

RE in Denmark – Political and Professional Discourses and Debates, Past and Present

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Abstract

Religion education (RE) in the public school in Denmark, as in many countries, is often subject to political, public and professional debate, relating not only to different ideas about RE's potential contribution to *Allgemeinbildung*, religious and/or moral formation and citizenship education, but also to reactions or responses to what is perceived as challenges posed by supranational processes such as globalization, individualization, and migration, including a new and growing Muslim presence. Based on an academic Study of Religions approach, defined in contrast to confessional RE, the article outlines relevant political processes and political, public and professional debates on RE, and analyzes the way they have set their mark in past and present Danish education legislation, national curricula and guidelines issued by the state for RE and for the training of RE teachers. Whereas a study-of-religions approach has long been seen as a 'natural' framework for RE in the upper-secondary school, RE in the compulsory school (as well as in teacher education for these schools) has traditionally been linked to theology, and is often seen as an instrument in political and ideological efforts to promote and secure a social and national-cultural identity, an identity defined with reference to the majority religion. RE is thus thrust into a key role in on-going 'culture wars'.

Keywords: RE, religion education, study of religions, identity construction, Allgemeinbildung, Islam, culture war

Compared to many other school subjects, RE in the public school¹ is particularly often subject to political, public and professional debate. In Denmark, as in many other countries, it is primarily RE in compulsory education, at primary and junior-secondary school (and in teacher education for RE in

1 The term public school refers to the state schools and the state school system funded by public sources and open to all.

this age-range), that draws the heat. However, RE in the post-compulsory upper-secondary school (in Denmark called *gymnasieskolen*, *gymnasium*, or *stx*) also attracts public attention from time to time.

These debates turn around the real or imagined function of the public school as the most important tool for the nation state in its efforts to influence or control the mindset and behavior of future citizens, for what is considered 'the good citizen, society and life'. In Denmark, as in many other places, these efforts of the state have been and still are closely linked to the majority religion.

In Denmark, a Lutheran variant of Protestant Christianity has for nearly 500 years been the dominant majority religion, and, consequently, transmission of the knowledge of this religion is often seen as important, and main focus in RE.

More recently, however, in Denmark as elsewhere, the status and role of the majority religion, *and* the use of such RE in nation building, have come under challenge, partly reflecting a relative increase in religious pluralization and individualization.² There are many questions, and different opinions, but the debate around RE is clearly part and parcel of on-going culture wars linked to these challenges. Some of the many positions and questions as to the status, aims, contents, and function(s) of RE may be summarized as follows:

– How far should it function as the theologically-based transmission of the Evangelical-Lutheran brand of Christianity and (postulated) Christian values, of a Danish culture seen as based on Christianity and Christian values, of an existentialist philosophy of life based in Christian theology, or of a postulated universal 'religious dimension' of life tied to a Danish and Christian theology and worldview? – as learning *about*, that cannot be distinguished from learning *from* religion, and specifically the Danish majority religion? Should RE continue to be religious and moral *upbringing*, or 'edification' as Robert Jackson has called it (Jackson 1997, 131–2)? – or, with reference to Donald Wiebe's discussion (see below) should it encompass a range of different confessional religious studies, a 'crypto-theological' RE?

2 French sociologist of religion and RE scholar, Jean-Paul Willaime (2007), in his brief and succinct overview of RE models in Europe speaks of a '*Européanisation*' of challenges to RE. See also Jensen (forthcoming) '*L'enseignement de la religion au Danemark : les réponses récentes à des défis européens communs*'.

– Or should it be more like normal secular school subjects, concentrating on objective, informative, pluralist teaching and learning about the plurality of the religions in the world and in Denmark, an RE based in the academic Study of Religions and taught simply because learning about the world, history and humankind needs to include learning about religion? – Should it be an ‘integrative’, non-religious’, ‘non-confessional’ RE, as propagated for example by Wanda Alberts and Tim Jensen, where students and pupils are, of course, not prevented from being personally and existentially inspired by the teaching about religions and religion (cf. Jensen 2008, 136–7), but where the *stated* aim is that they learn from *the study of* religions, not from religions (cf. Alberts 2008, 320–1)?

– How far should RE, not just implicitly but also explicitly, aim at providing knowledge and tools for future citizens to better understand and handle the increasingly multi-religious and multi-cultural reality of Denmark, Europe and the world?

Some recent contributions to this debate, both in Denmark and elsewhere, have been linked to ‘citizenship education’; and, in our view, these ideas are often intimately linked to an ideological and political agenda of transmitting and consolidating traditional societal and religious (Christian) ideas and values, with special regard to a perceived threat posed by Islam, the new Muslim presence, and thus not merely to a general loss of traditional values, or to globalization and migration in general.

In this way, a formally ‘non-confessional’, ‘non-religious’, and ‘integrative’ RE, possibly with citizenship education integrated with or running parallel to it, can – just like the earlier ‘confessional’ and ‘religious’ RE – be deployed as a key instrument for the state for inculcating religious, moral values in order to (re)socialize and control its citizens. This kind of RE can come in various shades, whether with regard to the transmission and consolidation of traditional, mono-religiously based values of the majority society and the nation state, or to the transmission and consolidation of values seen as necessary for peaceful coexistence amongst citizens in a globalized and multi-religious world.³

So far, we have used RE, this widely used and well-known acronym, to cover all kinds of teaching (about) religion in school. As Tim Jensen has

³ See Schreiner 2011, Jackson 2008 and Weisse 2010 for overviews of initiatives from International and European institutions about ‘citizenship education’ and ‘intercultural education’. Jackson 2007, 2009 and Miedema & Bertram-Troost 2008 have also made proposals for RE’s contribution to citizenship education

proposed (Jensen 2011,131), however, we prefer to use '*religion education*' to signify non-religious-based teaching about religion, with an approach derived from the academic Study of Religions, and to reserve '*religious education*' for the earlier, confessionally-coloured concepts.

Even so, it is constantly necessary to qualify the use of both 'religion education' and 'religious education' as actually prescribed and practiced in specific countries and school systems. Things are complicated. RE, including 'religion education' and 'religious education', comes in many shapes and shades. Wanda Alberts' 'integrative', 'separative' and 'dimensional' model for the classification of RE (Alberts 2007, 324; 2008, 303) is, we think, very useful, but it always needs to be defined what *kind* of 'integrative RE', for instance, is being practiced in each specific case. Similarly, classifying RE as either 'confessional' or 'non-confessional' may also be useful, yet formally confessional RE may *in practice* be very much like non-confessional RE, and it may be so for various reasons and in various ways.

The term RE can be used to cover a wide range of teaching about religion, and in dealing with specific instances of RE, it is therefore always necessary to specify the kind(s) of RE actually being implemented. In what follows we shall adapt a distinction originally proposed about theology (and theology-like (or religious) studies of religion) by Donald Wiebe (1984, 2011), in order to distinguish between what we, with reference to Wiebe, shall 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 explicit or implicit aim of promoting (some kind of) religion, or religion-based values in general.

Wiebe writes:

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. (Wiebe 1984, 405; 2011, 10.)

We are fairly confident that analysis of many RE materials will reveal traces of such 'religious thinking', whether it operates within the framework of

general religious assumptions or a particular religious tradition, and we consider these cases to be a kind of 'small-c confessional' RE.

Like Wiebe (*ibid*, 407 and 12), we also 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. 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; cf. Wiebe 1984, 407 and 2011, 12.)

An RE grounded in the academic Study of Religions will be characterized by curricula, textbooks and teacher training that subscribe to these basic presuppositions.⁴

With reference to the terminology for comparative educational studies developed by Oddrun M. H. Bråten (2013), this article outlines how supranational and societal processes, including political, public and professional debates about RE, have left their mark on Danish RE as this is normatively institutionalized in Danish education legislation, national curricula, and guidelines issued by the state. We also offer a critical analysis from a Study of Religions perspective of the definitions of RE and the training of RE-teachers in Denmark, past and present. The larger part of the article deals with RE in the public schools in Denmark, and with the training of RE-teachers for these schools, since this is where the cultural wars over RE are raging – and where a Study of Religions-based RE is most needed.

⁴ See also Wanda Alberts' equally clear description of a study-of-religions based RE in Alberts 2008.

Overview: RE in the Danish Educational System⁵

In Denmark, as in the other Nordic states, compulsory schooling lasts a minimum of 9 years, in an integrated primary and lower-secondary school system for children aged approximately 6 to 16, called in Danish the *Folkeskole* ('The People's School'). Students may also continue for a 10th year.

In grades 1–9, RE has the name *Kristendomskundskab* ('Knowledge of Christianity'). The subject is timetabled with one lesson per week at each grade, except at the grade (normally 6 or 7), during which most of the pupils 'go to priest', i.e. have regular out-of-school instruction for confirmation by a local Lutheran minister.⁶ As Article 6 of the current legislation (*Folkeskoleloven*, most recently revised in 2013) puts it: 'The main field of knowledge in [the teaching in] *Kristendomsundervisningen* ['Teaching Christianity'] is the Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity of the Danish People's Church [*Folkekirken*]' (our translation). Article 5 of the Act lays out the rules for opting-out.⁷

Teacher education for the *Folkeskole* takes four years at a university college. The training includes several compulsory subjects, one being *Kristendom/Livosophysning/Medborgerskab (KLM)*, ('Knowledge of Christianity/Life Philosophy/Citizenship')⁸ and three electives, one of which is *Religion/Kristendomskundskab* ('Religion/Knowledge of Christianity'). To teach RE in elementary school, however, one does not need to have taken the elective *Religion/Kristendomskundskab*, and RE teachers thus do not necessarily have specialist training in the subject. Recent statistics show that RE is the subject

5 A schematic overview in English of the entire educational system in Denmark is provided by the Ministry of Education at <http://eng.uvm.dk/Education/Overview-of-the-Danish-Education-System> (last accessed October 19, 2013).

6 See *Folkeskoleloven* 2013 § 5, Paragraph 2, at <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=145631#Kap1> (last accessed October 19, 2013).

7 The main rules read (our translation): 'A child may be exempted from the classes in *Kristendomskundskab* following a written request by the person given the custody of the child on the condition that the custody also declares to the headmaster to see to the religious education of the child. Exemption can normally be given only with the beginning of a school year. If the child is 15 years old, exemption can be given only with the consent of the child. The minister of education (& children) may lay down [further] rules for the procedure to be followed in the case of exemption' (Article 6, stk 2). See <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=145631#Kap1> (last accessed October 19, 2013). Just one comment: nobody really knows what is demanded of the 'religious education' provided by the custody for a child who is exempted.

8 'Enlightenment-of-life' refers to a concept developed by the Danish theologian N. F. S. Grundtvig in opposition to enlightenment linked primarily or solely to rationality. See Bøwadt 2007, 2009 for a study of the Danish tradition of Life-philosophy (and 'Enlightenment-of-life'), and its impact on RE.

taught by the largest number of teachers without specialist training (62 per cent) (Undervisningsministeriet 2013a, 4).

After the *Folkeskole*, about 70 per cent of Danish students choose to continue their education with three more years in the *Gymnasium* (academic upper-secondary school). In the *Gymnasium*, RE is called *Religion* ('Religion') and it is taught as a normal compulsory school subject with about three lessons per week for one year, ending with an oral exam. There is no opt-out possibility.

In addition to the compulsory C-level subject *Religion*, *Gymnasium* students may choose to take a further *Religion* B-level elective.⁹ In addition to serving the purpose of a general liberal education (Danish *almendannelse*, cf. German *Allgemeinbildung*), *Religion* in the *Gymnasium*, unlike *Kristendomskundskab* in the *Folkeskole*, is also meant to prepare the students for higher (or tertiary) education: the *Gymnasium* is orientated towards further academic education and is thus also closely linked to the relevant academic disciplines.

Parallel to the *Gymnasium*, another post-compulsory education sector called HF¹⁰ also offers *Religion* as a compulsory subject. *Religion* is taught in HF as part of a subject package called *Kultur- og samfundsfagsgruppe* ('Cultural & Social Sciences') in which three subjects, *Religion*, *History*, and *Social Science* are intended to interact, each contributing tools and knowledge in their respective areas to a teaching and learning process built around selected historical and contemporary topics and themes. In addition to

9 The subject taught and offered in the *Gymnasium*, whether as compulsory subjects or electives, are categorized as A, B-, and C-level subjects. An A-level subject corresponds to three 'blocks', a B-level to two 'blocks', and a C-level subject to one 'block' (or 'unit'; Danish 'blok'). Altogether a three year 'package' must be built of 25–26 'blocks', and any 'package' must contain at least 4 subjects at an A-level, 3 at the B-level, and 7 at the C-level. An English introduction to the *Gymnasium* can be read at <http://eng.uvm.dk/Fact-Sheets/Upper-secondary-education/The-Gymnasium-%28stx%29> (last accessed October 19, 2013).

10 HF (acronym for '*Højere Forberedelseseksamen*') is a 'Higher Preparatory Examination' that was introduced in 1966. RE in HF was named *Kristendomskundskab* until 1974 when it was named *Religion*. Already in 1967 did the subject include 'non-Christian religions, and a-religious and anti-religious world-views', and the subject actually served as an inspiration for *Religion* in *Gymnasium* for quite a few years. Since 1971 differences between *Religion* in the HF and in the *Gymnasium*, however, have been few and mostly related to the idea that students attending HF were not as minded nor qualified for textual analysis as the students in the *Gymnasium*, and, furthermore, more practice orientated. HF was established primarily as an alternative to the *Gymnasium* for younger (and also not so young) people who had left the educational system but wanted to get back in. An English introduction to HF can be read at <http://eng.uvm.dk/Fact-Sheets/Upper-secondary-education/The-Higher-Preparatory-Examination-%28hf%29> (last accessed October 19, 2013).

this application of *Religion* in HF to cross-disciplinary thematic studies, HF *Religion* is 'application-oriented' more generally: the students are supposed to learn about religion in order to be able to analyze contemporary social and political challenges which relate to religious issues.

All *Religion* teachers at *Gymnasium* and HF levels are educated in the academic, scientific study of religions to the MA level at Departments of Study of Religions .

The national normative curricular frameworks ('*læreplaner*') and guidelines ('*vejledninger*')¹¹ for the overall objectives for all subjects in the *Folkeskole*, *Gymnasium*, and HF, as well as for the various kinds of RE in teacher education at the university colleges, are issued by the Ministry of Education; the university colleges then have the right to draft local curricula for the various subjects, as long as they are in accordance with the national curriculum.¹²

The study programs (*studieordninger*) at the universities, and thus at the three departments for Study of Religions at the universities in Aarhus, Copenhagen and Odense, are drafted by the respective departments and authorized by the dean of the respective faculty. For a teacher to be admitted to teach in the *Gymnasium*, his or her exam and study program must fulfil the minimum requirements fixed by the Ministry (see below).

RE in the Danish public schools: Past and Present¹³

1814–1975: Forming good (Christian) citizens

A public elementary school was first established in Denmark in 1814, with the subject *Religion* (= instruction in Christianity) as one of four subjects. The Education Act stated that the teaching should contribute to the children's

11 The normative curricula for the various subjects are part of the law and its executive order and listed as such in the relevant legal material. Sometimes they figure as '*læreplaner*', sometimes as '*fagbilag*'. For many years they were always mentioned as 'executive orders'. In what follows we simply use curriculum/curricula for the normative texts and 'guidelines' for those texts, also issued by the Ministry of Education, for the non-normative texts.

12 From 2011 University Colleges have been handled by The Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education

13 For a more detailed historical outline of the subject in the elementary school, see Bugge 1994, Jensen 1994, Reeh 2006, and Juul 2011. Jensen 2013 has served as starting point for this variation on the theme.

dannelse (*Allgemeinbildung*),¹⁴ which at the time, of course, could not be imagined detached from the teachings of the Lutheran church.

In spite of the establishment of freedom of religion with the 1849 Constitution, and therefore in principle also the separation of church and state schools, the intimate relations between state, school and the established Lutheran-Evangelical church, the *Folkekirke* ('The People's Church') continued. Up to 1933, the Church was the supervising and inspecting authority. In 1933 this supervisory role conducted by the Lutheran parish minister was limited to RE, rather than to the school curriculum at large, and from 1949 to 1970 (when it was finally discontinued) the minister's authority was limited to the right to attend RE lessons.

Following a long debate, in the 1937 Education Act (*Folkeskoleloven*) the name of the subject was changed from *Religion* to *Kristendomsundervisning* ('Christian Education'),¹⁵ and an opt-out possibility was introduced for both pupils and teachers (§52). At the same time, the earlier article in the Education Act requiring that teaching in the school at large should be consistent with the teachings of the Church, was deleted. Instead, the new Education Act (§ 1, Paragraph 3) now stipulated that 'Christian Education in the *Folkeskole* shall be in accordance with the Evangelical-Lutheran doctrines [*Lære*'] of the *Folkekirke*' (Undervisningsministeriet 1937). In 1960, the name was changed to *Kristendomskundskab/religion* ['Christian Knowledge / Religion'], and the guidelines (though not the normative Executive Orders) mentioned the possibility of teaching about 'foreign religions' (*fremmede religioner*).

14 The (meaning, use, and connotation of) Danish '*dannelse*' or '*almendannelse*' (the two are frequently used more or less synonymously), for various reasons, is very close to the (meaning, use and connotations of) German '*Allgemeinbildung*'. It is much harder to find an English equivalent, even though it is implied in the idea of 'liberal education'. Maybe 'formation' could come close, while 'education' primarily corresponds to Danish '*uddannelse*'. Robert Jackson's 'edification' (Jackson1997) might also serve as an alternative but since it is used by Jackson mainly in regard to a process of learning not just *about* but also *from* RE and the religions taught in RE, we prefer to limit 'edification' to render this more particular RE related aim – which, by the way, is closely related to Michael Grimmit's idea of learning *from* religion. '*Dannelse*' and '*almendannelse*' need not have an element of im- or explicit moral and religious 'inculcation' (as inherent in 'small-c confessional RE') but it often does – at least when RE is concerned.

15 The change of name may be seen as an indication of secularization and pluralization: up to then 'religion' was, as a matter of course, Christianity, but in 1937 this was no longer so. However, it might also be an indication of a Barthian theological view: Christianity is the truth but no religion. See also Bugge 1979, 116, and Jensen 1994, 26.

1975–1989: De-confessionalized but still forming good (Christian) citizens

Up to 1975 the subject was thus explicitly 'Capital-C Confessional', but with the new Education Act 1975, the name of the subject was changed to *Kristendomskundskab* ('Christian Knowledge'), and the relevant paragraph (§5, Paragraph 1) now reads: 'The main field of knowledge in Christian Knowledge is the Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity of the Danish People's Church [*Folkekirken*]'.

Though not stated explicitly in the relevant official texts, this has normally been read as evidence that RE as of 1975 was no longer confessional RE, but more of a normal school subject. It was still, however, not quite normal: teaching of this subject was still suspended either at the 7th or 8th grade when the majority of pupils were expected to attend instruction for confirmation; the opt-out possibility was retained; and RE was still the only school subject to be mentioned in the general aims for the school at large.

In 1975, also, a new compulsory topic (not a 'subject'), *Fremmede religioner og andre livsanskuelser* ('Foreign Religions and Other World Views'), was introduced. The 'foreign religions' topic was to be taught in grades 6–9 and 10 within one of the following subjects: Danish, History, Geography, Orientation about Contemporary Society (*Samtidsorientering*), or *Kristendomskundskab*, and on grade 10 it was a mandatory component within *Kristendomskundskab/Religion*, whereas 'other world views' were to be taught in *Samtidsorientering* ('Contemporary Society') for grades 8–9, but on grade 10 within *Kristendomskundskab/Religion*.

Though the official guidelines for this topic reflected approaches grounded in the academic Study of Religions, in *Kristendomskundskab* the approach was dominated by theology. The learning objectives were aimed at enabling the pupils to read and understand biblical texts and to evaluate their subsequent interpretations (*udsagn*). A certain historical-critical theological approach thus was in place. However, it was also made clear that an equally important aim was to provide the pupils with an 'understanding of religious notions and problems, so that they could get a better foundation for acknowledging and taking their own stand in regard to existential human life-questions [*livsspørgsmål*], be they individual or societal' (Undervisningsministeriet 1975, § 4, our translation).

A link was thus still presumed between religious thinking and existential matters and morals, and teaching about religion, especially Christianity, was still thought to be conducive for the formation of morally good and responsible citizens. With reference to Jackson's ideas about 'edification' and our adaptation of Wiebe's 'Capital-C Confessional' and 'small-c con-

fessional' theology, 1975 RE could thus be said to have been 'Capital-C de-Confessionalized' RE, yet with its explicitly 'edifying' agenda, still clearly 'small-c confessional'.

1989–1995: Teaching (and 'Preaching') Danish Culture as Christian Culture

In 1989, the Ministry's curriculum and guidelines for the subject were revised, but *not* the Education Act, with its specific mention of the subject. The aims (Paragraphs 1–2) read:

The aim [...] is that the pupils obtain knowledge of Christianity in its various manifestations past and present. The point of departure is stories from the Bible. The pupils shall be familiarized with the fundamental values of Danish culture.

[...] at the secondary level, the meeting [or:'encounter'; Danish *mødet*] of Christianity with other religions and views of life [*livsopfattelser*] are to be included with regard to the pupils getting an understanding of [*får forståelse for*] foreign ways of life and attitudes (Undervisningsministeriet 1989; our translation).

Now, for the first time, religions other than Christianity are included within the subject itself.¹⁶ Analysis of the relevant part of the Guidelines (Afsnit 5, Kapitel II) indicates that this reflected concerns about aspects of globalization, including an increase in the number of immigrant pupils with 'other religions', especially Islam. References to 'other religions and ways of thinking' in the Preface to the Executive Orders, written by the Minister of Education, B. Haarder (Undervisningsministeriet 1989), however, also cite '*åndløshed og okkultisme*' ('spiritual vacuity and occultism'), and it is thus tempting to see the objective behind the introduction into the syllabus of 'foreign religions and ways of life' as a concern to combat their influence on Danish culture and pupils.

The 'other religions', moreover, are to be taught (see Paragraph 2) through what is called an 'encounter' of Christianity with other religions'. What this means never becomes quite clear, not even from an analysis of the Guidelines, where an implicit essentialist understanding of Christianity, said to be in a global 'dialogue' with non-Christian religions, appears side by side with an authoritative speaking 'we'. The result is a strange

¹⁶ The compulsory topic *Fremmede Religioner og andre livsanskuelser*, introduced i 1975, and mentioned above, was not discontinued.

mixture of a theologically well founded and formulated Danish Christian 'we' with a secularized 'we' lost in 'absurdity' (*meningsløshed*): a sophisticated Danish 'we' who, in contrast to Muslims, embrace 'secularization', most likely to be understood as a mature way of having religion (religion as a private and spiritual and ethical matter). What 'dialogue' means, and how religions, however reified, can 'meet' each other is never explained; but a plausible reading of the guidelines leads to the conclusion that the 'meeting of Christianity with non-Christian religions' and 'foreign ways of life' actually refers to the speaking 'we' of the Preface – the Danes – 'encountering' the immigrant [i.e. Muslim] children, who are now 'pupils in the Danish school', where 'one notices them because of their special dress, their eating habits, and their deviant attitudes to much of what we consider natural.' (*op.cit.* 41.)

Furthermore, the text never makes it clear why – if Christian values really are as fundamental to Danish culture as claimed, the speaking 'we', clearly including the majority pupils, need to be taught about them.

Kristendomskundskab anno 1989 was thus a manifest sign that 'the others' had arrived, and that 'we' are a bit confused about who 'we' are, except that 'we' are not 'them' and 'they' not a part of 'us'. It is also a manifestation of a neo-Romantic and neo-nationalist politics of identity, where RE and the public school are harnessed to teach and preach Danish tradition and culture as Christian culture, and thus to try to re-socialize and re-Christianize the nominally Christian but secularized Danish pupils, and integrate, or rather assimilate, 'the other'.

Mention must also be made of the fact that the Executive Orders clearly indicate the influence of certain theologians in Denmark who set out to promote 'narrative theology' as the ground for a 'narrative pedagogy' in RE: Biblical stories, they argued, constituted the grand narrative or myth in 'our culture', and the transmission thereof, therefore, was essential for the transmission of Danish culture (see Bjerg et.al. 1988). As explained by Andersen (2011) in more detail, citing both Danish and international theologians and philosophers on the benefits of the use of Biblical narratives in RE, the key idea is that the Biblical narratives incarnate God and/or universal existential 'life-questions' and understandings, and that their effect on the pupils is direct and deep. They create, to use the words of the Danish theologian-philosopher J. Sløk quoted by Andersen (2011, 120) 'the emotional and normative foundation for the reality that is ours' (our translation).

Bertel Haarder, Minister of Education in 1982–1993 and again 2005–2007, was in agreement with this view, and in his Preface to the 1989 curriculum

and guidelines said explicitly that the school subject was intended to 'give the pupils experiences (*oplevelser*) and foundation for life-interpretation (*tilværelsesfortolkning*), as well as a 'cultural foundation and philosophical counterbalance to spiritual malaise and occultism' (Undervisningsministeriet 1989, our translation).

Although RE in 1989 was thus not a 'Capital-C Confessional' RE, it most certainly was 'small-c confessional', explicitly meant to be 'edifying', and with a kind of 'preaching' prescribed as an integrated part of the teaching. With respect to the way the Guidelines deal with Islam, and with reference (see below) to the political interference in RE for the *Gymnasium* as well, this year provides the first piece of evidence for what can be labeled the 'securitization' of religion, its subordination to security concerns, through a 'securitization of RE'.¹⁷ The cultural battles and the struggle against Islam that have been fought out in the Danish public and political sphere in the 1990s and early 21st century, can thus already be identified in the RE classroom in the late 80s.

1993–2004: Teaching (and 'Preaching') a so-called Religious Dimension & Christian Life-Philosophy

A major school reform in 1993 led to a 1995 revised curriculum for *Kristendomskundskab*. Though Haarder was no longer the Minister of Education, his formulations for *Kristendomskundskab* in 1989 now had become a central part of the general aims for the public school in Denmark. Section 1, Subsection 3 of the 1993 Education Act now reads: 'The *Folkeskole* shall familiarize the pupils with Danish culture and contribute to their understanding of other cultures [...]', and in the Preamble to the Education

¹⁷ Tim Jensen has written more about what he has called the process of 'the islamization of immigrants and the securitization of Islam' in Denmark in Jensen 2007b and in Jensen 2012. What I call the securitization of religion, not least of Islam, is, *inter alia*, linked to globalization with migration, to the new Muslim presence in Europe, to the more recent Islamophobic and anti-Muslim discourses, including a 'clash of civilization' discourse, and thus to a idea of Islam and Muslims constituting a threat to political, social, and cultural 'order' and 'security' of for instance Denmark. It is also linked to (discourses on) de-secularization and re-politization of religion. Securitization of Islam can be seen as a result of an Islamophobic political discourse as well as a discourse in itself. Either way, it paves the way for (and justify) various measurements, political, social, and educational intended to protect the order conceived of as threatened. A Danish political science 'school of thought', with Ole Wæver as prominent figure, has theorized like ideas and analyses, and the theoretical framework has been put to use also in the study of representations of Islam in the media. See, *inter alia*, Christensen 2006 for an application to the study of Islam in Danish media.

Act, Christianity is described as a constitutive aspect of Danish culture, in distinction to the 'other, non-European cultures and cultures that have influenced immigrants' (Undervisningsministeriet 1993a). Here, as in the 1989 curriculum for the subject, great care seems to have been taken to make sure that the vocabulary differentiates between the kind and degree of 'understanding' of Danish culture (and Christianity) and other cultures (and foreign religions).

The 1993 Education Act leaves no doubt: the Danish public school is seen as a key instrument in the politics of identity, and the stated objectives, no longer restricted to RE but now applying to all subjects and the school as a whole, clearly reflect a political and public discourse provoked by what is perceived of as a threat to social and cultural identity and security, and to what is called 'Danishness', namely Europeization, globalization and, maybe most important, Islam and the immigrant Muslim community.

The nationalist-culturalist-Christian identity discourse can also be seen in the 1995 curriculum for *Kristendomskundskab*, but a slightly different tactical approach is now evident. The Christian-theological-existentialist approach from 1989 is still there, but narrative theology has been replaced by an appeal to a Christian life-philosophy and a postulated universal 'religious dimension', evidently inspired by two famous Danish theologians, N. F. S. Grundtvig and K. E. Løgstrup, as well as by the equally famous Paul Tillich.¹⁸ The 1995 aims read:

1. It shall be the aim [...] that the pupils realize and understand that the religious dimension is important for the view of life (*livsopfattelsen*) of the individual human being and for his or her relationship to other people. The teaching shall take its point of departure in Christianity as it appears in a historical and contemporary context.
2. The pupils shall acquire knowledge about Biblical stories and an understanding of the importance of Christianity for the foundational values of our culture (*kulturkreds*). In addition to this, the pupils shall acquire knowledge about non-Christian religions and world-views (*livsanskuelse*) with a view to giving them an understanding of other ways of life and attitudes.

18 This inspiration is not explicitly stated in the curriculum, but analyses of the curriculum as well as of interviews with and essays by members of the expert committee drafting the curriculum and guidelines make it clear that this is the case. For the interviews, see Bering-Jensen 2006, and Dons Christensen 1997. For the analyses, see, *inter alia*, Jensen 1999, and Bøwadt 2011.

3. Through their meeting with the different forms of existential questions (*livsspørgsmål*) and answers that can be found in Christianity and other religions and views of life (*livsopfattelser*), the teaching shall give the pupils a foundation for taking personal and responsible position and action towards their fellow human beings and nature. (Undervisningsministeriet 1995; our translation.)

A new 'Central Knowledge and Proficiency Area' is introduced, called *Livsfilosofi og etik* ('Life-philosophy and Ethics'), constituting not just additional content, but providing (through 'existential questions and answers') the overall perspective for the whole syllabus. The concept of, not *a*, but *the* 'religious dimension' is proposed as an ontological fact, and close analyses of the text of the curricular document has shown that these concepts of a 'religious dimension', like that of religion in general, and of a postulated core of all religions, is intimately linked to a Lutheran-Protestant existential theology and theological life-philosophy.¹⁹ The 1995 RE curriculum made a specific kind of Christian theology both the dominant subject area *and* the overall dominant theoretical and didactical approach to religion and to RE for the Danish school.

2004–2013: More of the Same – But Now With 'Knowledge' and Exams?

In 2004, the curriculum was once again slightly revised, reinforcing the centrality of 'Life-philosophy and ethics' and linking it even more tightly to the 'religious dimension'. The major innovation was that specific and legally binding objectives were formulated for this on the 3rd, 6th, 9th and 10th grades

For 'Non-Christian religions and other views of life' on grades 1–6, no legally binding objectives are provided. The guidelines do, however, allow individual teachers discretion to introduce phenomena and symbols of other religions already in primary school.

In 2006, a revised Education Act for the *Folkeskole* paid more attention to 'hard core' knowledge in general, and at the same time *Kristendomskundskab* became one of two possible extra exams at grade 9. Bertel Haarder, once again Minister of Education, set up a committee, headed by a minister in

¹⁹ See Jensen 1999b, 2000, 2005, 2013; and See Böwadt 2007, 2009, and Skovmand, 2007, 2011.

the established Lutheran–Evangelical church,²⁰ to revise *Kristendomskundskab* with a focus on the subject's new status due to the exams, the demand for more hard core knowledge in general, and with the explicit aim of strengthening 'national-cultural' (*kulturbærende*) subjects and the status and importance of biblical narratives in *Kristendomskundskab* (Undervisningsministeriet 2006a, 2).

The recommendations of the committee were adopted almost completely in the 2009 curriculum, and remain in effect in 2013. The main difference from 1995 is that 'knowledge' has been inserted in various places:

1. It shall be the aim [...] that the pupils acquire *knowledge* [needed] to understand the meaning and importance of the religious dimension for individual human beings and their relationship to others.
2. The core *knowledge area* is Christianity as it manifests itself in historical and contemporary contexts. The pupils shall acquire knowledge about *Biblical stories* and their importance to the value foundations of our culture (*kulturkreds*). In addition, the pupils shall acquire knowledge about non-Christian religions and world views (*livsanskuelser*; cf. German: *Lebensanschauungen*).²¹
3. Through meeting the different forms of existential questions (*livsspørgsmål*) and answers to be found in Christianity and other religions and views of life (*livsopfattelser*), the teaching shall give the pupils a basis for taking a personal stand and (*co-*)*responsibility in a*

20 This practice is far from uncommon as regards RE in elementary school. In 1989 as well as in 1995 a bishop and high profiled minister (later to become bishop) headed the expert committee drafting the curriculum and guidelines. In both cases, though, the persons in question also had an university degree that included '*Kristendomskundskab*' (or: '*Kristendomshistorie*') as this was taught in the 1960s and 1970s at the universities as a forerunner to the 'Study of Religions'. The other persons in these expert committees normally have been RE teachers in elementary school and at university colleges, together with a so-called '*fagkonsulent*' ('Her Majesty's inspector'). In the Gymnasium the committee, apart from the '*fagkonsulent*' for *Religion*, normally would not include clergy-men or women but a theologian from a university might be included together with RE teachers from the Gymnasium and scholars of religion from the universities.

21 As the reader may have noticed, and as the references to a specific Danish (and German) Christian theological philosophy-of-life tradition also, the terminology used in the curricula and guidelines is sometimes close to 'esoteric': only an insider to this theological-philosophical tradition will be equipped to grasp the precise meaning of the terms *livsanskuelser*, *livsopfattelser*, *livssyn*, *livsfilosofi*, and *livsoplysning*, and this, of course, makes the translation somewhat difficult. We refer thus here to the German *Lebensanschauungen* to indicate that there is more to it than can be rendered by 'worldviews' or 'views of life', or the bland 'approaches to life'.

democratic society. (Undervisningsministeriet 2009a, our translation and emphases.)

Despite the shift from ‘understanding’ to ‘knowledge needed to understand’ the ‘religious dimension’, it is still taken for granted that this dimension is an ontological fact with universal importance for all human beings. ‘Life-philosophy and Ethics’ remains the overall starting point and perspective, even if it is stressed almost demonstratively that Christianity is the core knowledge area. Moreover, the 1989 biblical narratives and their impact on ‘the values in our culture’ are back (Undervisningsministeriet 2009a).

As in 2004, there are no binding objectives for ‘non-Christian religions and other world views’ before grades 7–9, but the guidelines do allow that teaching in this area *may* take place on the primary level. Maybe this statement, in spite of the stress placed on Biblical narratives and their importance for ‘our’ culture, is intended to strike a slightly better ‘balance’ between a mono-religious understanding of Danish culture and the concept of a more multi-religious Denmark (which is the reality of many RE classrooms in today’s Danish schools, especially in the cities). On the other hand, this could be a strategic recognition that since *Kristendomskundskab* is now one of two subjects for elective exams on the final grade 9, if all the teaching in ‘non-Christian religions and other world views’ is placed on grades 7–9, the exam would have to focus less on Christianity (Undervisningsministeriet 2006a, 3, 6).

Life-philosophy and the ‘fundamental life-/ existential questions’ continue both as a core content area and as the overall perspective and didactical principle (Undervisningsministeriet 2009a, 11, 17). Although a historical-critical approach is recommended for the biblical texts, the ‘religious dimension’ and ‘life-philosophy and ethics’ have priority, and are seen as the royal road (together with the Biblical narratives) for learning not just *about* but also *from* religion. The concepts of ‘the religious dimension’ and of ‘religion’ as outlined in various, not always consistent, ways in the guidelines:

The premise for the description of the subject is that the human being is conceived of as imbued with a deep need for searching for the meaning of life. [...] The questioning of the fundamental condition of life, with no unambiguous [or: ‘easy’] answers, is what is defined as the religious dimension of life. (Undervisningsministeriet 2009, 19; our translation.)

The concept of religion is explicated with a model inspired by Ninian Smart's dimensions of religion²² – with 'what is imagined as divine' in the center, and minus the political dimension. It is noted that the limited time allotted to the subject in the school curriculum means that there is little room for nuance. Furthermore, because of the key role to be played by the 'religious dimension', the focus needs to be on contemporary interpretations of the central core of the religions, in particular Christianity:

the most important obligation for the teaching is thus to bridge interpretations of the meaning of life (*tydning af tilværelsen*) offered by the religions and the life-world of the pupils, so that insights of the former can qualify the latter (Undervisningsministeriet 2009,20; our translation).

The guidelines also discuss the concept of 'belief', suggesting that 'belief' can be used as a synonym if not for religion, then for the core of religion, or for 'the religious dimension'. Religious belief is said to be complementary to knowledge (*viden*) and differentiated from 'superstition':

[...] a personal existential or mythical truth (the religious dimension) – different from a common objective or rational truth. Next to this kind of belief, there is superstition which, in contrast to the other kind of belief, is defined as a belief against superior knowledge – thus a belief in opposition to factual knowledge. (Undervisningsministeriet 2009, 21; our translation.)

The concepts of religion, belief and superstition given in the 2013 curriculum and guidelines thus differ significantly from a study-of-religions approach, indebted as the latter is to a wider range of theological and/or philosophical approaches.

22 See Skovmand 2007 for a kind of criticism of the of Smart's dimensions in the guidelines. Skovmand suggests that it may be connected to a model developed by Friedrich Heiler, a model that puts 'the holy, God' in the center, and a model recommended in a textbook for teachers about didactics of religion (Rydahl & Troelsen 2009, 82–4). We have not come across other analyses of the influence of Smart and his dimensions on Danish RE and Danish RE textbooks, but he certainly has exercised an influence, also in the Gymnasium, and especially in 1980s. For an analysis of the use of Smart in a Norwegian context, see Andreassen 2010.

RE in the Gymnasium²³

RE 1877–1967: Religion as a non-confessional knowledge subject

Religion was introduced to the 'Latin school' in 1877. It was a non-confessional subject, aiming at knowledge rather than instruction, even though the teaching was about Christianity only and the knowledge meant to contribute to the pupil's moral and social *dannelse* (*Allgemeinbildung*).

In 1930, a draft for a Royal Decree concerning what was now called the 'Gymnasium', and the curriculum for *Religion*, state that the pupils should be given some basic information about the other major religions and about important elements from the history of religions.

In 1955, a regular rule stated that if time allowed, the pupils were to be taught elements of the general history of religions, and in 1961, this possibility became a norm. A breakthrough for a separate subject close to the present-day subject, with the name *Knowledge of Christianity* (from 1974: *Religion*), came in 1967 in HF (see above, note 9). The subject was compulsory, though with a possibility of opting out, and it had exams.

1971–2013: Religion as a normal subject with a study-of-religions approach

The contents and thinking of the 1971 curriculum for *Religion* in the *Gymnasium* can be said to have been decisive, not only for the schools, but also for the university study programs for future *Religion* teachers. The syllabus, divided into three subject areas defined with reference to the textual sources, comprised 1) normative texts from Christianity and other world religions, 2) texts that describe religious phenomena, and 3) philosophical, ideological and religious texts. These subject areas, with minor changes, have constituted the subject almost to the present.

In 1971, there were no exams, no grades were given, and both in the *Gymnasium* and in HF there was a possibility for opting out. Grades for the year's work were introduced in 1979, and in 1984 *Religion* became a subject with an oral exam. The opt-out possibility was abolished in 1994, and the subject has since then been a compulsory and totally 'normal' subject, of the same status as all other subjects in the *Gymnasium* and HF.

In 1984, a norm for the time to be spent on the separate subject areas was introduced. Although Christianity was given the heaviest emphasis (25–30

²³ See more detailed accounts of the history of *Religion* in the *Gymnasium* in Bugge 1994 and Jensen 1994, 2007 and 2013.

per cent), the differences in time allocations were relatively minor. The curriculum was revised in 1984, 1987 and 1993, but with only minor changes.

The teaching syllabus was defined in terms of the study texts, i.e. primary sources, and a study-of-religions based analysis of these, with knowledge and analytical skills as the main objective, giving the subject at this educational level a scientific profile very different from RE in the *Folkeskole*.

The core contents were defined in 1987 and 1993 as: 1) Religions of Illiterate Peoples (*naturfolks religioner* or *skriftløse folks religioner*);²⁴ 2) Christianity; 3) (One or Two) World Religion(s); 4) Contemporary Ethics and Philosophy; and 5) Other topics related to the core content (Undervisningsministeriet 1987, 1993b).

In 1984, the list had a different order, listing Christianity as number three, but when an expert committee suggested the same order for a 1987 revision, the then Minister of Education, Bertel Haarder (see above), interfered. He wanted Christianity to be listed as number one, before the other religions, particularly Islam. The final result was a compromise, listing Christianity number two but before Islam.²⁵ At the same time the time allocated to Christianity was raised to 30–35 per cent. Here, as was the case with RE in the *Folkeskole*, the political and public debate on Danishness, Danish culture, and the Islamic threat, set its mark on the curriculum for RE. A ‘cultural battle’ over the politics of identity was being fought out in the *Religion* classroom.

In 2005, an extensive reform of the *Gymnasium* took place, and revisions of the curriculum for *Religion* followed in 2006. This time, the draft aroused considerable public and political debate, relating once again to national-cultural agendas and the politics of identity. The committee that drafted the curriculum was initially instructed by the Ministry of Education²⁶ not to allocate specific time norms to the subject areas, to transfer ‘Ethics and Philosophy’ from the obligatory list, and to, instead, make teaching about Islam compulsory. ‘Religions of Illiterate People’ had already been made non-obligatory in 1999.²⁷

24 The name for these ‘peoples’ and the name for this subject area naturally has changed over time. It used to be religions of ‘primitive’ people or ‘*naturfolk*’ (but in the Danish tradition of V. Groenbech with no negative connotations at all), then it became ‘*skriftløse*’ (‘illiterate’), and – had it still been in the curriculum – today’s name most likely would have been indigenous religions.

25 See Jensen 2013 for a discussion of this affair.

26 The Minister of Education was Ulla Tørnæs.

27 These changes, no doubt, constitute the most conspicuous changes in an otherwise fairly stable and consistent subject. Recently, in June 2013, the ‘*fagkonsulent*’ (‘Her Majesty’s Inspector’) has taken yet another step to remove the last traces of the formerly rather important subject area of philosophy and ethics.

Subsequently, however, the draft was criticized by a 'reference group' appointed by the same Ministry, for not making it crystal clear that Christianity ought be the content area allotted the most teaching time (more than Islam, now the other obligatory religion to be taught); and the right-wing political party *Dansk Folkeparti* (DF) protested against making teaching about Islam obligatory (Bindslev 2004; Rasmussen 2004). As a result of this, the Executive Orders from 2006 stipulated that 30 per cent of the teaching time should be spent on Christianity (Poulsen 2005a, 2005b). The 2005 curriculum was revised with minor changes in 2010 and most recently again in 2013.

The 2013 curriculum defines the 'identity of the subject' as follows:

In *Religion*, the world religions are central, and Christianity is obligatory. The religions and their key phenomena are to be described and interpreted on a scientific, non-confessional basis in their relation to individual, group, society and nature. The subject covers the origin of the religions, their historical development, contemporary manifestations and historical bearing (*virkningshistorie*; cf. German: *Wirkungsgeschichte*). The perspective of the teaching is global. The role of the religions in the European and Danish history of ideas and identity formation receives special attention. The pupils are to work primarily with textual sources and other documentary material. (Undervisningsministeriet 2013b, our translation.)

The core contents of the syllabus is:

- Christianity, in its global, yet especially European and Danish contexts and manifestations. This includes texts from the Old and New Testaments, from later times, and today.
- Islam, in a global perspective, including its European and Danish contexts. This includes texts from the Qur'an and present-day texts.
- A world religion (Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Japanese or Chinese religions).
- The key phenomena of the religions, along with terminology and methods pertaining to the scientific study of religions. (Undervisningsministeriet 2013b, our translation.)²⁸

It is explicitly stated that the subject needs to cover more than the core content. The teaching must deal with at least one more area, either a specific

²⁸ <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=152507#Bil48> (last accessed October 6, 2013).

religious-related topic, or another religion. It is also an obligation that the contents should be seen in interaction with other subjects.

As for didactical principles, it is stipulated that the religions, should be approached on the one hand as specific cultural and historic formations, each with its own identity and problems, and on the other hand, must also be approached from a comparative perspective as a cross-cultural phenomenon with general themes and problems. The religions are mainly approached through the study of classical and representative textual sources and other materials, but religious objects, music, fieldwork should also be included. The overall approach to the texts and material should be a combination of descriptive, interpretative and critical approaches, thus paying attention to the self-understanding of the religions and to secular points of view on the religions.

In 2005, Religion became a B-level²⁹ elective and can thus be part of a special 'profile' of a student's exam. The aims, identity and didactical principles for this subject are almost identical with the C-level, but even more stress is laid on a scientific approach. The students must, for example, be able to discuss and apply theories and methods pertaining to the academic study of religions, and be capable of analyzing and discussing a longer and more complex text.

As for the subject in HF, a major change took place following the 2005 reform. As mentioned above, *Religion, History and Social science* now form an integrated *Kultur- og samfundsfagsgruppe* cluster (Culture and Social Sciences) with one exam and a common curriculum, but also with a specific core curriculum for each subject. The common overall areas to be approached in a combination of the three subjects are:

- Globalization and meeting of cultures
- An area study project
- Identity formation in traditional, modern and late-modern societies
- Religious and political hiatuses (*brud*) in a Danish or European perspective
- The good society. (Undervisningsministeriet 2013c, our translation.)³⁰

The teaching should, as a minimum, comprise four modules, where the three subjects support each other, taking as their starting points concrete problems close to reality.

²⁹ Cf. note 8.

³⁰ <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=152579#Bil14> (last accessed October 6, 2013).

The core contents in *Religion* in HF comprise Christianity, Islam, one more religion, central phenomena of the religions, ethical and philosophical problems, and the social, political and cultural role of religions.

In general, *Religion* in the *Gymnasium* and in HF is closely linked to the academic study of religions, and is characterized by various kinds of close cooperation. This has to do with the fact that all *Religion* teachers are educated at university departments for the study of religions, that many *Religion* teachers function as external examiners at oral and written exams at these departments, and that both the Association for *Religion* Teachers and the *fagkonsulent* (educational inspectorate) frequently ask scholars of religion to arrange in-service training for *Religion* teachers and study trips to various countries around the world. There are also formal and informal but well established fora for cooperation and mutual exchange of information. Last but not least, the list of scholars of religion writing textbooks to be used in *Religion* is long, and the most recent textbook – *Horisont – en grundbog til religion* (Gyldendal 2013) – is the result of a planned and intensive cooperation project between the university scholars, who did the writing and editing, and *Religion* teachers co-editing and testing and improving the material for classroom use.

This does not mean there are no disagreements between some of the scholars and teachers,³¹ but mostly the opening line of the *Religion* guidelines are not far off the mark: 'It is taken as self-evident as regards *Religion* in the *Gymnasium* that the teaching is study-of-religions based' (Undervisningsministeriet 2013d, our translation).³²

Teacher Education for RE³³

Teacher Education for the Folkeskole

Teacher's Training Seminars (*Lærerseminarer*) were established at the end of the 18th century, and in 1818 a national Education Act for the education of

31 See Hvithamar 2011 for an outline of some recent discussions related to the inclusion of Jehovah's Witnesses in a RE textbook about Christianity, written by Hvithamar and edited by Jensen & Josephsen in 2007, and published in a series called *Danish World Religions*. For earlier and other discussions, see Christensen & Clausen 2009 and Albinus, Geertz & Widmann 2001.

32 http://www.uvm.dk/Uddannelser/Gymnasiale-uddannelser/Studieretninger-og-fag/Fag-paa-stx/-/media/UVM/Filer/Udd/Gym/PDF13/130716_STX_Religion_C.ashx (last accessed October 6, 2013).

33 For a detailed presentation and discussion, but a different perspective, see Jensen 2009.

teachers for the elementary school was given. Christianity was stipulated as playing a key role in 'awakening' the future teacher's religious disposition, which was considered crucial for a qualified teacher. (Sommer 2007, 11)³⁴

Until 1954, the education was comprehensive, and consisted of several compulsory subjects, including *Kristendomskundskab* ('Knowledge of Christianity'). In 1954, it became possible to specialize in one or two subjects, including *Kristendomskundskab*, as a supplement to the compulsory subjects, in order to qualify for teaching in the *Mellemskole* ('Middle School' – grades 8–9, with public exams). In 1966 (implemented in 1969), this was extended to two to three electives, and the number of compulsory subjects was reduced, though it still included *Kristendomskundskab*. One of the elective subjects in the 1969 curriculum was called *Religionskundskab* ('Knowledge of Religion'), which included history of religions and two of the areas philosophy of religion, psychology of religion, ethics, and didactics of religion (Undervisningsministeriet 1969). The contents of the compulsory subject *Kristendomskundskab*, on the other hand, were limited to Christianity, with a focus on Biblical exegesis, dogmatics and church history.

In 1975, knowledge about 'other views of life' (*andre livsopfattelser*) and 'general religious elements from a phenomenology-of-religions perspective' became part of the compulsory subject, maybe to ensure that all teachers could teach the new above-mentioned topic 'Foreign Religions and Other World Views', introduced in the Education Act for the *Folkeskole* in the same year.

A new Education Act in 1991 was followed by a new curriculum in 1992, characterized by increased decentralization, and providing only general objectives for the subjects, with the detailed contents to be decided locally. The obligatory subject *Kristendomskundskab* focused on Christianity in a European and Danish context, on human (existential) and ethical questions, on encounters between religious and secular worldviews, and on basic features of 'other religions'. The objectives for the elective did not differ in substance, but the subject should give a deeper knowledge about 'selected religions'. (Bugge 1994, 47–8.)

In 1997, the comprehensive character of teacher education was replaced by a training program encouraging specialization. Teachers should specialize in teaching four subjects, and the number of compulsory subjects was reduced. In some of the early drafts for the Education Act, it was proposed to make *Knowledge of Christianity* non-compulsory, but public opposition

34 For a historical outline of the education of teachers from 1900 to 1993 see Bugge 1979, 1994.

led to a compromise, introducing two new subjects called *Knowledge of Christianity/Enlightenment of Life*³⁵ (KL= *Kristendomskundskab/Livsoplysning*) and *School and Society* (SIS= *Skole og Samfund*) respectively.

In the preparatory work for KL, it was mentioned that increased encounters between people with different cultural backgrounds made knowledge, not just of 'other religions and cultures' but also of 'one's own background', essential.³⁶ A qualitative difference between knowledge of Christianity and of the 'other religions' can be seen in the objectives, however: 'The students shall gain insight (*indsigt*) into the impact of Christianity on the foundational values of European and Danish culture', and 'acquaintance' (*kendskab*) with other religions and world-views that have played and still play a central role in our culture'. (Undervisningsministeriet 1998.)

In the 2004 curriculum for KL, the word 'knowledge' was now used in both paragraphs. Christianity (and other world-views) were still to be treated with a focus on the cultural impact on Danish/European culture, whereas the 'other religions', now referred to as 'non-Christian religions' and specified as having had an impact within Europe, including Islam, were primarily to be treated in a cultural-*encounter* perspective.

The goals of the curriculum are to qualify teachers to fulfill the general objectives for the *Folkeskole* set out in 1993: to familiarize the pupils with Danish culture and contribute to their understanding of other cultures relevant for immigrants, including Islam. The central knowledge and proficiency areas for 'non-Christian' religions are (our translations): 1) 'knowledge of basic characteristics'; 2) the encounter between Christianity, European culture, secularized culture, and 'other' cultures; and 3) the meeting of cultures (*kulturmødet*, 'cultural encounter') in the school. The core of the subject is built around questions about *dannelse* (*Allgemeinbildung*), values and ethics seen in relation to religions, philosophy and the vocation as a teacher (Undervisningsministeriet 2004).

When a new teacher education program was introduced in 2007, KL and SIS were replaced by a new compulsory subject called *Knowledge of Christianity/Enlightenment of life/Citizenship* (KLM= *Kristendomskundskab, Livsoplysning, Medborgerskab*), and the concept of citizenship education was thus introduced

35 The Danish word is '*livsoplysning*' and bears the stamp of the aforementioned Danish life-philosophy ('Philosophy of Life'= German '*Lebensphilosophie*') tradition so heavily represented in elementary school RE.

36 For an overview of the preparatory work, see Sommer 2007.

for the first time in the Danish education system.³⁷ The subject consisted of three knowledge areas: Religion and Culture, the History of Philosophy, and Democracy and Citizenship. Besides Christianity, Islam and Judaism as minority religions in Europe were obligatory.

This subject, with its combination of what had been or could be seen as many subjects, was hotly disputed from day one. One major critique was that KLM was seen as an effort to ensure that all teachers were able to promote a national-cultural-Christian heritage and 'Danish values' originating in Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity.³⁸

The 2007 syllabus, like those of 1991, 1997, and 2004, clearly reflects exactly the same public and political debates described in relation to RE in elementary school. Two paragraphs of the 2007 curriculum were particularly criticized: one which states that students should be equipped to 'relate to the impact of Christianity and other world-views (*livsanskuelser*) on the foundational values in a European and Danish cultural context'; and the other, listing contents under 'Religion and Culture'. It reads: 'The impact (*betydning*) of Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity on democracy, the welfare state and the school in Denmark.' (Undervisningsministeriet 2007, 2.2.; 2.3.1.)

Though some of the discussions reflected a struggle for work and jobs (social science teachers versus RE teachers), the discussions were primarily due to professional and ideological disagreement, with social science teachers insisting that they were best qualified for teaching about citizenship, and arguing that the curriculum 'de-politicized' the citizenship concept in a non-scientific way. At the same time, some RE teachers complained that religion had been 'reduced' to (its) political and sociological aspects while the important life-philosophy tradition and approach had been played down.³⁹

A report made after the first year of implementation found that many students seemed to have acquired a highly simplified 'understanding', seeing democracy, the welfare state and human rights as a direct heritage of Christianity and as being in opposition primarily to Islam. The report also found that students expressed a 'secularized culture-Christian' perspective, with no critical awareness of the historical impact of Christianity or of the

37 In the preparatory work it was stated that the contents of SIS was to be integrated in KLM as well as in the compulsory subject *Pedagogy*.

38 See, for example, statements from the former Minister of Education, Bertel Haarder (Undervisningsministeriet, 2006b). See also Claus Haas 2007 for discussions about the combination of 'citizenship education' with identity politics.

39 For these discussions, see for example Haas 2007, Gade & Busk 2009 and articles in the periodical published of the association for RE teachers in teacher education (*Lærerruddannelsens Religionslærerforening*). Medlemskommunikation 2006, 1; 2007 1, 2 and 2009, 2.

church as a powerful and dominating institution (Brandt & Bøwadt 2009). Although this report was criticized, *inter alia*, for not being statistically representative and for overestimating the influence of the curriculum on the actual teaching and learning process and outcome, reports from external examiners also highlighted the risk of simplified views when students were asked to integrate the various contents areas. (Censorformandskabet 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; Larsen 2010).

A 2012 research project, analyzing local syllabi, and applying Klafki's general categories of 'material' formation (with the study material as point of departure) and 'formal' formation (with the focus on developing the learner's competences and skills) (Klafki 2011), found that the subject was given different profiles at different university colleges.⁴⁰ In some colleges the student's 'material formation' was stressed, giving priority to knowledge of politics, religion and/or a European-national cultural heritage, while in other colleges a 'formal' formation was profiled, prioritizing a problem-oriented approach and/or giving the students intercultural, analytical or didactic competences.

Some common tendencies, though, could be discerned: All the classes analyzed had been taught a nuanced picture of Islam, stressing diversity and different Muslim views on democracy and human rights, and they also had all read literature with a critical perspective on essentialized discourses on culture and 'Danishness'. All classes had also read literature promoting intercultural dialogue as necessary for peaceful coexistence in a globalized and religiously and culturally plural school, nation and world. At the same time, however, a majority of classes had primarily read literature offering a positive version of Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity and its impact on a Danish culture, the welfare state and democratic values. (Kjeldsen 2012.)⁴¹

When a new teacher education program was negotiated in 2012–2013, KLM once again became hotly debated. This time, though, it was discussed whether KLM should be abolished, as recommended by an expert committee, but political parties from opposite sides of the political spectrum managed to form a majority in favor of the subject. The new draft curriculum was also criticized for watering down what these critics considered

40 This research project was carried out as a master thesis in the Study of Religions. The study included all the local curricula and 15 syllabi from 13 campuses, covering approximately 25 per cent of the students taking the subject in 2010–2011.

41 It must be stressed that some of the literature gives a nuanced picture of Christianity and that the literature may have been read in a critical-analytical way.

the main function of the subject, namely *dannelse* (*Allgemeinbildung*) and turning it instead into a knowledge-focused subject. (Korsgaard 2013; Vihøj 2013.) In the end, a political compromise was reached, with 'Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity' and 'Enlightenment of Life' (*livsoplysning*) both explicitly mentioned (Mikkelsen 2013). The neo-nationalist cultural-Christian discourse, however, was played down, and the paragraphs on the impact of Christianity and Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity on foundational European and Danish values, democracy, the welfare state and the school have been deleted (Ministeriet for Forskning, Innovation og Videregående Uddannelse 2013).

The 2013 curriculum for the *Knowledge of Christianity/Religion* elective has also been revised, attracting, however, no public attention. From a study-of-religions perspective, though, there are promising new features, including the fact that a university scholar of religion was invited to be a member of the expert committee drafting the Executive Orders. Religions (including Christianity) are to be taught as contemporary and lived religions, and the hegemony of Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity has been challenged by introducing reference to other Christian denominations as well.

The identity of the subject is also now formulated differently. While in 2006 Christianity played a prominent role, it is now not even mentioned, and the 2006 vague, probably Tillichian and life-philosophy inspired concept of religion has disappeared. Islam has become obligatory, and the other religions and new religious movements have been quantitatively and qualitatively strengthened, while the life-philosophy and/or existential approach has been played down.

In 2007, one of the overall objectives was to gain competence in formulating and working with religious, philosophical and ethical questions relevant for the children, and one of the objectives under 'didactics of religion' was to promote a positive impact on the self-understanding, cultural identity and life-philosophy of the trainee teachers' future pupils (Undervisningsministeriet 2009b). These objectives are no longer there, and life-philosophy has been transferred to the area of philosophy, with a greater focus on knowledge.

Members of the expert committee have commented that there was hardly any discussion amongst the members as to the need for these changes. Maybe the study of religions does after all have a future in RE teacher education, and thus for RE in the schools themselves.

Teacher Education for the Gymnasium (and HF)

In 1900, the first chair in the History of Religions in Denmark was occupied by Edvard Lehmann (as Reader) at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Copenhagen. When Lehmann left for a chair in Berlin in 1910, Vilhelm Grønbech filled the vacant position.

In 1912, a regular degree program for *Gymnasium* teachers of RE (still called *Kristendomskundskab*) was established at the university – located not within the Faculty of Theology but in the Faculty of Philosophy and History of Religions. The Faculty of Theology, however, was in charge of the major (theological) part of the program, and provided the teachers for the theological topics, while the teaching of the history of religions was left to the History of Religions chair. A long tradition of having theologians and ministers teach the subject had, however, finally come to an end.

The story about the many developments of *Kristendomskundskab*, under whatever name, at three universities since then, is (of course) a story about a struggle between Theology and the History of Religions, but it is also the story of an almost exemplary process of emancipation and secularization, with RE teacher education slowly but surely moving away from Theology into the academic Study of Religions.⁴²

As in the case of *Religion* in the *Gymnasium* and HF, the big changes took place in the aftermath in the 1960s and 70s, following demands from both teachers and students for a humanist, non-theological approach. In the mid-1980s, a new University Act paved the way for the establishment of a common basic degree program in Copenhagen comprising *History of Christianity (Kristendomshistorie)*, *History of Religions*, and *Sociology of Religion*. In Aarhus, things developed in their own way, but the direction was the same. In Odense, a department for *The Study of Religions* was established for the first time in 1982.

Odense aimed primarily at training RE teachers for the *Gymnasium* and HF, and for other students offered only a minor in *Religion*, with comparative religion/history of religions, Christianity, and Philosophy/Ethics as the three main subject-areas. Copenhagen and Aarhus, on the other hand, incorporated RE teacher training within a general degree program. Soon it became possible to take *Religion* not just as a minor but also as a major.

In line with the general increase in public interest in religion-related matters (and the more and more competent and inspiring teaching of *Religion* in

42 For a brief introduction to parts and aspects of these histories at the universities of Copenhagen and Aarhus, see C. Breengaard 1993.

the *Gymnasium*), the three study of religions departments have witnessed a striking increase in the number of students over the last 30 years.⁴³ Though many students seem to aim for a career not as RE-teachers but as consultants on anything that has to do with the challenges in a multi-religious and multi-cultural society, most of the graduates so far have found employment as RE teachers in the *Gymnasium*.

Since the study of religions in Denmark, as can be seen from this historical outline, has thrived not least due to all the students who have become RE teachers, the three departments are well aware that apart from producing all kinds of 'consultants' and a very few scholars of religion, their study programs need above all to fulfil the needs of future RE teachers. The requirements for future RE teachers have been drawn up by a committee (in which the study of religions departments had a seat) on behalf of the (then) Ministry of Science, Technology and Information.⁴⁴ For a study of religions graduate to get a job as a *Gymnasium* RE teacher, s/he must

- have a solid knowledge of categories and problems pertaining to the phenomenology of religion
- master basic theories and methods pertaining to the sociology of religion
- have solid knowledge of texts from the Old as well as New Testament, and of the formative, historical and contemporary forms of Christianity in a global, incl. European and Danish, perspective
- have a solid knowledge of texts from the Qur'an, Hadith (Tradition) and contemporary texts, and of the formative, historical and contemporary forms of Islam in a global, incl. European and Danish, perspective
- be familiar with core issues pertaining to philosophy of religion, and have a general knowledge about core issues and main trends in the European debates for and against Christianity and religion from the 18th century until today, incl. knowledge about non-religious world views and philosophical points of view in regard to ethical issues
- be capable of analysing texts pertaining to the history of religions with regard to an understanding of the individual religions in their

43 For a critical survey of the development of the study of religions in Denmark since the early 1980s see Jensen 2002. For earlier surveys see Johansen 1979; Nørr & Lundager Jensen 1981; Hansen & Geertz 1985; Tybjerg 1996; Geertz 1996.

44 The requirements can be found at <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=29265> (last accessed October 9, 2013).

historical (social, cultural, political) contexts. In the case of at least one religion, the candidate must be capable of reading the classical texts in the original language and know about textual criticism [our translation]

Though scholars of religion may not approve of everything and may find certain terms problematic, these minimum requirements have not been perceived as a problem. They are only a framework, and not that far from what most scholars would consider 'basic' (if not totally up-to-date or entirely sufficient) for an academic, historical and comparative, study of religions.

The key modules in the study program (for the major and minor) at the University of Southern Denmark in Odense may serve as an example of what RE teacher education at a Study of Religions department in Denmark may look like: Introduction to comparative history of religions with phenomenology of religion; Old Testament religion with Judaism; Christianity; Islam and Indian religions; East Asian religions; history of the history of religions; themes in phenomenology of religion; philosophy, ethics, and philosophy of science with reference to religion and its study; religious innovation past and present; religion in Denmark today – sociology of religions perspectives; contemporary religion – sociology of religions perspective; language studies and a study-of-religions exam based on the analysis of texts in the chosen language; an elective and a special study-of-religions topic (both offered on an *ad hoc* basis), didactics of RE and the study of religions; and a Bachelor's thesis.

It is everywhere required (cf. the official requirements) that the candidate must pass an exam where s/he proves that s/he can read and interpret primary sources in the original language. Though there are differences as to which languages the three university departments allow the students to take, these tend to include modern languages such as Spanish, Russian, and Italian, as well as the 'classical' languages such as Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Arabic, and Hebrew.

A module on the Didactics of RE and the Study of Religions' has a long tradition (under various names) in Odense, having been an integral part of the study program since 1982, and similar training is gradually being introduced at the other universities.⁴⁵

45 In Aarhus the department has for a couple of years offered a module on communication ('*formidling*') of study of religions knowledge, and, following a new general strategy for the Faculty of Arts according to which all study programs must integrate several job-market 'profiles', a module giving the student the possibility to attend to RE lessons at a Gymnasium and to reflect on didactical issues is being developed. In Copenhagen, students can attend to modules focusing on the transmission of knowledge about religion in museums and exhibitions or in regard to the communication of religion in articles, films and lectures.

Concluding Remarks

For decades, two almost totally separate and closed RE 'circuits' have been in existence in Denmark: one constituted by the academic Study of Religions and *Religion* in the *Gymnasium* and HF, and the other by theology, RE education at the university colleges (mostly run by theologically trained teachers) and *Folkeskole* RE (*Kristendomskundskab*) (Jensen 2009, 94).

This has been evident in the respective curricula, in the ways of teaching and approaching religion(s), and in textbooks written and used, and for many years there have been few efforts to bridge the gap between these two different worlds. Some developments towards finding more common ground can, however, be noted, and recently some scholars from the academic Study of Religions have started to produce textbooks for *Folkeskole* RE, and one scholar recently contributed to revising the curriculum for an RE teacher education elective. Besides, more and more RE teachers at the university colleges have a master's degree in Study of Religions rather than in theology.

As will be evident from the description, analyses, and critical comments above, the debate surrounding these two circuits, and RE more generally, are not that dissimilar in Denmark to discussions in other countries. The construction of politics of identity using religion (Christianity and Islam) as symbolic markers of national and cultural identity, the securitization of religion (Islam), and the strategic effort to 'sell' Christianity as the main provenance of the foundational and core values for democracy, the welfare state etc., and the majority religion and its understanding of religion as a universal life-philosophy and ethics, can be found in many other places. The same can be said about efforts to construct and deploy RE in the public school system – sometimes in conjunction with citizenship education – to foster and further aims such as fostering tolerance, furthering human rights, democracy, and intercultural communication and understanding.

In Denmark, as in many other places, these 'culture wars' are mainly being fought in relation to RE in compulsory education within the public school system – yet this is also where a study-of-religions perspective has proved harder to establish. RE in the Danish *Folkeskole* most certainly still is a 'small-c confessional' kind of RE. The situation in the *Gymnasium* is much better: here RE can be said to be a 'mini study-of-religions', where – as Wanda Alberts puts it (2008, 320–1) – students are supposed to learn *about* religion, and to learn not from religion itself but from the study of religions. In the *Gymnasium*, this subject focuses of course on what is called religion, on religious and non-religious discourses about religion,

on religious practices, on possible links between religion and integration, religion and the 'meeting of cultures', religion and the individual, cultural and societal conflicts and identity constructions. But what RE contributes to the students' *dannelse* (*Allgemeinbildung*), and the wellbeing of an open, democratic society – as suggested by Tim Jensen (2008, 135; 2011, 140), – is by providing the students with knowledge and analytical skills, just like any other normal school subject within the humanities and social sciences.

Since religion (in one form or the other) seems to be a recurrent element in the history of human societies past and present, knowledge about religion, and analytical skills in regard to religion, ought be something that societies, respectful not only of their religious traditions but also of their Enlightenment traditions, should consider a valuable common 'good'.

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