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Tim JENSEN

ASR and RE

ABSTRACT: As a university discipline, the academic study of religions (ASR) has produced a critical approach to the study of religion which is (or ought be), I think, of fundamental importance for a modern secular and enlightened democratic state. However, the ”study-of-religions” approach has percolated with limited success into society at large as well as into the primary and secondary educational systems of Western democracies. Too often so-called religious education (RE) really is religious or confessional, and even so-called non-confessional RE is, mostly if not always, mixed with crypto-confessional approaches, inculcation of moral values (not least those claimed to be Christian) and the promoting of religion as a resource for a more ”spiritual” approach to life. While these goals may be in line with the traditional use of the public school as the key instrument of the (nation-) state to try to confer its ideology to (future) citizens, it is not compatible with the ideals of the academic study of religion, nor with the ideals and ideas of the present writer as regards the secular, study-of religions based RE that I think ought be taught in public schools as a totally ordinary school subject and as such also true to its scientific basis. In what follows I map and evaluate some of the many approaches to RE as well as some of the obstacles to a study-of-religions approach. Likewise, I ever so briefly argue why my approach to RE may be seen as a 'natural' and 'good' kind of 'applied ASR ', as an obvious way to promote and strengthen the academic study of religions, --and as a positive value to the open, democratic and pluralistic society. I begin, however, with a statement by Prof. Brian Bocking, quoted in part below, which admirably describes the components and characteristics of the academic study of religions - and by extension - of a study-of- religions based RE.

KEYWORDS: academic study of religions, religious education, RE, study-of-religions RE, small c confessional RE.

Tim JENSEN is Associate Professor at the Department for the Study of Religions, Institute of History, University of Southern Denmark and Honorarprofessor at Leibniz Universität, Hannover, Germany. He has been (1997-2005) President to DASR, the Danish Association for the Study of Religions, (2000-2004) General Secretary to the EASR, the European Association for the Study of Religions, and (2005-2015) General Secretary to the IAHR, the International Association for the History of Religions. He cyurrently serves the IAHR (2015-2020) as its President.

ASR, ISASR, IAHR, - and a Statement by Brian Bocking

In 2011, the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religion (ISASR) was established, and in May 2012 it held its first of (so far) four annual conferences at University College of Cork. Prof. Brian Bocking, one of the founding fathers, head of the (in Ireland) unique study of religions department in Cork, and serving at the time as Treasurer of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) wrote a statement "What is the academic study of religions and why is it important?"

Together with a brief statement by then ISASR President Prof. Patrick Claffey, the statement by Prof. Bocking, most appropriately I think, still serves as the ISASR website introduction to the ISASR ('About the ISASR').[1] For reasons I shall return to, I find it appropriate to include (extensive) excerpts from this statement up front of this contribution in honour of Prof. Bocking:

> For most people in Ireland, studying religion has meant studying Christian theology and Christian history, largely in Christian-ethos (usually Catholic) educational institutions ranging from primary schools to third-level colleges. So-called 'other religions' (which for a long time meant only Protestantism or Catholicism depending on standpoint, but now extends to Islam) may be included through 'Ecumenics' or 'Inter-Faith Dialogue', but only in relation to a Christian theological perspective.(...).
> The academic study of religions (ASR), which is a well-established academic subject in universities around the globe, takes an entirely different approach to that of confessional theology (...). ASR studies religions (plural) using the same critical, open-ended methods of enquiry and implementing the same egalitarian standards in selecting staff and students that are applied in other reputable academic disciplines. (...).
> The Academic Study of Religions (ASR) fosters the *critical*, *analytical* and *cross-cultural* study of religions, past and present. [...] Within the human and social sciences ASR has, as its special focus of study, religions as they exist and have existed in the world. ASR (...) does not construe 'religion' as a separate, unique or transcendent category. (...).
> ASR draws a clear distinction between studying religions empirically and promoting (or, conversely, attacking) religions. Hence, it does not participate in the confessional, theological, or apologetic practices associated with particular religions. Yet, ASR places no limits on the questions that may be asked about religions. Consequently, ASR is very much interested in the study

[1] See https://isasr.wordpress.com/ (last accessed February 20, 2016).

> *of* theologies, *of* ecumenical activities and *of* inter-faith encounters where these occur, but its role is to study, critique and analyse such religious activities... (...)
> This approach might be termed 'procedural neutrality'. Like all other reputable academic subjects, however, ASR recognizes that any claim to procedural, or ethical, neutrality faces a serious challenge in the postmodern context. Gender studies and post-colonial theory in particular reveal that there is no truly neutral critique and all scholarship is contextual and politically engaged. However, recognizing that one cannot be entirely impartial is not a licence to act in an arbitrary manner, for example by prioritizing the study of one's own religion over others, or viewing all developments through a religious lens of one's own, as theologies aim to do. (...).
> (...) Religions are socially, culturally, economically and politically important, whether one likes them or not. [...]. ASR is important for understanding religions in just the same way that other reputable cross-cultural academic disciplines or interdisciplinary areas such as international politics, social history or the study of literature etc., are important in their respective fields; (...)ASR produces valuable, reliable and empirically verifiable findings and teaches methods of inquiry and ways of thinking about religions which enable students and others to understand religious diversity and negotiate meaning in today's complex world.

The statement, with which I heartily concur, is, I think, a clear articulation of the aims and stance of the ISASR and of Prof. Bocking as regards key components of an academic study of religions, promoted by the ISASR, as well as by Prof. Bocking and his colleagues in Ireland, in Cork.

The statement, followed on the website by the ISASR Constitution, saying (§2) that "[t]he Society is a forum for the critical, analytical and cross-cultural study of religions, past and present. It is not a forum for confessional, apologetical, interfaith or other similar concerns", is, furthermore, implicitly as well as explicitly, in perfect line with the IAHR 'mission' statement and Constitution.[2]

Prof. Bocking, as indicated, played an important role in the establishment of the ISASR, and (on behalf of the BASR) he also played an important role when, back in the 1990s, one of the many initiatives to establish an European regional association for the study of religions threatened to derail the wished for establishment of what later (2000) became the highly respected and very successful European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR).

[2] Cf. the 'About IAHR' and the IAHR Constitution § 1, at www.iahr.dk. Consequently, it was no problem at all for the IAHR Executive and International committees to unanimously recommend, in 2012 and 2013, to the IAHR General Assembly meeting in Erfurt 2015 that the ISASR be adopted member to the IAHR.

Prof. Bocking, furthermore, served the IAHR as the first IAHR Publications Officer ever (2005-2010), and (2010-2015) as the IAHR Treasurer. As is evident from IAHR minutes and reports (cf. the IAHR website and the relevant *IAHR Bulletins* and *IAHR e-Bulletin Supplements*), Prof. Bocking in both these capacities played a key role in the IAHR flagship journal NVMEN and the conspicuous improvement of the IAHR finances—both of which were of uttermost importance in furthering of the aims of IAHR, i.e. to strengthen and support on a global scale the academic study of religions.

Having served the IAHR (General Secretary 2005-2015, currently President), the Danish Association for the Study of Religions (DASR), and the EASR (General Secretary 2000-2004), it can come as no big surprise when I take this opportunity to say that it has been a great pleasure, privilege, and honour to cooperate with Prof. Bocking. It was, thus, also a great pleasure to witness how the work and dedication of Prof. Bocking and his colleagues manifested itself also in the established ISASR, as well as in the Department of the Study of Religions in Cork.

ASR, ISASR, and a RE Conference in Cork

A work that was manifested again when Prof. Bocking, August 20-30, 2013, only a year after the inaugural conference of the ISASR, together with his colleagues in Cork hosted "RE 21—Religious Education in a Global-Local World".

In addition to my work within the academic study of religion, as a scholar and via the DASR, the EASR and the IAHR, I have also tried to promote the study of religions by way of promoting a study-of-religions based (non-confessional, integrative, teaching about) RE in public schools,[3] in Denmark, in Europe and world-wide. I have done so by way of critical analyses of RE, by way of the writing and editing of study-of-religions based textbooks for RE, by way of participation in public, and thus political debates, and by way of participation in professional and political associations and committees dealing with RE, e.g. the drafting of national curricula for upper-secondary school RE in Denmark.

I have 'fought' for the furthering of such a study-of-religions RE when teaching the timetabled study-of-religions based subject called 'religion' in upper-secondary school in Denmark (1981-1995), when chairing the Danish association for RE-teachers (1991-1993), and when representing the same association to the EFTRE, the European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education.

[3] By 'public school' I mean a state funded school, in principle open for everyone irrespective of e.g. religious or political affiliation, and economic capacity.

I continued doing so when entering the Department for the Study of Religions at the University of Southern Denmark in 1995, and when, in 2007, together with Prof. Wanda Alberts, I encouraged the establishment of and co-chaired the EASR Working Group on Religion in Secular Education.

Thus, no wonder, I welcomed the "RE 21—Religious Education in a Global-Local World" conference, held in Cork, Ireland—a country with, I find it safe to say in spite of recent developments, no long or great tradition as regards a study-of-religions based RE in schools. The conference aims were presented as follows:

> An international conference on Religious Education (of all kinds) which seeks to encourage a sociological and ethnographic/anthropological research-based approach to the study of RE, rather than the 'top down' approaches which often start from prescriptive legal, ideological or religious standpoints. The conference aims to foster international academic research into the diverse past, present (and possible future) forms of RE and to enhance public and professional understanding, in Ireland and beyond, of the complex issues and debates surrounding RE in the wider world.

The conference organizers furthermore stated that the conference started from two assumptions, (a) "that RE has and will continue to have multiple and contested meanings", and (b) "that local interpretations of RE are increasingly in negotiation with each other as a consequence of globalisation".

From my point of view, hosting and arranging this conference on RE was in perfect line with the other efforts of Prof. Bocking and his colleagues to further the academic study of religions. In this case, I think, primarily by way of promoting and strengthening one of the—as I see it—obvious and promising research areas within the study of religions, namely the study of everything that might be seen as pertaining to RE and RE didactics as this is imagined, discussed (amongst various kinds of scholars as well as amongst RE teachers, educationalists, and politicians) and practised around the world.[4]

RE is an area of study that has until recently been attended to by only a few study of religions scholars, but is an area that seems to attract more and more interest. An IAHR Regional Conference held (2004) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, signalled a growing interest on a more than

[4] For a similarly comprehensive notion of what constitutes a (non-normative) didactics of RE, see Andreassen 2012, 39.

individual level on the subject matter.[5] In 2007, I was invited to give a keynote on study of religions based RE at the EASR annual conference in Bremen, Germany, and the EASR established a Working Group on Religion in Secular Education (co-chaired by Wanda Alberts and myself). In 2008, NVMEN, the IAHR flagship journal, devoted a special issue (ed. by W. Alberts) to RE and the History of Religions, and in 2013, *Temenos* dedicated an issue (edited by W. Alberts and myself) to RE in the Nordic countries. These developments, as well as several volumes and a new Swiss journal edited by scholars of religion and dedicated to RE,[6] signal a growing and more 'institutionalized' interest in this research area within the academic study of religions.[7]

While I am pretty sure that Prof. Bocking arranged the 'RE 21– Religious Education in a Global-Local World' because he wanted to promote a study-of-religions based research on this subject matter (I take the wish to "encourage sociological and ethnographic/anthropological research-based approach to the study of RE" to mean that much), I can also hope that he also had other motives and aspirations, e.g. strengthening a study-of-religions approach to teaching (about) religion, not just at the university level but also in schools, not least schools in Ireland. The first paragraph in his 2012 statement may, I think, indicate as much.

Be that as it may. The rest of this article is devoted to 1) a short version of my (normative) argument why the academic study of religions (ASR) and ASR based RE ought to be 'a must', 2) an overview of kinds of RE actually 'out there', and 3) an evaluation and conclusion as to why what is 'out there' is still not very study-of-religions like.

ASR, and ASR based RE - A Must

[5] See Pye et al (eds.) 2005. Especially the articles by Wanda Alberts, Peter Antes, and Einar Thomassen directly address RE.

[6] See Franken & Loobuyck 2011, Jödicke 2013, and Zeitschrift für Religionskunde - Revue de Didactique des Sciences des Religion ed. by Katharina Frank and Petra Bleisch (1st issue 2015; see http://www.religionskunde.ch/ (last accessed February 20, 2016). An edited volume on 'key terms in a study-of-religions RE-didactics', edited by W.Alberts, B.-O. Andreassen and myself is underway.

[7] Having said this, I hasten to add that I am aware of the strong links between several UK scholars of religions, past and present, to RE and didiactis of RE, with Ninian Smart, of course (and the Shap Working Party), as a towering figure and influential initiative. (Cf. e.g. Alberts 2007, 88-94 on Smart and Shap). In Denmark (cf. Geertz & Jensen 2014), a relationship between the study-of-religions and RE in upper-secondary school has existed ever since the History of Religions at the University of Copenhagen in 1914 was entrusted the education of RE-teachers for upper-secondary school. Still, the development of a study-of-religions approach to RE, as a more widely respected and accepted field of research *and* application of the academic study of religions, is of a more recent date.

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If science and scientifically grounded knowledge is held by the state to be of positive value (and it is at least to a certain degree), then scientific approaches to and knowledge of religion and religion-related matters must be of value too. Religion is a human and social phenomenon, a phenomenon influencing, now as before, for good or bad, other areas of life, society and culture (also Culture with a capital 'C'). Scientifically grounded knowledge of humankind must include studies and knowledge of what is referred to as religion. The state, thus, needs must establish and support an academic, scientific study of religion. Solely for this reason. But there is another (good and maybe linked extra-scientific) reason.

Whether or not the state supports one religion, the past and present world (and normally also the country in question) is *multi-religious*. Furthermore, there will also be citizens who do not identify as religious, who are not adherents to any religion, and there will, furthermore, be citizens who are not just a- but even anti-religious. For a secular, open, democratic and pluralistic society to stay secular, pluralistic, enlightened and open, the state must provide for and support in addition to (a) first-order religious discourse(s), i.e. what the religions say (about) themselves, an additional non-religious second-order discourse on religion and religions. This second-order discourse is not the one produced by any one religion (theology) but the one produced by historical, comparative study of religion(s).

Moreover: Though the tasks of the elementary and secondary public schools are different from the tasks of the (public) universities, with schools having other tasks than transmitting knowledge produced by the various academic-scientific disciplines, *part* of the task of the school, even the elementary school, is to provide pupils and future citizens also with scientifically produced and based knowledge, and with competences and skills based thereupon. With regard to both 'Allgemeinbildung', further education and skilled and qualified performance as qualified citizens, performing also in various professions where knowledge about religion(s) may be helpful and preferred to ignorance and prejudice.

I admit, of course, that it may be discussed whether a state and public school system can always find time, space and money for a time-tabled RE, ASR based or not, rather than e.g. providing more time, space and money for subjects considered more important for the well-being of the state and society, e.g. knowledge leading to an improved agricultural or health sector, knowledge improving the economy and the politics, etc., I find it reasonable to argue in favour of an ASR based RE: most states already *do* find it worthwhile to include some kind of RE, and providing all future citizens with qualified scientifically based knowledge of religion(s) past and present as well as qualifications to analyse religion

and discourses on religion might be argued to be of such an importance that it ought be provided for.

The state can and ought to decide to leave confessional RE to the religions/confessions/denominations themselves (outside of the public school) and instead include a compulsory totally normal or ordinary time-tabled school subject, an ASR based RE, in the school curriculum. If it so wants, it can keep on with its support to the confessional RE as this takes place outside the public school.

I admit, of course, that the arguments above, also the one valuing science for the sake of scientific knowledge '*per se*', are normative and political. They are based on my vision of what is valuable and good. Consequently, I am well aware that some states, politicians and even educationalists may put greater value in *not* having too well-educated, enlightened citizens, citizens who cannot, e.g. based upon knowledge and skills acquired via an ASR based RE, critically analyse religion(s) and public discourses on religion(s) (Islam and Christianity for example), whether these discourses are religious or not, pro- or anti-religious, or e.g. Islamophobic. As it is now, evidently (see below) most European states seem to prefer, no matter a growing interest in some kind of teaching about more than the majority religion, to have good Christians (of a certain kind, of course), brought up not just at home or in 'church' but also in the public school with a state-supported confessional or crypto-confessional RE inculcating what is considered right and valuable religious knowledge and morals.

Be that as it may: I think that ASR and ASR scholars, no matter their political stance, ought to see that it might be in its (their) own best interest to 'prolong' its work and to consider the larger public and the school 'classroom' a natural prolongation of the lecturing in lecture halls and the publication of e.g. articles in academic journals. It is in the interest of ASR to try to make a larger public and for politicians to discover the value of the work of ASR scholars and to value positively the difference between a theological and insider approach and the study-of-religions approach to religion. This, furthermore, may lead to more students at the study-of-religions departments, and then again, hopefully, to more scholars and more research. This, at least, has been the case in Denmark. If the ASR departments, as is the case now in some countries, e.g. in Denmark, are responsible for the education of RE-teachers (at least some of them), it is even better for 'business'.

Besides, I think, it can be argued that the obligation of a public state university cannot be limited to pursuing and producing scientifically grounded knowledge shared *only* by other scholars in academia. It must be obliged to (as it is in e.g. the Danish University Act) share its knowledge and competences also with the public at large and to thus 'feed' the public sphere and debate with the results of the scientific,

academic endeavours, *in casu* the scientifically grounded theories of, approaches to and knowledge about religion.

There are many ways in which scholars can educate the public, including the not unproblematic and risky way of engaging with the larger public via the mass media, and discussions about the most appropriate (or least risky) ways are important discussions.[8] Training RE-teachers, being active in committees that draft (RE-) curricula, writing textbooks (for RE), and like activities are, I think, fairly 'safe' and 'sober' ways of sharing ASR produced knowledge and critical-analytical competences with the wider society. It is, I contend, also an obvious way of carving out more space for and strengthening ASR, and, I think, with e.g. Wanda Alberts, an example of a excellent kind of 'applied RE'.[9]

And, I want to add, I find it in perfect line with the 2012 statement by Prof. Bocking regarding the character and *usefulness* of ASR, usefulness not just for university students but for citizens at large.

RE - Some Shapes and Shades

RE, as indicated by the RE21 announcement text speaking about "Religious Education (of all kinds)" (my emphasis), is a widely used acronym, quite often covering all kinds of teaching religion in school. RE 'out there' most certainly comes in many shapes, and each shape, besides, comes in various shades. When dealing with specific instances of RE, it is always necessary to specify the kind(s) of RE actually being prescribed and practiced in specific countries and school systems. Things are complicated. Often not black or white, and if black and white then in various shades of black and white—as well as in shades of grey.

Maps and models are, hopefully, less complicated than the empirical mess they try to map, overview, reduce and handle. Yet RE in its various shapes and shades are classified in so many ways—and the classifications based on such a variety of criteria - that outsiders to the terminology are likely to get lost. I can, however, refer the reader to a small sample of the host of accounts on various kinds of RE, and, without further ado, in this brief overview stick to some of the most common terms or 'kinds' of RE.[10]

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[8] I have, using my own experience as an 'expert' to the media, discussed some of the relevant issues with special regard to religion scholars and the international discussion, in e.g. Jensen 2008 and 2011. See also Jensen & Rothstein 2000 for remarks by leading scholars of religion on the issue.

[9] See e.g. Alberts 2007, 385 ff, 2008, 325 ff. and 2012, 307 f.

[10] Most of the books and articles on RE listed in references to this article have some kind of account of the various terms and kinds of RE. However, from a study-of-religions perspective specific mention may be made of: Alberts 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009; Jensen 2005; Willaime 2007. Byrne 2014 also has useful overviews and discussions. For

RE in public education, in state-run secular education and public schools, be it elementary or upper-secondary school, may be a time-tabled *Confessional* RE, state supported (in various ways), run by teachers (or 'preacher-teachers') educated and paid by the 'confession' (majority or minority religion, denomination etc.) or teachers educated and paid by the state. Though it comes in various shapes and shades (Finland for example having its own special kind, maybe more correctly termed 'separative' rather than 'confessional' RE), it normally takes as its starting point the teachings of the religion/confession/denomination in question, and it has, one way or the other and in various ways, the aim of making those teachings religiously and morally relevant for the pupils who are normally, though not exclusively, children to parents who 'adhere' or 'belong' to the religion/confession in questions. Today, an opt-out possibility is the norm, and the alternative subject offered may be e.g. Ethics, Philosophy, or a mixture of Ethics, Philosophy and (Study of) Religions.

Confessional RE is always a kind of learning religion or *learning from religion*, especially or exclusively learning from "one's own" religion. It aims at making the pupils *religiously competent*, as it is sometimes expressed. It is, no matter if it is or may be distinguished from the kind of religious upbringing that may take place in the family and the kind of 'catechisation' that takes place in the religious institutions proper, some kind of teaching *into* the religion or denomination in question. 'Religious instruction', 'Religious upbringing' or 'religious nurture' are terms that may be applied too.

As a consequence of an increase in certain kinds of religious pluralisation, e.g. an increased presence, in a nation or region, of parents and pupils with different religious or denominational backgrounds, systems of confessional RE, e.g. in various 'Länder' in Germany, tend to become systems of *multi-confessional* RE, with each denomination, with the support of the state, establishing and running its own confessional RE.[11]

Another kind of reaction to the development towards more (or/another kinds) religious plurality as well as to other developments like secularization and individualization, are of course efforts, e.g. in Spain, Italy, Germany, and Belgium towards the establishment of some kind of non-confessional RE. Non-confessional RE may (as is evidenced from e.g. England) be a lot of things, though, but it is often, in principle at least, a kind of RE that, legally as well in practice, is contrary to confessional RE, not based upon or intimately linked to the (explicit) teachings of one specific religion. And teachers are, normally, not

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overviews and discussions from other perspectives that a study-of-religions perspective, cf. e.g. Jackson 2014, and Schreiner 2015.

[11] See e.g. with regard to Bavaria in Germany Jensen & Kjeldsen 2014d.

educated by religious institutions but at normal teacher-training institutions.

In much non-confessional RE, in principle, the religions taught about are to be approached on equal terms; theories and methods applied are, in principle, the same no matter what religion is taught. It is teaching and learning about religion(s), and it is not rarely claimed that it is so in ways that resemble a study-of-religions perspective.

It is not infrequently said that it is this kind of RE that may be found in countries like England and Scotland, as well as in the Scandinavian countries. It could be added that it is often thought to be, in principle, this kind of RE that might comply with the criteria put forward by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) as well as the US Supreme Court for the kind of RE that may be compulsory, i.e. without an opt-out possibility and an alternative offered. A kind of RE that does not violate the rights of the parents as regards (religious) education. Such RE is supposed to be and must (according to the ECHR e.g.) be "objective, critical, and pluralistic."[12]

In 2007, Wanda Alberts' (Alberts 2007) introduced into the terminology, classification and discussions of RE a set of new, and I think, helpful terms and categories, namely 'integrative', 'separative' and 'dimensional' RE. In integrative RE, all pupils no matter their religious, a-religious or anti-religious backgrounds are taught at the same time and in the same classroom *about* religion(s), in principle all religions and in principle from a study-of-religions perspective. In 'separative' RE, pupils are divided in accordance with their (or their parents') religious backgrounds and (primarily) taught the religion of 'their own'.

While these two kinds of RE correspond (grossly) to confessional, respectively non-confessional RE, the third term, 'dimensional' catches the kind of religion education that takes place (most notably in France), not as time-tabled separate school subject, but as a dimension in the teaching of other school subjects, e.g. history, art, and literature, where it is also (normally) taught by teachers without a specific RE-orientated education.

The state of affairs in France is, of course, linked to the specific French notion of the secular state and state school vis à vis religion (in France: laicité) as well as to an understanding of religion as a cultural, historical and human phenomenon that is best studied and taught as such, as a historical variable, and thus in context and not as something *sui generis*. [13]

[12] See Jensen 2005 for a discussion with reference to human rights norms, and Andreassen 2013 on the problems for Norwegian RE to meet the human rights standards, a case which, in an exemplary way, reveals how hard it is for an in principle non-confessional RE to comply with not just the human rights but also the study-of-religions standards.
[13] See Kerchove 2011, Baudin 2014, and Jensen & Kjeldsen 2015b.

Mention may be made here finally of a typology developed by Katharina Frank on the basis of research on RE in Switzerland. Based on various empirical sources, classroom observation included, Frank distinguishes between (a) 'religiöse' and (b) 'kulturkundliche' framings of religion in RE. The two kinds of RE are then subdivided into, on the one hand (a) narrative RE, dogma-related RE, and life world-related RE, and, on the other hand (b) historical RE, sociological RE, and systematic-comparative RE.[14]

Last but not least, one may, of course, also speak more broadly about 'religious' RE (as well as 'interreligious' RE) over against 'non-religious' or 'secular' RE, for instance because the term 'confessional' may be seen as too narrowly linked to a system where RE is identical to a kind of catechism and intimately and exclusively based upon and aimed at a formulated 'confession' or creed.

One may also speak more broadly about teaching religion over against teaching about religion, and about learning about religion over against learning from religion. And, one may add to this, the stance of scholars like Alberts, Jensen and others, talking about a kind of non-confessional, secular, non-religious RE and teaching about religion where the aim is that the pupils learn, not from religion, but from the *study of religions*.[15]

RE: From Confessional to Non-Confessional Or? A Study-of-Religions Critical Look

French sociologist of religion, and for a long time Director of the Paris based IESR (set up to stimulate and strengthen the French way of teaching about religion as a dimension within other school subjects, e.g. by a qualification of textbook material and teachers), J.-P. Willaime in an earlier overview of RE in Europe wrote that all kinds of RE were challenged by the increased religious pluralism and individualism.[16] Though I would like to add more challenges, real or perceived, I cannot but agree.

(Different kinds of) confessional as well as non-confessional time-tabled RE (or educational systems with no time-tabled RE, e.g. France) have, as already indicated, 'responded' to some these 'challenges'. Responses have been and still are many and various. Mention here can be made of but a small selection and only ever so briefly.

Apart from the development into a system of multi-confessionalism in places with confessional RE (e.g. in several German

[14] See, *inter alia*, Frank 2010, and 2015; Frank & Bochinger 2008.
[15] A way of putting it, I think, used first by Wanda Alberts (Alberts 2008, 320-21).
[16] Willaime (2007) spoke about a '*Européanisation*' of challenges to RE.

'Länder'), mention must, of course, also be made of the necessity to have an opt-out possibility and to offer an alternative subject, claimed to be non-confessional or a-religious, to confessional RE. The human rights 'regime' is evidently in place in most places.

Likewise, most confessional RE nowadays includes some teaching of and about 'other' religions.[17] A critical look at the inclusion of other religions in the curriculum in confessional RE, however, reveals that quite often this teaching does not comply with basic study-of-religions standards.

Though the teachers teaching about other religions within the framework of confessional RE may have had some kind of education qualifying them for this, there can be no doubt that most confessional RE-teachers have not been educated at something comparable to study-of-religions departments and thus have not acquired those cross-cultural, critical, comparative and historical knowledge and competences which I, for one, consider necessary in order to minimize the risk that teaching about the other religion(s) take place on the basis of and from the viewpoint of the teacher's own religion or notion of religion.

Linked to the inclusion of teaching about religions in confessional RE is a widespread ecumenical aim, or, as it is more often called, interreligious or interfaith education. Teaching of one's own religion and the religion of others (also sometimes with the others sitting in the classroom) aims at providing the pupils with not just religious competence but with interreligious competence. The so-called Hamburg way of doing things, with protestant theologian Wolfram Weisse as a leading figure is a good example of this combination of confessional and interreligious RE.[18]

The recommendations from the famous REDCo (Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries)[19] project as well as the aims and policy of the equally influential ENRECA network (The European Network for Religious Education through Contextual

[17] Examples may be found in the so-called baseline studies on RE in Spain, Italy and Germany produced by Jensen & Kjeldsen (2014bcd).

[18] For one of many brief introductions to the 'Hamburger Weg', see Doedens & Weisse 2007. For a brief critical overview with references to further study-of-religions based critical analysis, inter alia by Christoph Bochinger, of this kind of confessional-interreligious RE, see Frank 2010, 27-29. Linked to this kind of confessional RE in Hamburg is the so-called Akademie der Weltreligionen at the University of Hamburg. See http://www.awr.uni-hamburg.de (last accessed February 20,2016).

[19] The project, financed for three years, 2006-2009, by the research department of the European Commission, included projects linked to eight countries. The project has resulted in several books published by Waxman, Münster, and in even more articles. The US journal *Religion & Education* devoted a special issue (Vol. 37, Number 3, 2010) to the project. With an introduction by W. Weisse, *ibid*. 187-202, and 'responses' from invited scholars, including my own critical one (Jensen 2010).

Approaches),[20] in various ways all show signs of the most evident characteristics of interreligious education: religions are seen as spiritual and moral resources for the pupils and for society, teaching about is combined with teaching from the insider's perspectives, learning about is also learning from, and RE is seen as having much more to accomplish than providing knowledge and analytical skills. If not there to save the world, it (RE) is there to, at the least, play a key role in paving the way for tolerance, social cohesion, peaceful coexistence, human rights, freedom of religion, and it is supposed to function as an anti-dote to what is seen as a growing fragmentation, lack of spiritual and moral orientation, and gross materialism. It is aiming at contributing to the formation of what has been called 'the whole child'. The famous 'gift to the child'-project and pedagogy is seen also as a gift to society at large, to the cohesion of which it contributes because it also functions to develop inter-personal (moral) values and interreligious competence.

Quite a few of the trans-national famous recommendations and projects at a first glance seem to recommend a study-of-religions approach, teaching about religion. Yet, quite a few, e.g. the Council of Europe's intercultural education project, stress that learning *about* is not enough.[21] This is true also for the most recent 2014 publication edited by Robert Jackson (Jackson 2014), beyond a doubt the most influential RE-scholar for many a year. The publication, thus (Chapter 2) *inter alia* stresses that religion cannot be reduced to a cultural fact, that understanding must include the understanding of the insider's perspective, and that it takes imagination and empathy to understand religion. This, as well as the explicit recommendation of e.g. a dialogical approach is not in line with a study-of-religions approach, even if the

[20] The policy statement of ENRECA, written by Siebren Miedema, Peter Schreiner, Geir Skeie, and Robert Jackson may be downloaded from several URLs. One is the Comenius platform at http://www.comenius.de/pdfs/themen/Europa-enreca.pdf (last accessed Februay 20,2016). The Comenius-Institut, by the way, represented by its former director as well as by its present director (Peter Schreiner) has been prominent and very influential in the field of European RE for decennia, an indication of a characteristic mixture of scholarly as well as religious interests and affiliations to be found on the European RE scene. Schreiner, has, it must be emphasized, time and again produced solid and helpful research based overviews of RE in Europe. Nevertheless, it must also be noticed that (cf. the Comenius-Institut website) this key RE-player is at the same time director of the Comenius-Institut (Muenster, Germany), a Protestant Centre for Research and Development in Education. Consequently, it must be noted that a key player like Schreiner who has also been central in the EFTRE, the European Forum for RE-teachers, and who is moderator of the Coordinating Group for Religious Education in Europe (CoGREE), at the same time is also president of the Intereuropean Commission on Church and School (ICCS), a non-governmental organisation with participatory status at the Council of Europe and an associated member organisation of the Conference of European Churches.

[21] See the critical overview with references in Jensen & Kjeldsen 2014a.

publication at various places speaks about the kind of RE recommended for schools as 'study of religions' ('studying religions') in school.

The same can be said about another response to the 'challenges', especially religion-related challenges, conceived of as a threat to the security of the OSCE member states: the *Toledo Guiding Principles*. This 'response' and recommendation to member states to implement a non-confessional kind of RE in public schools, time and again refer to the study of religions as the academic basis for the RE (and the educational background of RE-teachers) and time again stresses that it is teaching about. Yet, at the same time it displays, as pointed out by the present writer (Jensen 2008, 132-133), several clear examples of an approach to religion and RE not specifically characteristic of an academic study of religion.

Nevertheless: responses like the *Toledo Guiding Principles* do constitute a step in the right direction, I think. Even if flawed. The same, of course, goes for the many conferences and discussions, not least in French-speaking and Catholic countries, that have looked to Quebec and the recent introduction of the so-called "Ethics and Religious Culture" (ERC) program for inspiration as they try to introduce something other than confessional education. I, with Bruce Grelle, guest-editing a special issue on ERC (*Religion Education* 38, 2011) also think that "the ERC program, and the academic and public discussions and controversies surrounding it, have a relevance that extends well beyond Quebec, Canada.".

However, again it is worth noticing that scholars of religion and RE-specialists Bengt-Ove Andreassen (Norway), as well as Satoko Fujiwara (Japan) in their critical contributions to the volume (Andreassen 2011; Fujiwara 2011) did not think that 'deconfessionalisation' had been completed with the ERC either.

I cannot go into detail as regards the many alternative subjects offered to pupils opting-out (e.g. Ethics, Philosophy or a combination, sometimes also with some kind of supposedly non-confessional study-of-religions education about religions like in Werte und Normen in Niedersachsen, Germany). One thing is for certain, though: they not infrequently display signs of not just teaching about morals (from, say, a philosophical or sociological point of view). They evidently have not infrequently taken over from confessional RE an aim at providing morals, so that they seem to not be real alternatives but rather subjects trying to take care of that moral and societal upbringing of the pupils which was hitherto the business of confessional RE.

Before saying a few more words, from a study-of-religions point of view, about some so-called non-confessional RE, mention must be made of another 'response' to the challenges mentioned above, namely the introduction or development of 'citizenship education.' Though not

always the case, citizenship education, not least when linked to and discussed in relation to intercultural and interreligious education and RE, reveal, as it most evidently did in Denmark when linked to the education of teachers for elementary school, an ideological and political agenda that includes an effort to transmit and consolidate religious (Christian) ideas and values, with special regard to a perceived threat posed by Islam, or the new Muslim presence, as well as to a (perceived) general loss of traditional values, or to globalization and migration in general.[22]

Turning more directly to established educational systems with a declared non-confessional RE, a look at the situation in e.g. England taken by Wanda Alberts in her ground-breaking 2007 dissertation (Alberts 2007, 86 ff, and (a brief exposé) Alberts 2010, 277f) shows with crystal clarity that a lot of RE in England cannot even with best will be seen as in line with an ASR approach. There is a lot of RE that may described as much more in line with e.g. 'a gift for the child',[23] and thus not just multi-faith RE but also interfaith RE. A recent report (by the UK Religious Education Council) on the purpose, aims and content of RE in the UK, summarised by the editor to the *British Journal of Religious Education* speaks its own clear and honest language as regards the messy situation:

> Is religious education an academic study of the beliefs and values of others, or more a form of personal development in which pupils work out their own important beliefs, values and identity? [...] Is it a non-confessional activity or is there a place for faith development? What is the place of philosophy and ethics? Can religious education contribute to social and political goals such as community cohesion, global citizenship or saving the planet, or is this ridiculously overambitious and distracting from the core purpose? (Editorial, *British Journal of Religious Education*, vol. 35, no 3, 2013)

Turning from England to Scandinavia, not rarely considered a stronghold of non-confessional RE, with Sweden and Norway introducing it as early as in 1969, and Denmark (elementary school) in 1975, the situation, especially as regards RE in elementary school, is also somewhat ambiguous. As scholars of religion Wanda Alberts (2011), Jenny Berglund (2013), Bengt-Ove Andreassen (2013) and Tim Jensen & Karna Kjeldsen (2013) have demonstrated, RE, not least in elementary school in each of these three countries, may be said, as indicated in the title of the 2013 article by Berglund, to be 'marinated in' Lutheran-Protestant Christianity.

[22] See Jensen & Kjeldsen 2013, 187 and 207 ff.

[23] For the 'gift to the child' approach and poroject with references, see Alberts 2007, 120-130.

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In each of the three countries RE is linked to a (neo-) nationalist culturalist agenda of inculcating (a notion of) so-called Christian values and Christian (cultural) heritage in the pupils and future citizens via RE. In Denmark, furthermore, such a neo-nationalist agenda as regards RE and the promotion of Christianity as foundational for the past and present Danish society and culture, is coupled with a pro-religious agenda promoting some postulated 'religious dimension' (clearly some sort of Tillich-inspired theological notion) said to constitute a universal human and ontological fact that, strangely enough, is totally in line with Danish theological-existentialist life-philosophy. Despite some recent attention to providing more solid knowledge, this RE primarily aims at having children realize that the postulated religious dimension is important, to them and everybody, since every religion at its basis has this 'religious dimension' and a quest for 'meaning'. At a closer look, the 'religious dimension' as well as the key thematic and pedagogical unit, the philosophy-of-life, is but Christianity in new clothes. The teaching supposed to be teaching about is preaching the gospel of this 'religious dimension' and of Danish culture as Christian culture (cf. Jensen & Kjeldsen 2013, 195 ff).

Unfortunately, this crypto-confessional or (see below) 'small c confessional RE' can be seen elsewhere too, for instance in Switzerland, as shown by e.g. Andrea Rota (Rota 2013). Also on the basis of research on RE in Switzerland, religion scholar Katharina Frank (at times with Christoph Bochinger) has, as mentioned above, developed another highly useful classification of RE. The discussion of the category 'life world related RE' and the demonstration, with reference to the analysis of the relevant empirical material, why this pertains to the larger class of religious RE is particularly useful: In 'life world-related RE', the aim is to link the objects of the teaching, i.e., religious figures, narratives, dogmas, rituals etc. to the life world and experience of the pupils and thus to make the pupils familiar with what is considered universal human themes and experiences; the aim is to develop the personality, spirituality, and 'humanity' of the pupils.

When pupils in many an RE classroom are imagined to develop respect and understanding for other religions and for those (other) pupils and persons who 'adhere' to these religions, the 'otherness' of the other religion(s) may be stressed.[24] It may, however, also be evaded or belied:

[24] In Denmark for instance by way of seeing 'our ' (way of having) religion as compatible with a secular democratic state, with secularization, human rights, and gender equality, at the same time as it is seen as a challenge to the other religions (Islam not least, of course). Another 'strategy' is to describe and see the religions of the others as 'religion' while our religion is primarily 'morals' and 'faith, or 'culture' or 'cultural heritage'. Furthermore, the religions of the others are religions with e.g. divine commandments, rituals, and outmoded rules regarding childish notions of e.g. pure and impure. Cf. Jensen & Kjeldsen 2013, 195- 197, and Andreassen 2014)

the majority religion ('our' religion) and the other('s) religions all translate into universal existential themes and general human experiences. We and they can thus meet (in the RE classroom and in the hoped for better world) as humans, and 'we' can all see all religions as valuable resources for human development, mutual understanding etc. Religion, though especially the Christian one, or religion 'in general', yet seen through some kind of Christian-theological lens, is seen as a resource for positive values, including moral values. This kind of RE cannot properly be classified as study-of religions based but this is the kind that has taken over in many a place when confessional RE had to go.

Concluding Remarks

In order to, *inter alia*, 'catch' kinds of so-called non-confessional RE that actually turn out *not* to be non-religious study-of-religions based RE, I have, with PhD student Karna Kjeldsen, tried to develop a category a bit similar to the one of Frank mentioned above. Briefly introducing this, I end up linking up with the 'core' tradition within the IAHR, the tradition, I think, Brian Bocking (implicitly) drew upon in the statement from 2012 that opened this contribution.

The distinction we tried to make, originally proposed about theology (and theology-like (or religious) studies of religion) by Donald Wiebe (1984), was made in order to distinguish between what we, with reference to Wiebe, call 'Capital-C Confessional RE' and 'small-c confessional RE'. While the latter is formally dissociated from a specific religious confession, it continues to be based on a religious understanding of religion, and to have the ex- or implicit aim of promoting (some kind of) religion, or religion-based values in general. Wiebe wrote:

> All uncritical thinking about Gods or the gods that rests on revelation and authority or on the 'presumption of theism', and that therefore refuses to countenance the possible non-existence of God or the gods, is 'confessional theology'. Such theology constitutes a species of what I prefer to think of as 'religious thought' which operates entirely within the framework of general religious assumptions, or within a particular religious tradition, and is, therefore, incompatible with what will be referred to below as the basic minimum presuppositions for the academic study of religion. (Wiebe1984, 405)

Analyses of kinds of RE reveal, I think, many traces of such 'religious thinking', whether it operates within the framework of general religious assumptions or a particular religious tradition, and I consider these cases

to be a kind of 'small-c confessional' RE, sharing, I think, many characteristics with Frank's 'life world related RE'.

Like Wiebe (*ibid*, 407), I subscribe to the 'basic minimum presuppositions' for the historical and comparative study of religions that R. J. Zwi Werblowsky proposed in Marburg in 1960 at the X International Congress for the History of Religions.[25] A famous passage in the paper read by Werblowsky (quoted in Annemarie Schimmel's 'Summary of the Discussion'), on *Religionswissenschaft* as a scientific discipline and branch within the humanities, reads that *Religionswissenschaft*, i.e. the academic study of religion, is

> an anthropological discipline studying the religious phenomenon as a creation, feature and aspect of human culture. The common ground on which students of religion *qua* students of religion meet is the realization that the awareness of the numinous or the experience of transcendence (where these happen to exist in religions) are – whatever else they may be – undoubtedly empirical facts of human existence and history, to be studied like all human facts, by the appropriate methods. (Quoted from *NVMEN* VII, 1960, 236; reprint in Jensen & Geertz 2015, 82).

This is not the place to discuss or unfold in any greater detail the contents and methodology of 'my' ideal of a study-of-religions based RE. I have to refer to earlier contributions, and to contributions by colleagues in the EASR Working Group on Religion in Secular Education, inter alia Wanda Alberts and Bengt-Ove Andreassen, who have staked out the main methodological (or didactical) principles for a study-of-religions RE that differs significantly from the confessional as well as (more or less) non-confessional kinds of RE mentioned above.[26] Here, I can only say a few words about this RE:

Generally speaking an ASR based RE will be characterized by curricula, textbooks and teacher training that subscribe to the basic presuppositions formulated by Werblowsky and a series of IAHR related scholars after him. As well as, of course, to the criteria staked out in Prof. Bocking's 2012 statement.

It includes teaching about religions past and present as well as cross-cultural themes ('phenomena'), and up-to-date methodological issues and theories, including e.g. issues pertaining to the very notion of

[25] A massive amount of indications of the influence of the Werblowsky stance on the IAHR approach, not to say of the predominant institutional consensus about the stance, can be glanced from several contributions to the volume celebrating the 60th anniversary of *NVMEN*, the Brill/IAHR journal. See the Introduction by the the editors, Jensen & Geertz 2015, 1-18.

[26] See e.g Alberts 2008, 314 ff, Andreassen 2012, 45 ff. , and Jensen 2008.

religion (and 'world religion') and to the dominant but misleading notion of religion as essentially an expression of human beings answering to or asking the so-called big existential and moral questions about life and death.

Such an RE trains the pupils in critical-analytical 'reading' of religion(s) and religious and non-religious public discourses on religion, something that ought to be more than sufficient when arguing for its contribution to citizenship education as well as to 'Allgemeinbildung'. This is the kind of 'edification' such an RE ought to aim at.

Such an RE, just like the ASR staked out and propagated by Prof. Bocking in his 2012 statement, brackets the truth claims of the religions studied. But it also 'brackets out' the religious or non- or anti-religious backgrounds of RE teachers as well as of the pupils. When entering the RE-classroom, as said also in Cork in 2013 reading my paper at the RE21 conference, pupils enter not as Muslims, Christians, atheists, or the like. They enter as pupils, and the teachers enter as RE-teachers trained at ASR departments. One of the main aims of an ASR based RE is exactly this: to *de-familiarize* pupils with familiar (be it their religious notions or commonplace notions) notions, and to teach them how religion(s) may be approached in other ways. In ways other than theological, religious or life world ways, in ways developed by the secular academic study of religions.

As indicated above, such an RE is not commonplace. On the contrary. There is a long way to go, and a lot of de-confessionalisation to do, also of the in principle non-confessional RE, before RE becomes a 'true' child of the academic study of religion. The road towards an ASR-based RE is uphill and steep. Many a (nation-)state and many educational developments and innovations meant to 'meet' contemporary challenges, including those having to do, one way or the other, with (notions of and discourses on) religion, end up with an RE that falls short of the "minimum presuppositions" for an ARS based RE.

When, as indicated above, many, if not most, of the most influential RE-related scholars and networks of such RE-scholars are in favour of interreligious, interfaith or intercultural kinds of RE (though at times also partially in favour of some kind of study-of-religions approaches), and when the most influential trans-national recommendations are influenced, and sometimes even edited, by the same scholars, networks and 'school of thoughts', it is sometimes hard to imagine that the work so far done by but a handful of scholars within the academic study of religions will bear fruit.[27]

[27] Engaging, with Karna Kjeldsen and study-of-religions colleagues from France and Italy in an EU Comenius so-called Lifelong Learning Programme: Intercultural Education through Religious Studies, has been an effort to help produce also (digital) learning material based upon a study-of-religions approach. Those interested may evaluate the

In 2013, the same year as Prof. Bocking hosted the RE21 conference in Cork, I was part of a panel at the AAR Annual Conference, a panel 'celebrating' the 50th anniversary of the 1963 famous US court decision named after the man who filed the complaint, Schempp. It was this decision that staked out the criteria for a constitutionally legal and accepted way of teaching (about) religion in the US educational system.

Though the decision has not led to the kind of RE that I support in US schools, and maybe not even to my kind of academic study of religion at the US universities in general, it did point the way towards both the academic study of religions and a study of religions based RE. Consequently, with regard to the US but also to Europe, my paper that year was titled: "More Schempp, please!"

In 2016, inspired by Brian Bocking, his 2012 statement and the Cork 2013 RE 21 conference, I cannot but once again, with regard to ASR and RE, say 'more Schempp!' What Catherine Byrne (Byrne 2014, 47) in her recent work on RE called "Jensen's scientific approach" is an approach that ought be - if not the one and only one - then at least added to those already there.

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