

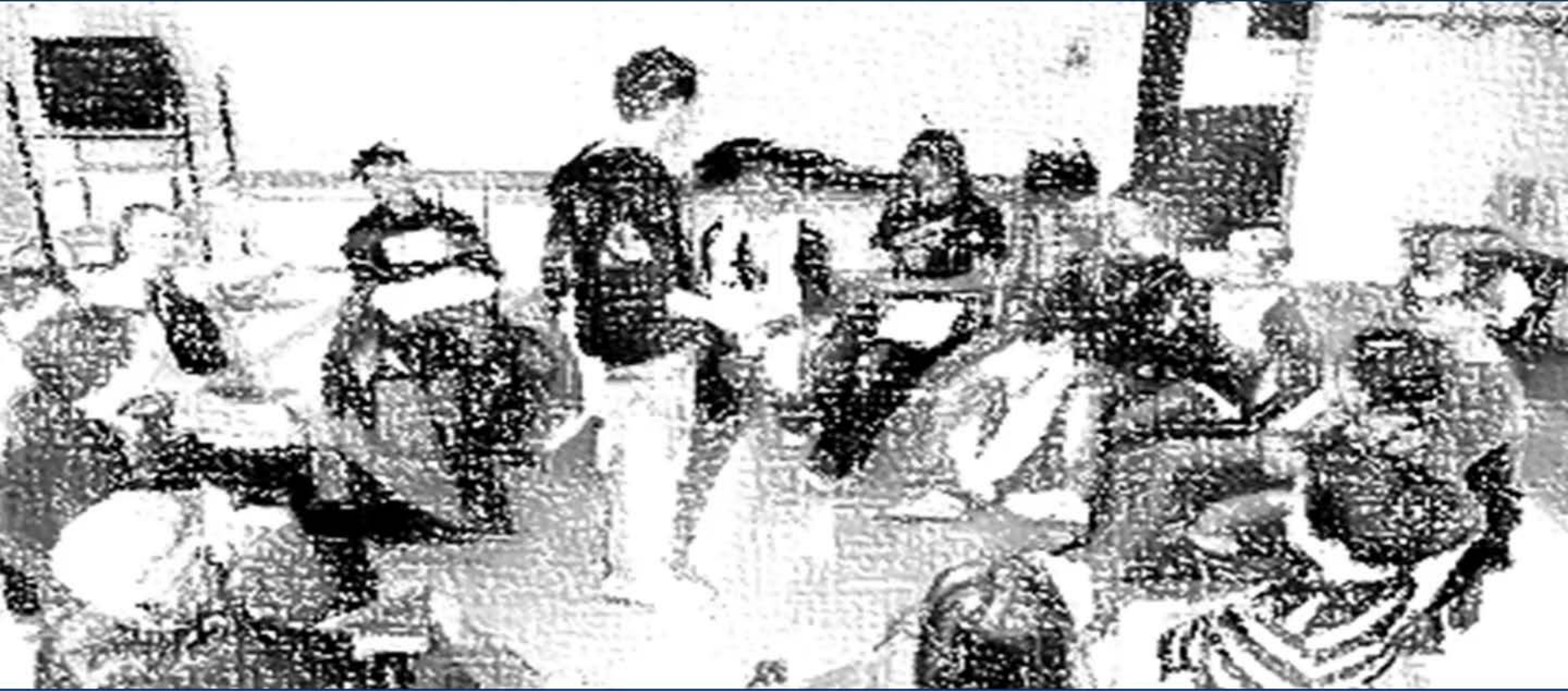
LECTURE SERIES PUBLIC THEOLOGY

An International and Intercontextual Assessment



Prof. Dr. Henrik Simojoki

Chair of Practical Theology and Religious Education
Humboldt University of Berlin



Public Theology and Education

Virtual Lecture Series *Public Theology: An Intercontextual Introduction*

1. In the beginning: an introduction
2. „We protest...“:
Paying attention to the prophetic voices of young people
3. A blind spot in Public Theology:
Looking for ways to adequately represent children
4. „Telic education“ and public concern:
Fostering reflexivity and positionality in today’s globalized world
5. Religious Education at schools:
Linking Public Theology with public education
6. Thinking “small” and “practically”: Educationally inspired considerations on the conceptual design of public theologies
7. In the end: a warning

2. „We protest...“



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It's up to your students!

Protest for the future -
Theses from students of Protestant schools worldwide



The theme of the year 2015 „Love each other – serve others in the global world today“ refers to the local and the global level of the project schools500reformation. Protestant schools form a solidarity network that can use its voice and its commitment for a world and future worth living: at the respective school as well as in a global perspective. Such a network requires bridge-builders with creative concepts and specific forward-looking ideas for action.

In his time, Martin Luther published his 95 Theses – and changed the world. The people were afraid of the end of the world. Wars, famines and diseases were considered as possible advance notices. The plague was widespread. There was great fear of death and purgatory.

Against this background, he raised his voice. He set off a theological debate on a crucial problem during those days and offered guidance to the burning questions of faith and life:

http://www.ekd.de/glauben/95_thesen.html

http://www.ekd.de/english/95_theses.html

http://www.ekd.de/francais/foi/les_95_theses.html

500 years later, we take up this idea as a growing global network of Protestant schools and collect “young” and current theses of schools500reformation for students of the future. The pupils from the participating schools can articulate and raise their voices, their criticism and their visions of a better future. The attached worksheet contains hopefully an orientation how to implement this idea in your school.

The action is dependent on the participation of as many schools as possible. Therefore, please send the theses of your students under the heading “Protest for the Future” to team@gpenreformation.net.

All submitted theses will be published online on www.gpenreformation.net.

2. „We protest...” - prophetic voices from Goma



We protest against corruption in school, in church and in our country.

2. „We protest...” - prophetic voices from Goma



We say no to killings and insecurity in our country because of the selfish interests of some people.

We protest against corruption in school, in church and in our country.

2. „We protest...” - prophetic voices from Goma



We say no to killings and insecurity in our country because of the selfish interests of some people.

Many teachers do not respect the rights of children. They punish children without a valid reason.

We protest against corruption in school, in church and in our country.

2. „We protest...” - prophetic voices from Goma



We say no to killings and insecurity in our country because of the selfish interests of some people.

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We protest against corruption in school, in church and in our country

Some pastors sow hatred and tribalism among Christians whereas Jesus came for everyone.

2. „We protest...” - prophetic voices from Goma



We say no to killings and insecurity in our country because of the selfish interests of some people.

Many teachers do not respect the rights of children. They punish children without a valid reason.

We protest against corruption in school, in church and in our country

Children are despised in churches. They are driven out to the benefit of old people who come to occupy their places. For God there is no children and no adults.

Some pastors sow hatred and tribalism among Christians whereas Jesus came for everyone.

2. „We protest...“: Paying attention to the prophetic voices of young people



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3. A blind spot in the current debate over responses to the global pandemic



3. A blind spot

in the current debate over responses
to the global pandemic



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3. A blind spot in public theology: Looking for ways to adequately represent children



- Since children do not have a direct voice in theology, theology has to find ways of adequately representing them.



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- Their perspective must be obtained "from below", in interaction with children as interpreters of their own life and reality.



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- Since children do not have a direct voice in theology, theology has to find ways of adequately representing them.
- Their perspective must be obtained "from below", in interaction with children as interpreters of their own life and reality.
- Therefore, Public Theology needs a solid empirical foundation (Simojoki 2020a).



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Education in the sense of
“Bildung” aims at

- seeing and understanding young people as subjects in their own right,
- acknowledging and strengthening young people in their individual growth.

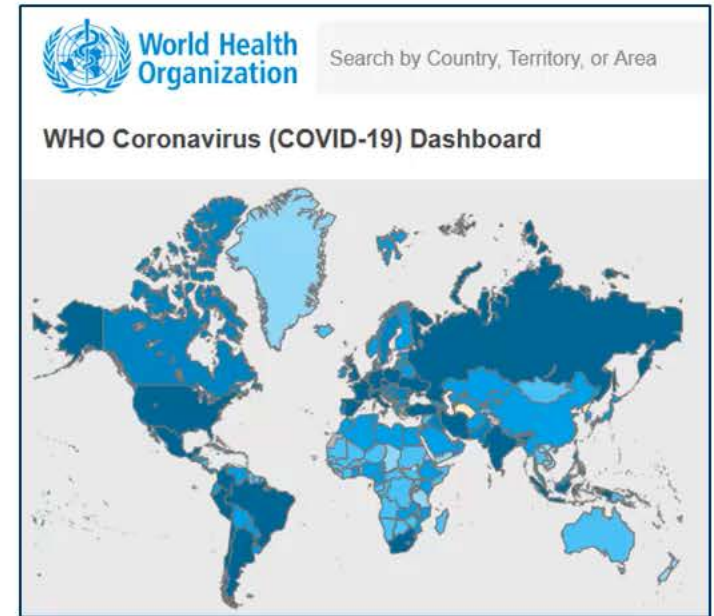
The similar concept of
“empowerment” puts additional emphasis on self-efficacy and power-structures (Bucher & Domsgen 2016).



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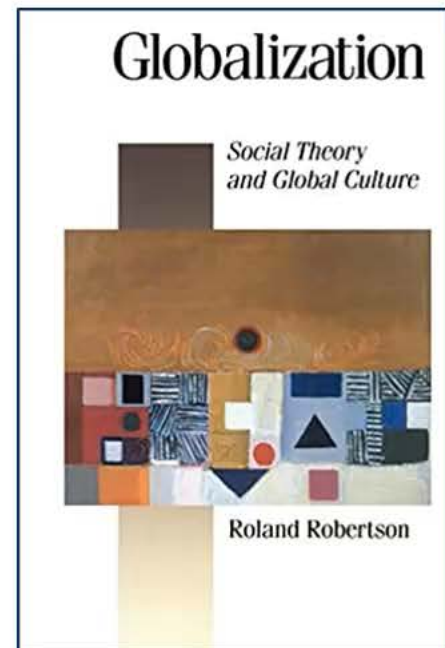
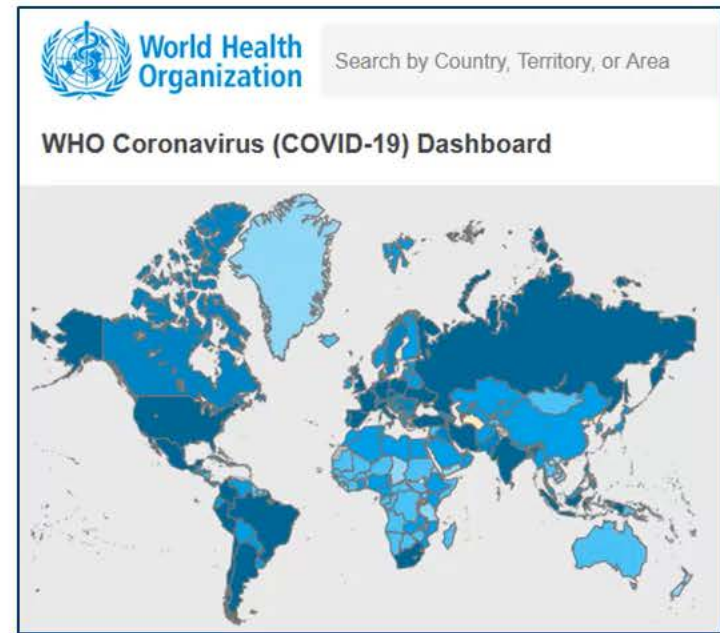
4. Globalization, “telic” concern and public theology

- Robertson & Chirico (1985): as the world becomes more globalised, “telic” questions and universalising discourses gain importance



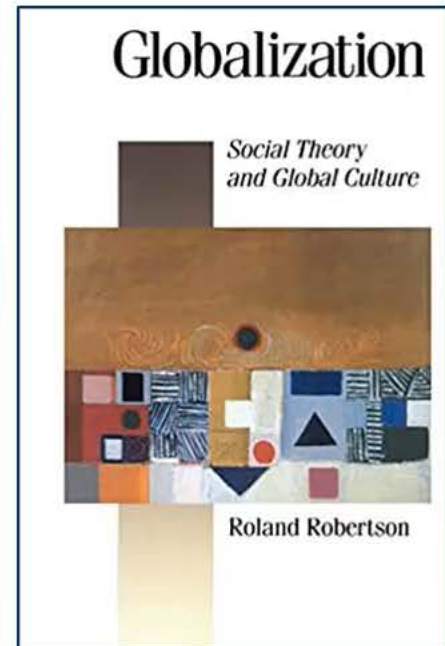
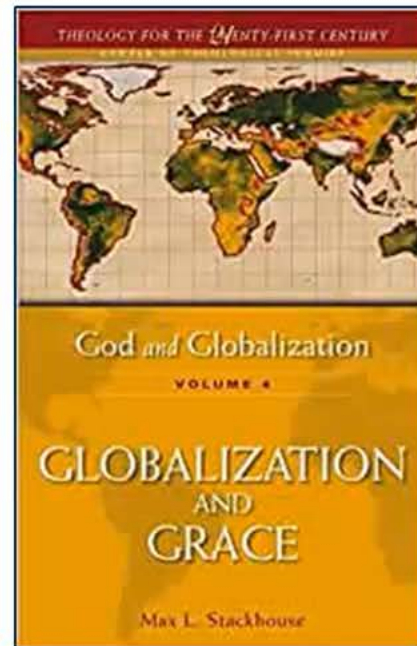
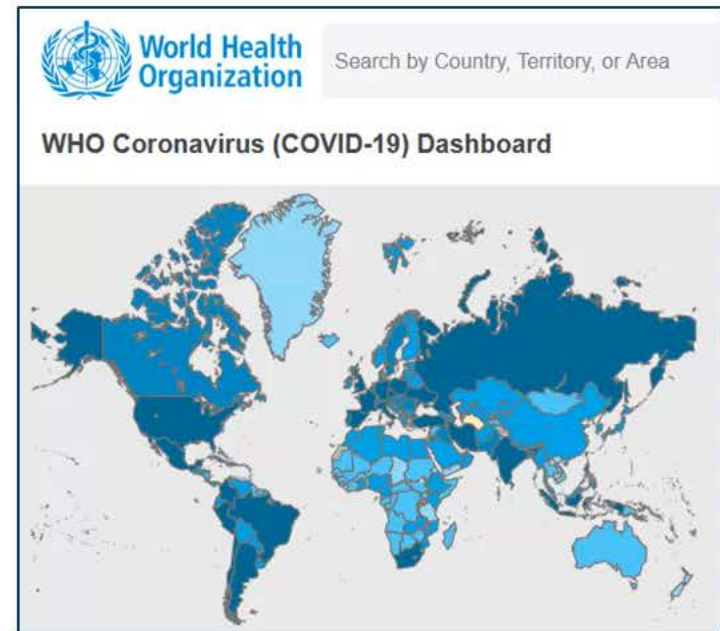
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- Robertson & Chirico (1985): as the world becomes more globalized “telic” questions and universalising discourses gain importance
- Robertson (1989, 18): "the making of the world into a single place constrains religious movements to offer interpretations of that development and of their own place in it – to give it religio-theological meaning, which may well be done in very negative turns".



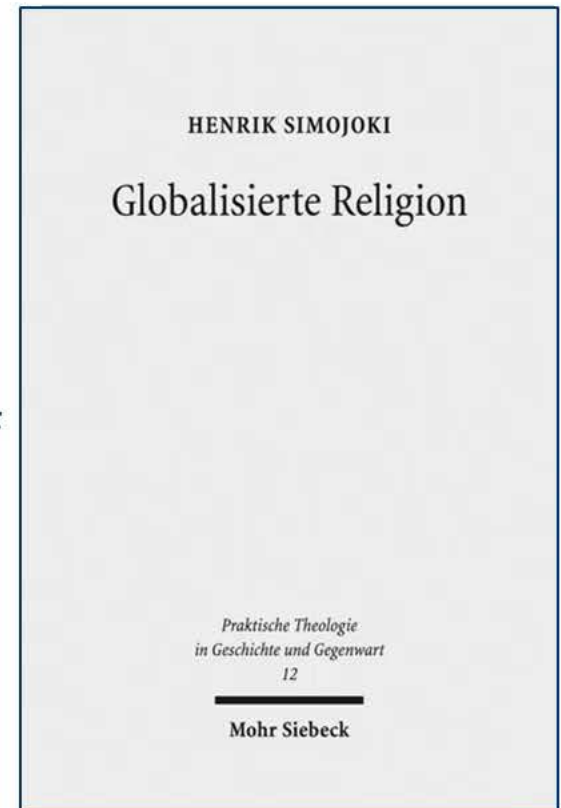
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- Robertson (1989, 18): "the making of the world into a single place constrains religious movements to offer interpretations of that development and of their own place in it – to give it religio-theological meaning, which may well be done in very negative turns".
- Stackhouse (2007) emphasizes the orientating and civilizing potential of theology in the evolving global civil society.



4. „Telic education“ and public concerns: Fostering reflexivity and positionality in today’s globalized world

- The global plurality of diverse, sometimes antagonistic world views and life interpretations demands increased reflexivity from each individual Christian.
- Public theology can and should contribute to “telic education”, with the aim to foster young people’s capacities to cope with the manifold complexities of the public sphere and to bring their own views and convictions into the public discourse (Simojoki 2012).
- On the consequences for religious education in times of the global pandemic see Simojoki 2020a.



4. „Telic education“ and public concerns: Fostering reflexivity and positionality in today's globalized world



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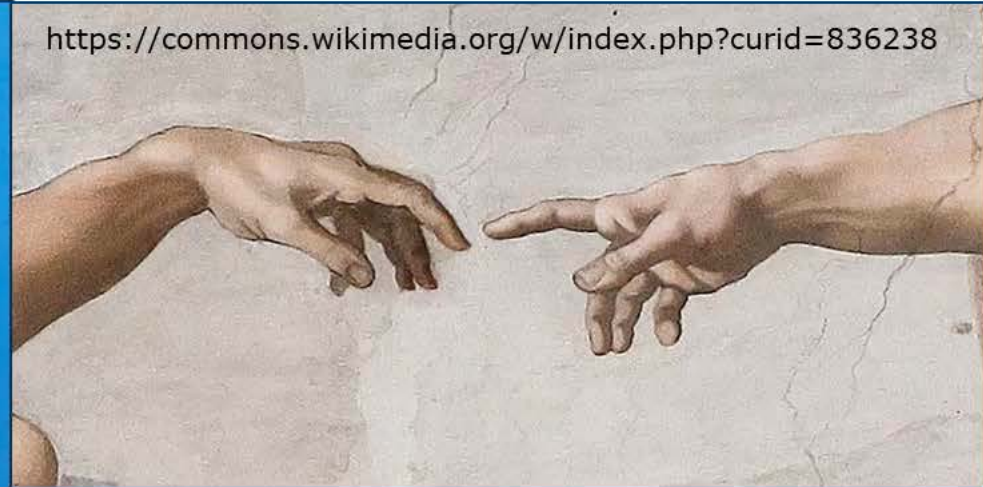
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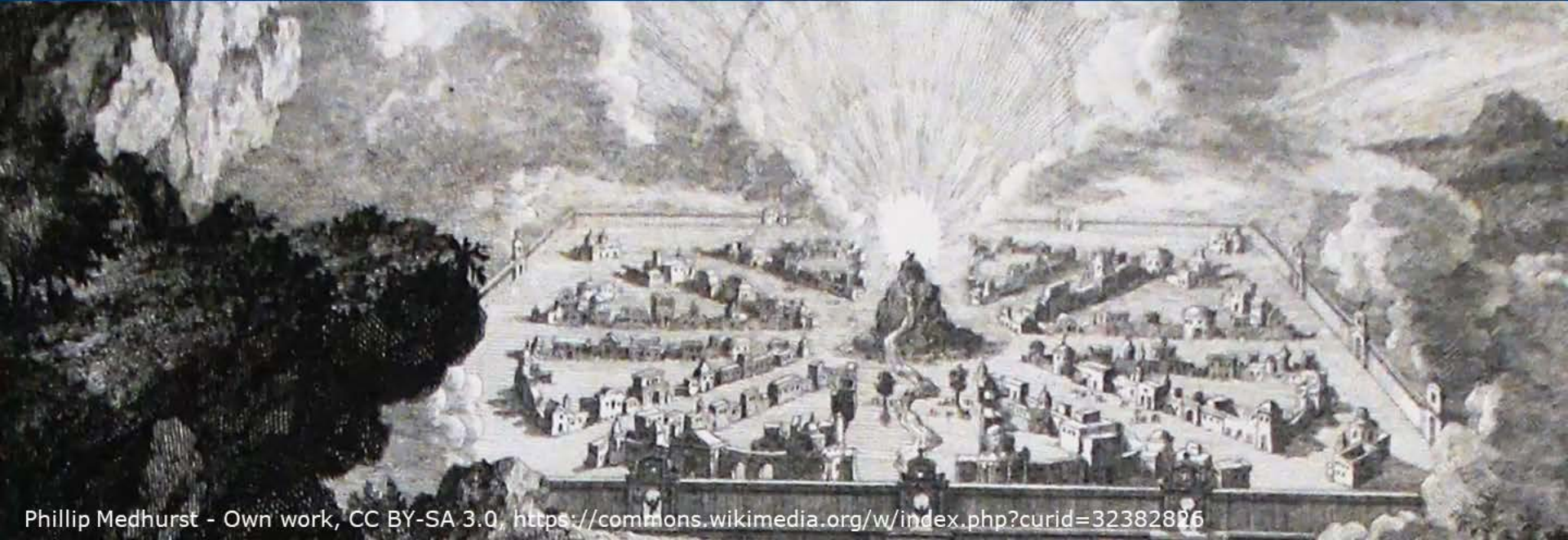
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5. Religious Education at schools – the German case

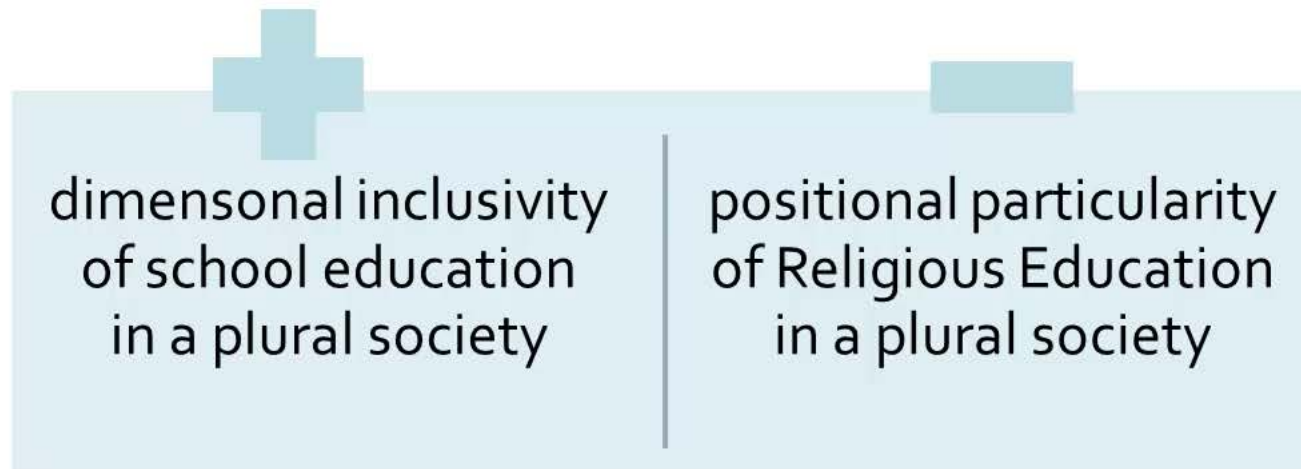


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Religious Education can only legitimise its place in the public school system if it visibly fosters the students' capacity to dialogically reflect and express their own points of views in the existing plurality of religious and non-religious orientations.

5. Religious Education at schools: Linking Public Theology with public education



- Since 2010, several concepts of a “public religious pedagogy” have been presented in Germany: Bernhard Grümme, Judith Könemann, Thomas Schlag, Bernd Schröder, etc. (overview in Pirner 2019; Simojoki 2020).

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- Manfred Pirner emphasises the role of public education “as it provides the young generation with a learning model of how diversity in society is dealt with and on which basis living together is possible” (Pirner 2018, 73).



5. Religious Education at schools: Linking Public Theology with public education

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- Manfred Pirner emphasises the role of public education “as it provides the young generation with a learning model of how diversity in society is dealt with and on which basis living together is possible” (Pirner 2018, 73).
- interlinking public theology and theories of RE to mutual benefit
 - public theologies need to be aware that their anticipations of a public faith or a public church rely on competencies that are acquired in learning processes
 - public theologies are particularly suited as reference theories for public religious education, since they are firmly “grounded in their own religious tradition and at the same time offer ‘translations’ into other religious and non-religious understandings of life and the world” (Pirner 2019, 47)
- On this basis, translation between different religious and secular languages become a major task of RE in public schools.



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6. Thinking “small” and “practically”: Pedagogically inspired considerations on the conceptual design of public theologies

- In theology, the public is often conceptualised discursively, in singular and rather “big”: as “the public sphere”, “the public square”, “the public forum”, “the public realm” etc. The main aim is to dialogically engage with the public and to make the orientative voice of theology heard.

Questions for further learning

- Which ecological Hermeneutics would fit your context? Explain your reasons
- How far can we read biblical texts in relation with modern problems without being anachronistic?
- Qoheleth 1:3 has no doubt about the sustainability of the earth as he says “one generation goes and another comes, but the earth remains forever”. Do you agree with him? Can you explain?
- How could you describe the relation between religion and the idea of cultural sustainability?
- Where do biblical and hermeneutical insights match with the program of Sustainable Development Goals?

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Whenever theologies or religious institutions aim to influence public discourses or the public opinion by pedagogical means, there are inevitably interests at play.

Therefore, educational claims in the name of religion or theology should first be treated with suspicion and caution.

If each of my answers provoked a critical query from you, this lecture certainly would have achieved its goal.

Thank you for your attention!

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