considerable effect on their ideological basis, since they tend to regard religion as a substantial body of passed-down doctrines. Their view on religion is primarily essentialistic, tending towards collectivistic approaches to identity construction in terms of nationality, ethnicity, culture and language. However, the higher the degree of political and social institutionalization of religious communities, the slower they react to shifts in the religiousness of their members on a functional level.

Such a more functional approach towards religion could help to determine more precisely the situations, arguments, feelings, and the potential challenges behind religious phenomena within society: What is the story behind? How do the respective ideologies (theologies, beliefs) influence the world-views? What experiences trigger conflict? What kind of personal and collective knowledge, experience, hopes, interests and expectations are shared? What kind of religious practices (cults) is touched? What are the consequences and effects on the individual as well as on the collective in terms of ethics? To what extent does a certain phenomenon have an effect in economic, (sub-) cultural and spiritual terms? (Stark and Glock, 1968; Stark and

Bainbridge, 1985; Pye, 1972; Smart, 1999). Which forms of analysis and cooperation can help to understand and change a situation which is about to be religiously overcharged? Such factorization (operationalization) could help to forward a higher level of “anthropological thought” in terms of Islam and community building.

Young Muslims in Germany increasingly do not feel taken care of by their established religious institutions. They complain about the insufficiently attractive reformulation of theology within Mosque standards. Therefore, religious institutions are facing two interrelated challenges: social dynamics within a new religious framework, as well as the relevance of the religious tradition for the solution of today’s problems – a setting that touches religious communities all over the world:

“On the one hand, the democratic system is a great opportunity for the emerging and strengthening of universal values such as pluralism, tolerance and inclusiveness. However, concurrently, democracy also gives an opportunity for emerging and resurgent primordial and local bonds which tend to be exclusive, either in the name of religion, ethnicity, class and locality [...] the conflict in Maluku [was] a horizontal or social conflict [...] and not a religious conflict” (Sarundajang, 2013).

Step by step, however, the usual assumptions shift towards an increased interest in questions of religiousness in general and in specific religions in particular. Teachers in the field of secondary education in Germany remark that they feel increasingly challenged by a decisive kind of neo-religious positioning of the young people they are in charge of in their classes. The situation in the German class rooms demands from them a higher awareness towards questions of religion that unfavorably pairs with a widespread lack in proficiency in terms of a *functional* approach towards religion as a social pattern, let alone an academic issue. This deficiency especially

touches the classroom discussion which rotates around tenuous topics. They bear the potential to charge with common emotions and religious bias. Issues like friendship, sexuality and family planning play an important role. Other issues are the loyalty towards Islam as a feature of the in-group and getting along in a pluralistic society. Very often questions of acknowledgement, reputation and appreciation pop up. Then the issue of social justice, the question of truth and the theory of cognition are touched. Above all, however, the following issues are under juvenile negotiation: gender, racism, migration, violence and peace, the East and the West, the Global North and the Global South, natural resources and a sustainable exposure, the basic distrust in the systems of regal power and the widespread disenchantment concerning the own future.

Hence, this contribution pays service to religious instruction in Germany on a general level. In Article 7, the German Constitution allows for religious lessons in public schools. This comprises Islamic education besides Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and other. About two decades ago some German universities (Frankfurt, Nürnberg, Tübingen, Osnabrück, Münster, Hamburg) established Islamic Theology and a regular Muslim teacher training; most recently Berlin has joined in. Islamic religious education (*Islamischer Religionsunterricht*) is supposed to offer basic knowledge about Islam and to exercise textual, historical, social and philosophical approaches. Muslim communities have participated in the design of the respective curricula and schoolbooks.<sup>3</sup> The regal discourse in politics and the media however reveals another ambitious agenda behind: the subject is expected to foster the integration of near to five million Muslims who call Germany their home country. Here the focus lies on Islamic education as a preventive measure against religious

radicalization. The logic behind is the new narrative of the post-migrational Muslim youth – a kind of persistent labeling that is likely to transform the heterogeneous, multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual third generation of former migrants into a social tribe of ideologically precarious and unreliable aliens. Hence, the profile of Islam as a classroom enterprise is torn between its identity as an instrument of exclusion and of empowerment; it bears the potential to create integration *and* othering in the same time.

This article gives insight into our shop-floor level of current research. It reveals preliminary findings about recent developments concerning the juvenile theological curiosity and orientation (*Jugendtheologie*) of young Muslims, based on empirical data we have collected so far (Kulaçatan, Behr and Agai, 2017; Kulaçatan and Behr, 2016). The ideas conveyed here are rooted in interdisciplinary research and intersectional approaches, taking educational science and teacher training, youth and gender studies, Islamic theology as well as studies in migration, racism and conflict resolution into consideration. The topic strongly correlates with the implications of trans-cultural and inter-religious learning (Behr, 2017a).

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research method follows qualitative social research, especially semi-structured interviews and group discussion with young Muslims of the adolescent age group. The interviews are gendered as they are taken in homo-social settings; some of the remarks given below refer to girls especially (Kulaçatan and Behr, 2016). The evaluation of the interview transcripts follows the basic grammar of the Documentary Method (the analysis for metaphors of focus; Bohnsack, 2008). Some interview quotations given in this article are marked by [IQ] without further information regarding the respective source.

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<sup>3</sup> The Islamic schoolbook Saphir is best known since it won the Best European Schoolbook Award 2008; see Behr, Kaddor and Müller 2008

## Targeting

The findings presented here intend to support a better understanding of what exactly we are doing when teaching Islam in public schools at the secondary level. The target groups are pupils who combine several labels: juvenile, migrational, Muslim. This perception comes with the danger to imagine such a combination as a performative identity: young Muslims in German public schools are perceived as a kind of social group that needs special treatment in terms of integration and enlightenment. Less is known, however, about inner polarizations between cultural bonds like first language the habits, social bonds like alien in-groups, religious bonds like faith, creed and belief and their aspiration of the future as German citizens. Islam is not only part of diversity as a new German experience – Muslims have to cope with diverse orientations *within* German Islam.

The question that these juvenile Muslim target groups actually are needs to held open for the sake of research. What may be denoted as the religious positioning of young Muslims to some extent remains constructed which of course depends on the sample criteria of the empirical examination. At best, we can construe so called *Islamicities* that diachronically run through the age groups. This term describes a set of visible and invisible markers affiliated to religion. They oscillate between the self-description as Muslims on the one hand and derogatory ascriptions on the other. These ascriptions are addressed to them as an alleged social cluster of people who somehow estrange themselves from social normality, being amenable to strange habits, disturbing beliefs and dangerous dispositions. Most likely, behind this lies nothing more than the preferential perspective of the dominant and authoritative segments of society who seem to be occupied with their Central European male whiteness.

Such ideologies need to be dismantled since they carry the danger of mutual

vilifications. Ultimately, this creates a paradigm of young Muslims in the classroom who are said to be in need of special correction in order to domesticize Islam as a foreign culture and as a set of alien life styles. What aggravates the discourse is their inability to stand up against the stultification of the debates. They are void of appropriate mental strategies and language skills to defend themselves or to barge in the public discourse on eye level. Thus, Islamic religious instruction clearly carries the notion of emancipation and empowerment.

Another critical question is whether the competences in favor of Muslim empowerment are welcomed on the side of the German societal majority. Are public schools in general ready to understand integration not as the debt of a religious, cultural or ethnical minority which is expected to adjust to the common habits of the majority, but as the duty of *both* of them to step up to each other instead? Do teachers still understand the difference of the familiar and the unfamiliar as the statutory boundary lines between putative social clusters or the color of the skin? Or rather have they come to terms with a broader understanding of diversity that is made up by a more dynamic understanding, looking at the various conditions of people within their social situations? One of our young interviewees reminded me of the rhetorical flush of the “Angriness” (the Angry Young Men as a group of writers who expressed their disillusionment with traditional British society in the 1950’s). When he was asked about his experience with inclusive pedagogy that has become so fashionable among experts in schooling recently, he expressed his disappointment with central features of modernity, pinpointing the Enlightenment, secularism and capitalism as an enterprise of elitism:

“Inclusion? Integration? What the heck are you talking about? As a young Muslim in public schools I faced incremental exclusion and expulsion from the feeding troughs of the middle

class. Such is camouflaged by the rehearsal of integration as an allegedly new demand. This is ridiculous. The demand for assimilation has replaced integration that never was. You know, I can slip into the role of the Noble Savage. It could be the zone of comfort if we darkies were stupid enough. But even if we totally assimilated to the expectations of our surroundings, it would still feed our alienation since these expectations remain degrading. My grandparents belonged to the first generation of Muslims who migrated to Germany. They would not talk about integration. It was not expected from them because they were not expected to stay. My parents, the second generation, would naturally manage integration as a precondition of living together although they kept being confronted with indifference. We, the third generation, now face the increased demand to integrate ourselves although we are more integrated than quite some of our native German fellows. We are now the generation who face adversary by being labeled as a Muslim out-group. We are about to lose the normal standards of daily life and social security. We are under pressure; your inclusionism threatens us [IQ].”

Whatever direction Islamic religious courses in secondary schools may take between spiritual instruction and non-confessional information, between teaching religion or teaching *about* religion, it has to pick up these patterns if it wants to reach the young Muslim students’ hearts and minds.

This article provides the opportunity, the method and the motive to come to an exchange with relevant reference to juvenile biography, religious orientation, volatile education and a possible mandate towards Islamic religious instruction. The theological grammar of it remains *dialogical* since it is rooted in a deeper structure than the phenotypic emanations of confessional systems. Teaching a specific religion in the public sphere touches general questions of either affiliation or indifference towards the religious sphere within the secular realm of the German civil society (Behr, 2017b). The issue of dialogue points to the outward different religious systems as well as to the

intra-religious dynamics which triggers more questions about life-world orientation among young Muslims: How tolerant is Islam vis-à-vis its urgent reformulation especially if the outcome is regarded as dissident thought among Muslims? And what will happen if Muslim critical thought, for example the critique of domination, of capitalism or of asylum policy, is being regarded as deviant from the German public opinion?

Young Muslims in school are submitted to an ambivalent situation. On the one hand they interact as pupils which is a social role they *take*, on the other they interact in terms of a role they are about to *take over*, dissociating from their social authorities and in the same time loosening their spiritual bonds with them, looking for a more convincing brand of *islamicity*. The patterns of religious orientation and positioning can take an existential spin, rotating between expecting to be held off and holding on to the unexpected. This affects religion in terms of its dimension of social relation, especially the parents: How and why do they take hold of Islam? What does this have to do with juvenile life-world orientation? How does this affect secondary education as a phase of initiation towards the active self-formation and the acquisition of the world? Can religious instruction, which is Islamic instruction in the case given, unfold the potential of providing significant orientation for them?

### Two Key Questions

The juvenile age scope within the sample of our pretest-studies broadly covers the age cohort of those who attend secondary education, usually for about three years. There already exist some studies about the Hamburg University project of (inter-religious) Dialogical Theology<sup>4</sup> as well as theology with a special focus on the youth age (Schlag and Schweitzer, 2012) or early

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<sup>4</sup>The Hamburg ReDi-project of the AWR Akademie der Weltreligionen, see <https://www.awr.uni-hamburg.de/forschung/redi-projekt.html>, accessed July 7th, 2017)

childhood (primary education). Such approaches to some extent are reminiscent of the Philosophy for Children Project P4C (Worsley, 2015) with reference to the research methodology and the criteria mapping. From our preliminary material, two central questions of juvenile spiritual life-world orientation have immanently (inferentially) emerged. The first is *Do I count?*, and the second is *Whom can I trust?*. Both questions are fundamental and existential. They carry the core criticism whether religion really works. Transferred to the framework of religious instruction, they give shape to a fundamental doubt whether religious instruction can be believed in and whether the instructors can be trusted. These two questions, though not touching *religion* in the strict sense of the word, are related to the intellectual, spiritual, social and existential scheme. Therefore they are deeply *religious* in the broader sense of the word.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Key Patterns of Life-World Orientation

Picking up these two questions and widening their understanding by exmanent (referential) questions, four key patterns of juvenile spiritual orientation with a feasible signature of contrast between them can be described:

*"I want to learn to understand!"* [IQ]

With regard to Islam, this expands the notional syllabus of religious instruction in terms of teaching religion, demanding a bigger rate of background knowledge in the shape of religious science instead of spiritual instruction only:

"I don't have to know what Islam is. To learn it I can go to the mosque and ask an Imam. I want to understand how Islam works, what religion does to people and what they do with it. I want to be able to shape my religion and determine my intensity and pace if I want to go on with it – or abandon it." [IQ]

*"I want to share and participate!"* [IQ]

This notion points to the deepening uncertainty regarding the future. As was depicted above, young Muslims tend to lose their confidence that their lives will succeed. Being exposed as a minority group that is expected to make the queue from behind, they fear to be cheated out of their luck. They measure success according to the standards which are exhibited by the members of their environmental authorities: prosperity, health, vertical and horizontal mobility and autonomy. The question is, however, to what extent these members can be regarded as supporters. In many cases, the parental support will not suffice to bring about better marks and thereby the promise of a better life. In addition to this, the majority of the teachers have internalized selection and allocation as the syntax of the German school system, detracting their supportive attention from pupils with dark hair and with Turkish or Arabic as their mother tongue and German as their second language. Both of them, the teachers and the family, tend to talk the kids out of the idea to strive for higher school degrees, warning them of the jeopardy of the excessive demands this brings about:

"You will fail when you want to climb; you better stay low; you are not German enough to succeed." [IQ]<sup>5</sup>

This fatal combination of structural distrust is measured as a fundamental and comprehensive refusal of the appreciation of the whole person and not of the particular ratio of missing learning skills. The effect, not only on the self-confidence, but on the further learning habit, is terrible. The existential concussion of the self-image lingers deep and long within their souls. This

<sup>5</sup> See Heike Klovert in Spiegel Online: Warum Schüler türkischer Herkunft schlecht abschneiden: <http://www.spiegel.de/lebenundlernen/schule/integration-warum-schueler-tuerkischer-herkunft-schlecht-abschneiden-a-1152964.html> (accessed on July 13th, 2017).

goes along with the risk of losing a whole generation to the uncertain dynamics of precarious segments of society. In the same time, the entailed loss of intelligence poses a threat to the welfare of this country. To put the question the other way round: If Germany continues to vandalize its own constitutional, cultural and social values of tolerance and solidarity by the penetrant shift towards folkish and identitarian sensitivities it will not prosper. In the eyes of young Muslims, Islam's potential is questioned as to whether it supports them or stands in their way. Especially Muslim youngsters are responsive to the luring rhetoric of Muslim radicals who provide them with the prospect of being approved and accepted members of their respective alternative networks, implementing an increased amount of disobedience towards the system.

*"I want to be accepted and appreciated!"*  
[IQ]

Compared to what was mentioned above, this item has a more emotional and less of a calculating notion of its own, referring to both, friendship and trust on the one side, versus publicity and reputation on the other. Especially racist and bullying offences and their devastating effects reveal the amount of possible victimization in this segment of possible identity orientation of Muslim or nationalist brand. One can imagine what happens if this combines with the perception of being structurally and incidentally discriminated against as Muslims, as well as being reinforced by the impression of the sensed inadequacy of their own body (see below). Above all, this bears an even stronger implication for Muslim girls who from time to time might face double discrimination. At first they feel exposed as *Muslims* within society, and additionally they feel being set back as *girls* within their Muslim in-group.

*"I want to do it my way!"* [IQ]

The Muslim target group who is in the focus of this treatise does not differ from their other peers as regards their hope for standing on their own, whatever parental provision they actually still depend on. This is the normal paradigm of growth, but it leads to the question how these patterns relate to religious orientation. Especially with regard to the aspect of knowledge and understanding, young Muslims would tend to address their search for *self-efficacy* and their natural reluctance against *heteronomy* towards Islam as their obvious referential set of symbols and interpretations in the spiritual sense. They need not be outspokenly religious or orthopractically assessed to do so. In most of our cases it initially is the impression of going through times of crises that maneuvers them into sudden religious declinations (which may disturb their parents, sensing ideological rigidity). The common key patterns discussed in the preceding section contain a maximum risk of juvenile vulnerability. Here religion, especially if close at hand (through the Internet especially) and not skillfully educated, may bring about both risks and chances: the risk of losing oneself, and the chance to find oneself. This is the instant which inspired my revered colleague Sallie B. King to express her concern during a conference we shared: "Religion bears the potential of attacking our children."

### **Key Patterns of Religious Orientation**

At the moment, *identity* is still an auxiliary term in relation to the perception of the personal self and the world, its constellations, the spiritual orientation and the religious positioning. In relation to the aspect of growth and social reputation, young Muslims who are socially framed as depicted above, would work on a far-reaching shift towards what they regard as a prominent feature of their personality: *authenticity* and *sincerity*. Both have popped up as the actual schemes behind their sometimes enervating pubertal boasting about *honor*. This shift has an enormous

normative impact when it comes to negotiating the difference between *opinion* and *attitude* as well as the one between *speech* and *action*. It can be exhausting for teachers of the secondary stance to cope with the maximal amount of juvenile Muslim opinion, fired by their endocrine machinery. This refers to both boys and girls, based on the least possible amount of experience, foresight and knowledge. Still they search for answers when turning to religion, and behind quite some exclamation mark hides a question mark. This leads to further central items of religious dynamics in terms of juvenile identity.

### *Physical Integrity*

This refers to the aspects of the comprehensive juvenile vulnerability mentioned above. The mazes of spiritual life-world orientation can be echoed by corresponding somatic statuses that are not always easy to integrate into the standard repertoire of pediatric expertise. The following idea is still jointed to a binary understanding (this needs further empirical investigation), but imagine the boys' primordial focus on the shape of their biceps and abdominal six-pack or the girls' frustration when staring in desperation and anger at their faces and hair in the mirror. Another facet of physical orientation that is related to the issue of gender identity is the fatherly role model. A significant number of young radicals complain that their fathers were either absent or conflicting (in most cases the fathers were the ones to break away and to virtually disappear).

When it comes to the question of healing the breaches, and this does not refer to the osseous apparatus, the boundaries between the physical and the psychological domain may become permeable, opening the gates for religion to step in. In the innate correspondence of the spiritual (Arabic *ru>h}i>*) and bodily (*jasadi>*) elements of the regularly practiced prayer, to name one example, lies one of the facets of Islam that

can be very convincing to young people. It brings about the impression of a ritualized strong bond – if not necessarily with God or with the surrounding people (in this case the prayer is predominantly a practise that serves social reassurance), then at least with oneself. In this case it helps healing the breach in terms of fragmented physical and psychical identities (Soeffner, 2010). The juvenile quest for strong bonds can lead to unlucky subsidiary ties with social clusters that develop a matrix of reassurance of their own, based on bad conduct, criminal mindedness, sexualized rituals and defragmented identities. The like could be witnessed when looking at the marauding gangs of young men of Russian or Maghrebian origin, harassing women and men during the New Year's Eve events in 2015 in Cologne and in the previous years in Berlin. Such gangs are likely to offer a subsidiary but deluding family-like membership to a network that in the end increases the bruises and the vulnerability instead of settling things. At short term, it even feigns a safe haven in economic terms, allegedly supporting the quest for self-efficacy. But on the long term such a false homeland affords criminal mind and conduct to maintain at least the *illusion* of societal appreciation and participation. Young people will have great difficulties to decode the rhetoric of it especially when such structures are dressed up as *Islam*.

### *Sub Cultural Affiliation*

To turn one's attention to religion may coincide with a change in lifestyle. This refers to visible markers of belonging at first hand, but not solely. Many parents of Muslim daughters as well as their teachers have experienced how the girls overnight put on their headscarf (or take it off) and *in the same time* decide to obey the regulations of vegan diet. What needs to be explained here is that the dietary matter of healthy food may have the stronger spiritual impact compared to the *hijab* matter. Both go hand in hand with the impression of explorative behavior,

trying out the fitting to one's imagined personality and the reactions of the parents. Every shift in juvenile expressionism between music and fashion, peer-group orientation, the consumption of food (or its refusal, looking at the vulnerability of girls especially) and social habits may reload with religious or at least near to religious concepts, narratives and rituals. Their (in the theological sense) erratic syntax and semantics are most probably deplored by the Imams, particularly when they allude to the realms of demons, magical thinking, fatalism, astrology, reincarnation the phenomena of near to narcissistic self-occupation. Aside from the harmful implications, the spheres of juvenile explorative behavior of the self and the world, though sometimes concealed, bear the potential of religious reform, turning the switch from Islam in terms of cultural *transmission* to Islam in terms of religious *progression*. Thus, the patterns of social identity can be transformed into more consciously and courageously chosen alternatives of how and with whom to arrange one's peer affiliations.<sup>6</sup> Here young Muslims are in search of living their lives at *eye-level to others* (the Koran uses the word *sawā'in* to express this), seeking help from people (*ittaba'a*, *chasing them* as the Koran puts it) who can provide them with the language that enables them to express what they perceive, feel, think, believe, hope for, love and hate.

### *Critical Mind*

Our interviews shed light on the comprehensive juvenile criticism and imagination of global justice which appear as prominent items from the interviews. It describes a conglomerate of dismissive inputs as one prominent feature in our empirical data. What is meant by this, is a fundamental opposition in the face of structures and people which to some extent

represent regal authority: the school, the parents, the Imams, the teachers, the police, the bus-driver, the media, the government, those up there, the Germans ... and for the girls and younger women the supremacy of adult male seniority. When the speech comes to this diction it mostly touches the issue of negotiating authority in the light of the autonomy and heteronomy of the juvenile self. Most interestingly, the Koran treats the issue of healthy disobedience with regard to Luqmān and his son, a wise man appearing in chapter 31, verses 12 to 19. The cliff-hanging dynamics of the religious orientation and positioning of young Meccans who followed Muhammad although being prohibited to do so by their parents had been a primary issue in the early days of Islam emerging as a religion (from about 610 to 620 CE).

Young Muslims today are in a different situation, of course. Nevertheless, radical voices would sometimes try to convince them of living in the same situation as Muhammad and his followers did, being suppressed by an unbelieving societal majority that is hostile towards Islam and suggesting a kind of *fighting spirit* (some of our interviewees use the word *jihād*) as a meta-identity, at least on the level of empowerment and self-defense:

“You are not being discriminated against because you are a Turk or an Arab but because you are Muslim.” [IQ]

Educated religious instruction must refer to a basic grammar of negotiating three forms of authority here. They can be derived from the Koran and its prophetic narratives: the regal *legitimacy* of the system and its authoritarian structures (*sulṭan*), the debate and the better *argument* (*ḥujja*) and the normative power of one's personal *conscience* (*istiḳāma*). When I raise the question of what exactly defines the better argument, my young interviewees partners would mention things like true responsibility, obedience towards what is proper and good, and most importantly, a better life for

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<sup>6</sup>This refers mainly to the urban and less to the rural setting since the urban containers offer more options of getting away from the social eye.

everyone. The innate competition between the welfare of the individual and the welfare of the collective (the equilibration of which is called *istiṣlāḥ* in Islamic theology) pushes them straight towards their critique of *false* system and rule. Here the classical schools of Salafi thought of the nineteenth century CE and their criticism against imperialism and colonialism still bear their fruits for contemporary Islamic thought and of course for juvenile criticism. The recourse to the primary times of Islam is one of the central issues of the diverse movements of the post-modern Islamic awakening (*al-ṣahwa al-Islāmiya*).

With regard to the fundamental discomfort, it is necessary for the development of the society in terms of *discourse* as a collective and individual state of mind, given that our target groups who are under discussion here are neither capable nor willing not only to participate in this discourse but also to give shape to it. At the moment, it seems, young Muslims are more or less bystanders who feel excluded. This leads to the other side which has darker implications: Feeling unable and unwelcome to interfere bears the risk of evoking spiritual and structural aglossia just where it would be important to reach out to them and listen to them. Out of this speechlessness might rise an escalated form of radical thought that is justified by fundamental criticism. Sometimes even a minor cognitive and emotional conflict can trigger the escalation scheme, starting with the *awareness* (*Something is wrong!*, very often regarding issues of social justice), followed by the *awakening* (*Someone should do something*), followed by the *appeal* addressed to specific persons (*Do something!*), then if not answered adequately followed by the *accusation* (*Why don't you do something?*), this being followed by the *judgement* (*You are guilty!*), by the *demonization* (*You are bad!*) and finally by the *latency* of violence.

The latter stages afford educated justifications, often in the shape of radically

religious or at least hyper-rational whisperings, to minimize the mental and spiritual violation of the self since the appeal most often is addressed to beloved inhabitants of their closest social surroundings. These stages need not necessarily be understood as a diachronic escalation-ladder but more as variable features of communication which are dependent from the social situation and the role it affords. This is why, at the same time, one may receive very moderate and very radical views from one and the same person who conveys the impression of being mentally disintegrated (one of the facets of the fragmentation mentioned above). Here the fascination for violence is lurking. Violence may take its own turn and unfold its own evil dynamics that don't need educated justification any more. This could recently be seen and heard from an interview with a young hooded slob who during the Hamburg G20 summit had burned cars, smashed windows and plundered a supermarket:

"I was at home watching TV, then I saw what was going on downtown, so I put on all my black garb and rushed over there to have fun. It was an incredible experience of ultimate freedom. I felt above law, as if I had unlimited powers. I could have done anything." [IQ]

This is reminiscent of Bakunin's *The robbers are the heroes*, conveying the idea that anarchy allows for the amount of violence that, at least from a Hegelianist viewpoint, is necessary to unroll the powers of nature and destiny that help to establish a new order (Bakunin, 2005).

An additional item of the cosmic identity is *humor*. My interviewees point to that fact when talking about their interpretation of smartness: being cool, not taking everything too serious, and above all not taking oneself too serious (the staged seriousness is one of their main objections against the neo-salafist propaganda of the long beards). They willingly open up their hearts and minds to the religious instructor if he or she is able to provide them with

reasonable answers to their questions, mixed with a healthy amount of subtleness and irony. The almost explosive increase of funny YouTube clips transforming Islamic topics into intelligent and witty formats gives proof of a development that walks past the established religious institutions, the mosques and their staff.<sup>7</sup>

### *Cosmic Homeland*

The patterns of social and physical identity mentioned so far allude to a kind of formative impact of *imagination* that has been underrated so far.<sup>8</sup> I am talking about the common desire of feeling integrated into a system of higher *cosmic order*. When looking at the juvenile age, achieving this kind of reintegration of personal fragmentation turns out to be one of the most challenging tasks of growing up. Translated into the context of religion, this may have to do with almost cosmo-theistic concepts by which some of them try to overcome the stringent demarcation-lines between the formal religious systems. Conditions like I experienced during my school-time in Jakarta beginning in 1979, namely friends of mine who in the same time were Buddhist adherents of Catholicism or Confucian adepts of Islam (the like Erich Fromm, looking at the Asian brands of religiousness, used to call *paradox logic*), seem to have vanished from the spiritual menu-chart once and for all. Instead, the neo-conservative withdrawal into the narrowness and over-obedience towards retrodox emanations of identitarian religion defined by cultural exclusion seems to have taken over (here groups like *Ĥizbut-Tahrĭr*

play a doubtful role). Hence, the increase of hijabs on my university campus does not necessarily indicate an increase in spirituality or religiousness. It may very well be read as the expression of a spiritual crisis and the juvenile attempt to overcome it at least on the *symbolic* level. The same applies for juvenile radicalization when understood as symbolic behavior.

To keep up with this more or less cosmic challenge, the spiritual elements of juvenile explorative conduct are short-circuited with facets of ludic behavior. The schemes of game and play allow for the negotiation between *taking* and *making* a social role which largely remains void of social sanctions. From there new and more radical formations of Islam can emerge. This kind of *doing religion* can differ from the maybe more settled domestic habits in practicing religion and in the same time worry the parents. The ludic patterns also connect to the realms of the juvenile aesthetical, spiritual, and sensual openness towards the world. The willingness to search and allow for experiences that have been unknown so far is often hastily disclaimed by the religious authorities. Personal experience as a foundation of contemporary didactical concepts in religious education, however, is difficult to be operated. A good deal of the religious experiences my interviewees talk about here, does not follow the visible and established grammar of formal religion, which is why it mostly remains undetected. In the case of Islamist radicalization it may remain covert until its too late for parental prevention or upgraded forms of intervention. Latest research has shown that the time span for radicalization can speed up in between 18 to 24 months, especially in the case of so called self-radicalization which is restricted to the virtual segments of social communication.

### **Basic Concepts of Youth Education in Islam**

Strictly speaking, the Islamic sources do not talk about religious education in the

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<sup>7</sup>There was a time in Indonesia in the late 1980's favoring funny and witty sermons during the Friday prayers – no God's blessing without at least one laughter. This was dismissed soon, not because of the objection that laughter in the mosque was identified as indecent behavior but as the signature of fundamental opposition against president Soeharto's despotic regime.

<sup>8</sup>The concept of imagination was described in the works of Jerome Singer and Carl Gustav Jung.

narrow sense of the word. This corresponds to the Koran addressing mankind and being a Muslim in terms of conduct and inclusive identities and not Muslims as an exclusive religious community. When Muhammad addressed issues of education, he meant education in general. Nevertheless, the textual information that is at hand to some extent feeds religious normativity today. But what are we talking about here on the conceptual basis? There is the entitlement of educational leadership of the senior generation on the one side. On the other side there is the juvenile claim of self-determination. The Koran picks up the relationship between both of them in texts like 31:12-19 (the Luqmān episode). Childhood and youth have to be understood as self-contained phases of life, following the implications of *sabiya* in Koran 19:12 and 19:29; an expression like *ḥukman sabiyan* alludes to the laconic juvenile intelligence. A word like *balaga* in the Holy Scripture (37:102) stands for *the ability to walk* which is the literal sense. The transferred understanding means something like *growth, adolescence* or *puberty*, or – one exegetical step further – *maturity* in the intellectual sense (which refers to both girls and boys). Some words of the Koran refer to *youth* as the specific sub-twen section of life (*syaba>b* is a nominal derivate of the verb *syabba* which means *to rear, to rebel, to burn, to boil over*) in the sense of a situation that affords coping, coaching and company depending on the individual state of maturity and *reliability* (*nabātan*, 3: 37).

Some of the prophetic figures of the Holy Koran run through specific processes of juvenile learning like trial and error, the quest for appreciation, the search for reliable emotional relationships, the search for truth, the strife for certainty concerning the individual points of view, the negotiation of authority, the ability to tough out conflicts, the ambiguity of parental authority, the dissociation from the parental home, compliance to senior authority, how to cope

with failure, affect and bearing the consequences (compare 6:74-83, 18:60-82, 28:14-21, 31:12-19). Muhammad described the juvenile episode of a person's biography as a valuable time, warning against wasting it. It is known how he negotiated with young Muslims how to find the balance between *wanting* to do, being *able* to do and being *allowed* to do (the issue was military fitness). The Islamic textual sources indicate that the domains of adolescent and mature life-world were not as separated as they seem to be today: The younger ones appear to be riper, the older ones appear to be younger in their minds. A good example for this is the famous *ḥilf al-fuḍūl*, a group Muhammad joined when he was young. They were dedicated to social service and the relief of the wounded of both sides during war. He advised the Medina youth to reactivate such an initiative, underlining some kind of romantic gesture.

Today, the parental inquiry that is addressed to experts in Islamic religious education in Germany aims at issues of concern which are typical of the post-migrational situation: the anomy of modern life in a secular society, the loss of normality in the face of everyday islamophobic racism, the ambivalence between chaining and unchaining their children, letting them find their own way and the bivalence of cultural transmission and emancipation. The latter touches gender issues especially, since the different cultural habits in dealing with patterns of sexual identities and the social role of the sexes are forced apart. This is why the German mosques today face major challenges in addressing their youth compared to so-called Islamic countries.

Our empirical findings of patterns with the signature of centrality allow for some conceptual approach towards religion as a topic within *general* education, as well as *religious* education in the strict sense of the word. Above all, the differentiation between religion (or better *religiousness*) in the shape of a more functional understanding on the one side and religion (or better *theology*) in

the shape of a substantial body of teachings, institutions and traditions is necessary. Otherwise the emanations of juvenile spiritual orientation and religious positioning could be overwhelmed by the confessional bias and quite some preoccupation concerning objective truth. This is the reason why a recent empirical investigation (see footnote 9) with focus on religious positioning offered two simplified parameters of juvenile religiosity. The first was said to be oriented towards *obedience* and the second steering at *criticism* – mentioning interview excerpts mainly given by young Muslims in the first case and *exclusively* protestant voices (with some minor Catholic exceptions) in the latter. However, this has nothing to do with juvenile theology but with the white-collar preoccupation of exclusively Christian and non-migrant researches who are members of what critical intersectional research would describe as the *dominant society*. The researchers projected their positive prejudices of Christianity as the supposed *religion of the heart and mind* against Islam as the alleged *religion of the law* in their negative view. They were searching to understand marine life world, staring at the selection of fish they had put in the bowl.

### Three Systemic Tensions

The difference of substantial and functional approaches to religion is one of the most prominent aspects when teaching religion with reference to the above mentioned juvenile indicative of *I want to understand*. With regard to the design of syllabus, school-book and teacher-training, this entails three patterns of constitutional suspense with regard to the theological, social and psychological realms. At first, the tension between *tradition and situation* alludes to the logic of normative power. Tradition may not be simplified as something statutory which is rooted in the non-comprising attitude of the clerical staff. Tradition rather unfolds its dynamic aspects when understood as *cumulative* tradition.

The situation an individual lives in, on the other hand, does not only point to the normative performance of the social condition but also to the persistence of the given constellations. Therefore, religious traditions that are believed not to be the state of the art any more can most surprisingly unfold a long forgotten impact.

To give an example: Surely there is quite some demand to discuss gender-issues in the face of the Koran, its male-dominated interpretation, the feminist quest for rereading the Holy Scripture considering gender-equality and the surge of young Muslim women and girls who try to overcome the patriarchal supremacy within their families and their social surroundings. In the same time, the liberal layers of the upper middle-class Muslim families in oriental metropolises like Cairo tend to return to arranged marriages not because their parents would claim it, but because the girls want it – they appreciate romantic love but prefer security first when the whole situation with the boys turns out to be ambitious. Even the most conflictive religious positions may snatch at the same verses in the codes and canons of the tradition. Here religious education has the duty to clarify the respective strategies of argumentation in order to render the algorithms of religious rhetoric transparent. This leads to the tension between *text and mind*, that is the tension between the literal and the trans-literal (see below) understanding of the Holy Text, alluding to the state of mind and the intention of the interpreter at eye level with the innate significance of the material text itself. The third tension is the one between the *subject and the collective*. It refers to the juvenile individual and its expectation to do things *my own way* vis-à-vis the collective and conjured convictions what *the right way* to do things would be.

### Ways and Means

To deal with matters *the right way* has to do with religious ascriptions as to the

assumed destinations of things. The Koran talks about ways and means in different ways. One example is mentioned in chapter 5, verse 48. Here the Arabic expression *syir'ā wa minhāj*<sup>9</sup> refers to religion in a general understanding of a *set of symbols* (*Symbolbestand*) and religious procedures. To have something at hand that permits to be called *religion* in the material sense of the word affords such a recognizable set of symbols (teachings), a formalized framework (community) and the individual (believer). Another text in the Koran refers to the social scheme with special reference to migration and refugees, two of the major issues aside from security and integration that occupy the current debates about Islam in Germany. The expression in chapter 4, verse 99 (*hīlatan wa sabīla*; power/plan/strength and way – or just *ways and means*) admonishes those who live in security and prosperity to provide those who have lost everything with the choice whether they want so stay or to push on at first hand.

These two examples shed light on how the religious lyrics of life do not only refer to the coordinates of vision, morale and hope but are jointed to the metaphor of *the path* in the spiritual and aesthetical sense. The literary figuration of the path does not only allude to one's destination but has its own entitlement as a narrative of life with regard to the juvenile subject and the social situation and mental condition it lives in. For young people, the path of life at the same time unfolds as a promising and hardly manageable amalgam of options and their contingencies that lie ahead. As a transposition into syllabus design, one of the most recent drafts for teaching Islam in public schools on the secondary level (the Hesse core curricula) has tried to translate this into terms of educational motives, competences and methods. These include the hermeneutical approach towards the

religious heritage in the shape of collective tradition (the following Arabic terms refer to concepts within Islamic anthropology). The competences aim at strengthening the personal reasoning (*taḥkīm*) on the basis of reliable religious information (*ta'lim*), at the capability of leading oneself to answerable targets (*tazkiya*) and to a sustainable religious positioning of the self (*tasāwin*), at the facilitation of the trust in oneself and in God (*tawakkul*), at the exercise of attentiveness towards oneself, towards other human beings, towards God and towards the big and small things in God's creation (*taqwā*), at the readiness to social understanding (*tafāhum*), agreement and solidarity (*taḍāmun*), at the ability to get along with others and their differences and to practise tolerance as appreciation (*tasāmuḥ al-tabāyun*) and at the education of language skills with regard to religious expressiveness and social discourse (*kalāma, bayān*).

In addition to this, the Koran unfolds a surprising diversity of metaphors of the path of life (the brackets indicate exemplary chapters and verses in the Koran). The following words show this variety: *maṣīr* (4:97) reminds of the Exodus narrative and gives the hard rock connotation of plight, *milla* (6:161) points to the idea of picking up a trail from the past and continuing it on to the future, *ṣirāṭ* (1:6) strengthens the anagogical aspect of one's personal salvation which lies ahead, *sabīl* (61:4) describes the necessity to strive for good goals in social solidarity, *syir'ā* (5:48) denotes the methods and strategies, and *sa'ī* (92:4) describes the personal pace in terms of the intensity of religious life-styles.

### The Different Senses of the Scripture

The metaphors of the path explained in the preceding chapter allude to the juvenile perception of *being on the way*. This perception does influence the personal imaginations of the future and the preferred

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<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Asad (2003) translates this by law and a way of life, Yusuf Ali by law and an open way and Marmaduke Picktall by divine law and a traced out way

religious narratives between rehearsal, narration, explication, interpretation, argumentation and critique. This is the reason why even those who have never been acquainted with the Holy Book and its narratives would most willingly turn to it in order to grasp ideas that might help them get through challenging conditions.<sup>10</sup> Such different dispositions of decoding narratives lead to the necessity of systematically teaching easy hermeneutical and exegetical approaches to the Koran (Behr, 2013; Behr, 2011a; Behr, 2011b). For example, following chapter 2, verse 102, the Koran tells the story of the two Babylonian angels *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*.

The *literal* sense remains allegiant to the material text, following the wording and spelling and rendering every exegesis of the Koran into a philological adventure. In this sense, *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* are the real names of real angels that really appeared sometime in early human history. They were sent to teach the inhabitants of the city and to try their belief (angels are angels). Actually this arena of literal readings reflects the primary and sole Koranic understanding of most of the Muslims I have come to know, at least of the vast majority of my Muslim students. To fluidize this mental slugging is the challenging part of my teaching profession at the university.

The *allegorical* sense looks at the literary figuration which is enclosed within the text. Here *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* can be compared to other dual personifications like Cain and Abel. These points at conflicting powers within the human soul and at the necessity are used to assess the options of action according to their expectable results. It contains the tension between experience, interest and anticipation. Here angels can be

understood as human dispositions and conditions.

The *epical* sense focuses on additional narrative information from other sources like the Bible or late ancient literature. The Koranic term for narration is *qasaṣ* (see 12: 1-3) which depicts *truth* instead of *reality*, a differentiation most of the pupils are hard to catch up with. Narration, other than the empirical world, draws its reliability not from measurable or objectified patterns but from *plausibility* which derives not from the precise rehearsal of the narration but from its *varieties* (*mutasyābihan matsānī*; 39: 23). As regards *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, 1 Moses 6, 2-4, the Epistle of Jude 6, the Second Epistle of Peter 2, 3, the Books of Enoch or the Midrash Akbir deliver similar stories. Here angels are characters.

The *critical* sense looks at historical, cultural, social and other background information that might help to illuminate the understanding of a text. It is part of the critical and namely secular approach to the religious scheme. It is important to know that the critical approach is not the antithesis of belief since especially Judaism, Christianity and Islam pass their innate disposition of religious critique as an integral part of their scriptural heritage. In Islam, secular criticism is not the contrary of theology, it is part of it – theology is not necessarily religious, and religion needs no be theological. The seven Zoroastrian ethical emanations (Amesha Spenta) mention Haurvatāt as a figure for *truthfulness* or *wholeness* and Ameretāt for a *long life* or *immortality*. In this view, the philological figuration of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* remind us that different imaginations of angels may have a cultural, areal, historical, social, psychological and spiritual origin and grammar of their own.

The *intentional* sense follows ethical implications, not asking about the intention of text and author but of the interpreter instead. This reading supports the normative

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<sup>10</sup> I have witnessed this with regard to young Muslim women who seek advise concerning abortion. The institutions that offer counseling here are unable to cope with the helpless efforts of these women to find a justification within Islamic tradition in favor of abortion which eases their confused hearts. Here female Muslim theologians are desperately needed.

power of the given situation vis-à-vis the actual situation. With regard to getting hold of one's own life, of one's religion and of one's future, the dialectical relationship between the text of the Koran and the juvenile access to its content (the tension between text and mind has been explained above) is a major challenge of teaching Islam to young Muslims. Here *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* stand for the good and bad, the divine and evil dispositions of human beings. Angels can be understood as an expression for the hand of man who is able to create either hell or paradise here on earth.

The *typological* sense is interested in the generalization. Singular and particular events or figures carry the potential of general and universal meaning. *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* represent angels as such, and angels represent the hand of a God who gets involved and interferes into man's actions.

The *anagogical* sense is oriented towards the individual hope for God and for the hereafter as a true reality. It focuses on the promise of eternal peace and the personal confidence in not being left alone or dismissed by God. This is a spiritual dimension which may be emotionally present though difficult to put into spoken or written words. The anagogical sense may correspond to the mystic elements of religious experience. Here angels represent the promise of the individual salvation.

The *lyrical* sense corresponds to the dimension of aesthetical sentience. As regards the Koran, it may appear on the level of performed religion, for example the reading of the Arabic Koran following the traditional rules of artful recitation (*tajwīd*) during Ramadan or whenever one feels the spiritual urge to do so. In this sense angels are lyrical figures who contribute to the personal escapist sensation which is not in need of at least near to rational explanation. On this level angels may even be addressed as personalized imaginations of reality who settle in a person's physical habitat – it is the familiarity and intimacy that counts.

Children are especially easy to find their approaches to this through magical thinking as an integral part of their developmental psychology. During their juvenile growth they will construct subsidiary constructions for this but will not give it up easily.

## CONCLUSION

Going through the different aspects of this contribution, some critical remarks as to dominant society, schooling and the questionable standards of teacher training have been made. Also the training of the Imams in the mosque needs special attention but is not the focus here. As a summary, some general recommendations shall be made with focus on the secondary and vocational level and at the issues of the juvenile target groups that are discussed here.

Religion must not only be understood as the realm of theology, formalized teachings, ethical principles, religious institution and regular instruction but also as a functional and often covert set of societal, spiritual, intellectual and aesthetical patterns. It is up to comprehensive research within general education to understand its impact on juvenile life-world orientation. This needs to be integrated into the general teacher-training as well as rising the teachers' awareness to all kinds of racism, gender bias, degrading rhetoric, anti-religious prejudice, Islam phobia, cultural and ethnical essentialism.

Juvenile critique and imagination correlate to highly individualized processes of religious orientation and positioning. Therefore safe spaces need to be offered to Muslims girls and boys to exercise how to express their creeds, convictions, hopes and fears. Even temporary non-coeducational formats should be taken into consideration especially regarding the precarious topics (which are often dethematized topics) discussed here. Such spaces would help young Muslims to find and explore their language skills which are needed to express spiritual convictions, emotions, hopes and

fears as well as to defend themselves against incriminating religious, sexual and racist bias and harassment they face not only from outright rightist and identitarian groups but from persons within their everyday surroundings, for example the teachers. Here it is necessary to delegitimize the penetrant Islamization of the common social and psychological deep grammar. The present *othering* intends to ascribe deviant behavior to migrants and Muslims as a putative trait of their alien personality.

Integration as a political agenda must not be confused with assimilation. Integration must be based on an understanding of identity that is not defined by cultural and identitarian exclusivism but by the art of being at the same time close to the other without dissolving oneself. Tolerance must not be understood as toleration but should be educated as the art of appreciation. Both integration and tolerance help to restore the greatest possible amount of normality in a situation that is sensed as contingent and menacing. Therefore it is necessary to elucidate the religious narratives, terms, relations and contexts of items that are liable to the misuse by rigid and radical demagoguery. Late ancient concepts, to name *ṣarīʿa* (teaching of norms and methodology) or *jihād* (struggle) as two examples, must be translated into useful mental frames and be freed from their hostile takeover by either radical neo-Salafist or anti-Islamic rhetoric, both enhancing their unanimous misinterpretation as *Islamic Penal Law* or *Holy War*.

A binding culture of mutual understanding must be taught and exercised at all levels of school education. This includes the deconstruction of ideological meta-identities and the negotiation of the future standards of living together in the framework of Germany as a democratic constitutional state. This includes religions and religiousness, irrespective of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim or other theistic, pantheistic, trans-theistic, non-theistic or

atheistic creeds and confessions. To achieve this, more religious science and philosophy needs to be thematized not only within the framework of religious instruction but also outside from it. However, confessional religious instruction as a regular subject in public schools needs to be saved and further developed as an unalterable standard.

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