

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN GERMANY

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This article not only outlines the meaning of Catholic schools in Germany within the state school system from an educational theory standpoint, but also explores the special challenges these schools face in light of societal changes. In order to understand the special challenges these schools are facing, it is necessary to first provide an overview of the development of private Catholic schools. In so doing, problems that are developing in this sector of education will come to light. Following this overview, I will explore the special educational mission of non-vocational Catholic schools, which are having problems legitimising themselves on the basis of Christian principles. It will thereby be shown that private Catholic schools are being challenged by societal changes to create a new identity that can bridge the gap between religious tradition and openness to the plurality of the life experiences young people make. This gives rise to a series of questions pertaining to the development of teaching and school in general. Furthermore, it will be shown how the current paradigm shift in the practice of quality development and assurance in the state school system forces private Catholic schools to develop their own standards of quality, which is a particular problem for these schools. Finally, some conceivable development trends and research projects will be discussed.

Private Catholic Schools: Insight and Overview

Internationally, the development of modern school systems is marked by highly differentiated school settings, a variety of schools and the increasing independence of individual schools. Due to this pluralistic development of schools, it therefore comes as no surprise that private schools in general, and private Catholic schools in particular, are developing their own profiles and educational concepts and are becoming increasingly popular. This profiling of a relatively small sector of private schools is being carried out relatively quietly against the background of a broader discussion about the quality of the state school system, which has been provoked by the publication of PISA test results. The position

of Catholic schools appears to be strengthened by the poor test results received by German school children (Baumert et al., 2001; Prenzel et al., 2004). At any rate the German media self-assuredly point out the high achievement rate of Catholic schools.^a However, two factors must be considered when looking at this claim. First, there is little empirical data that offer reliable information about the actual achievements and social make-up of the pupils who attend private Catholic schools. Second, it remains unclear exactly which schools are meant. As the following overview of the Catholic school setting points out, these schools differ greatly depending on the individual sponsor of each school.

The stocktaking of the “Arbeitskreis Katholischer Schulen in freier Trägerschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” which is carried out every five years in cooperation with the “Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz,” is highly informative when examining Catholic schools in Germany. The most recent data, and the focus of the discussion at hand, stem from the 2002–2003 school year (Dikow, 2004). But to understand the data we must first determine which schools this quinquennial study looked at.

When people speak of Catholic schools in Germany, they could essentially be speaking of three different groups of schools. First, there are denominational primary schools, “Volksschulen” and “Hauptschulen.” These schools are sponsored by the municipality and have a homogenous staff and pupils, as they are organised according to the principles of a particular faith. Even teacher’s training for these schools is carried out according to denomination. Moreover, the educational practice of these schools is aligned with the ecclesiastical calendar, the liturgy, and church festivals. But the number of these schools has drastically declined and only a few states offer such diverse types of schools. One such example is North Rhine-Westphalia, where approximately 250,000 pupils attend public Catholic denominational primary schools and 20,000 pupils attend public Catholic denominational “Hauptschulen” (Dikow, 2004). In some states, such as Baden-Württemberg and Lower Saxony, the decline of denominational schools is being countered by similar arrangements for private primary schools and “Hauptschulen.” The second group of Catholic schools in Germany consists of health services’ schools, which are largely responsible for vocational training to become a nurse or paediatric nurse. As a general rule, these schools answer to the “Arbeitsministerium” and “Sozialministerium.” The final large group of Catholic schools is particularly interesting because it consists of non-vocational private Catholic schools, which are fully recognised as alternative schools in accordance with Article 7, Section 4 of the German Constitution. These schools are largely sponsored by dioceses, religious orders or by “Schulwerken” and “Schulstiftungen” (especially in southern Germany).

^a An article written by Jan-Martin Wiarda, that appeared in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* Nr. 8 on 16 February 2006 on page 81 was entitled thus: “Frohe Botschaft. Warum konfessionelle Schulen die besseren Schüler haben”—A Happy Message: Why Denominational Schools Have Better Pupils. Wiarda supports the idea that parochial schools outclass state schools in school performance without being elitist. Andreas Verhülsdonk emphasises: “Unsere Schulen sind schon da, wo die staatlichen erst noch hinwollen”—Our schools have already reached the point that state schools are striving for. Thus Verhülsdonk is primarily thinking of the greater freedoms-afforded Catholic schools, which allows them to be on the offensive.

The above-mentioned survey and the following observations refer exclusively to this group of non-vocational Catholic schools.

A total of 531 non-vocational private Catholic schools existed in Germany in the 2002–2003 school year, of which 207 were “Gymnasien”; 162 were “Realschulen” (including two “Mittelschulen” or “Sekundarschulen” in the new states); 114 were primary schools, “Hauptschulen” and “Volksschulen”; 16 were independent “Orientierungsstufen”; 7 were “Gesamtschulen”; and 23 were “Abendschulen” and “Kollegs.” As would be expected, states with a Catholic tradition have the highest number of these schools: Bavaria has 129, North Rhine-Westphalia has 123, Baden-Württemberg has 66, Lower Saxony has 61, Rhineland-Palatinate has 43 (furthermore, Hesse has 20, Berlin 23, Saarland 11, Schleswig-Holstein one and the western German city-states Hamburg and Bremen have 26 and 11 respectively). The number of these schools in eastern German states has doubled to 40 since the last survey was taken in the 1997–1998 school year. Within this period of time, 293,584 pupils attended Catholic schools. If Catholic “Sonderschulen” and Catholic “Berufsbildende Schulen” were added to this number of non-vocational private Catholic schools, there would be more than 1,100 schools, according to Marion Wagner (Wagner, 2001a, V). This corresponds to a share of just under 3% of all pupils in Germany. Moreover, if the pupils of the approximately 800 non-vocational Protestant schools, Protestant “Förderschulen” and “Sonderschulen” as well as Protestant “Berufsschulen” were added to this number, the share of pupils would be 6% (see also overview from Klaus Klemm and Peter Krauss-Hoffmann, 1999 about Protestant schools).

Even if exact numbers diverge between individual authors, it should be noted that the demand for pupil placement in the sector of non-vocational Catholic schools exceeds the supply by roughly 25% (Dikow, 2004; Wagner, 2001b). In fact, within the course of five years the number of pupils in these schools increased by 33,199 pupils, or 12.75%, and when compared to the 1992–1993 school year, this means an increase of nearly 20%. The everwidening gap between demand and supply not only demonstrates the appeal of Catholic schools, but also indicates a number of difficulties. For despite rising numbers of pupils, the total number of Catholic schools has remained relatively stable. The quantitative increase of pupils therefore comes at the cost of the expansion of individual schools, especially “Gymnasien.” Apparently, the economic power of church-based sponsorship has been so exhausted that no new schools can be founded, a fact that affects parents and pupils alike. If such a high number of interested (and potentially committed) parents must be turned down, then the question of selection criteria becomes highly controversial. This must also be considered in light of the background that the composition of the pupils is continually changing. The problem for pupils is that “eine Chance nicht wahrgenommen werden kann, mehr jungen Menschen einen Dienst zu leisten und dem Wirken der Kirche in der Gesellschaft eine größere Resonanz zu verschaffen”¹ (Dikow, 2004, 15).

¹ Translation: more young people cannot be served while creating a greater effect of church on society.

A further problem arises when school sponsors and personnel are taken into consideration. The percentage of religious order schools has been reduced to nearly half within 15 years. These schools are run by dioceses, “Schulstiftungen” and “Schulwerken.” However, the problem remains unsolved concerning the drastic decline of jobs in religious orders and the ratio of members of religious orders to teachers of non-vocational Catholic schools, which constituted a mere 3.11% in the 2002–2003 school year (Dikow, 2004). Consequently, monks and nuns are rare even in religious order schools, and the special character of such schools must give way to other school cultures. Noteworthy is the fact that there are a number of “Gymnasien” that belong to this type of school and a high percentage of girls, roughly 65%, attending them. It should therefore be realised that a tradition is being continued, for Catholic schools gave girls access to higher education before state “Gymnasien” did. Following PISA, however, we must ask ourselves what characteristics this clientele have because PISA has proved the close relationship between social standing and school attendance at the various types of schools. It is unknown whether a parent’s choice for a Catholic “Gymnasium” corresponds to his or her affiliation in a specific occupational field or social class. But Catholic “Gymnasien” must ask themselves how far they favour girls from a strong educational background (see also Leschinsky, 1999), in other words, they must ask themselves how open they are to that particular group of youths which PISA named the educational losers, namely boys from a migrational background (Baumert et al., 2001).

An intermediary conclusion shows that private Catholic schools are enjoying increasing popularity. Of course, external data do not say anything about the quality of work done in schools. They do however signal challenges which arise due to structural change and the process of secularisation and which need to be more clearly defined. Due to the conflict that arises out of the increasing appeal of Catholic schools for parents and out of the qualitative challenges for the educational organisation of these schools, Wilhelm Wittenbruch and Ulrich Kurth ask in the title of their book *Katholische Schulen: Nachfrage steigend—Bildungswert fallend?* if the increasing demand of Catholic schools leads to a diminishing value of the education received there (Wittenbruch & Kurth, 1999). Before discussing the question about the educational mission of Catholic schools, however, we must first look at how Catholic schools explain their educational efforts and wherein parents see the appeal of these schools.

The Educational Mission of Private Catholic Schools and How They See Themselves Against the Background of Christianity

Parents are motivated to choose a Christian school for two different, yet overlapping reasons. The first reason stems from school criticism. Public state schools are accused of favouring rationalised learning, which does not penetrate to the core of young people because it neither corresponds with their search for a meaning in life nor answers their unavoidable questions about the reason of being. Moreover, school generally refers to secularised school. Critics say that school in

this sense of the word does not heed its educational task because it is too focused on symbolical and abstract learning, thereby not allowing for room to mould pupils' positive attitudes and values. Regardless of how overgeneralised such a critique of "the" state school may be, disappointing PISA results have led to an increased tendency of the public to criticise state schools and of parents increasingly to choose Catholic schools (Dikow, 2004).

The second reason why parents choose a Christian school is primarily related to anthropological and educational theory motives. This rationale is fed by the desire to choose a school that finds its strength in Christianity because such schools know how to interrelate the various dimensions of what it means to be human in order to help individuals cope with a world that is becoming increasingly complex. As for the "Proprium," or the undeniable character of Catholic schools in particular, parents expect Catholic schools to foster the development of their children's unique personalities, to hone social skills and to forge an educational community with the families.

Bearing parents' motives for choosing a particular school in mind, modern Catholic schools are trying to legitimise their pedagogical programmes based on a Christian view of humanity. It therefore goes without saying that both the Christian message of salvation and the unconditional acceptance that man is created in God's image underlie the personal definition of Catholic schools. This led Joachim Dikow to accentuate in a seminal article, that the Catholic Church is founding schools to fulfil its role of salvation (Dikow, 1988, 50). Catholic schools hereby assign themselves the task of creating a space for learning and living which allows for instruction according to the principles of the faith. One central goal of this plan, is to have the Church be experienced as a community that allows each individual pupil the freedom to make a well-founded choice of faith. But what exactly are the core Christian values that these schools support?

In accordance with the ancient Christian understanding of church as a community of Christ's followers, Hermann-Joseph Meurer highlights the following central ideas of the Christian community: "leiturgia," "martyria," and "diakonia" (Meurer, 2003). In a narrow sense of the word, "leiturgia" refers to worship services as a celebration of the Eucharist and praying. More broadly, however, it means service to God's creatures, including service to young people. Serving adolescents as beings created in God's image honours the Creator. "Martyria," on the other hand, means preaching Christ's words and deeds. Young people should therefore come to understand the message of the Gospel, that God, wants to give all humankind a fulfilled present and future. Finally, "diakonia" is targeted specifically at young people; it refers to the service provided for the spiritual welfare of the members of the Christian school community in answer to the questions, concerns, and problems which invariably arise when growing up in a complex world. Moreover, "diakonia" recalls the picture of an "organism" in which all parts of a community are codependent, an understanding that has a special status. However, this basic concern cannot be realised in the classroom alone, rather it is realised further in a cross-disciplinary educational concept at the level of individual schools. Accordingly, Catholic schools have recently

begun using various new forms of debate in the discussion about life problems. Noteworthy of mention are the projects of the “Schulpastoral” in some dioceses, which are carried out by specially trained experts for “Schulpastoral” to directly help pupils overcome life crises. The compassion projects established in some states at the beginning of the 1990s should not be forgotten either. These are social internships in institutions outside of school in which social skills such as helpfulness, cooperation and solidarity are fostered (Kuld, 2002).

Looking at the discourse about educational practices in Catholic schools more closely, the close connection becomes apparent between arguments that are critical of modernity, arguments based on educational theory, theological arguments, and arguments based on religious education. On the other hand, critics say that conventional state schools blindly follow the structural patterns of the modernisation of society, such as the dominance of economics over education, secularisation, acceleration, and rationalisation of learning, and relativising values (Fischer, 2000; Pongratz, 2000; Rekus, 2004). In a nutshell, the critique of neoliberal modernisation strategies look thus: while searching for their personal identity in the postmodern world, individuals take themselves to be the measure for freedom and see themselves as the originators of an outer reality. Accordingly, life is seen from a viewpoint that only suggests meaning and security in a “Geflecht des Faktischen”² (Kluge, 2000). The world’s development, marked by technical rationality, which gives man the authority to dispose of and steer through these self-created facts, feeds a dangerous illusion of omnipotence (Pongratz, 2000); the individual alone creates the myth of a “säkularen Selbsterlösung”³ (Anhelm, 2000). From a theological standpoint, man is not indebted to himself, rather he is dependent upon his Creator: life is a gift of God; man’s freedom is a “verdankte Freiheit,” a freedom for which all men are eternally indebted to God as the Creator and Preserver of the world. In this sense, man is bound to an absolute being that is outside himself and this requires certain forms of interpretation. Interpreting oneself and the world in the mirror of Christianity while at the same time making the interpretation clear to oneself—this would be Christian faith with practical meaning for life (Anhelm, 2000; Dressler, 2000).

Against this background and with Catholic schools in mind, Volker Ladenthin (2001) shows that conventional schools set the processes of generating knowledge in such a way that the dimension of religiousness itself is left unconsidered. According to him, conventional schools do not test the circumstances under which technical and scientific findings can be made and must therefore shield themselves from an “erkenntnistheoretisches Vakuum,” or gnostic vacuum, which is inevitably born when the nature of things is the centre of discussion. Ladenthin sees one of the central tasks of Catholic schools to be that they expound precisely those problems which other schools circumvent, namely the difficulty of absolute justification and the problem of creating a gnostic vacuum.

² Translation: weave of facts.

³ Translation: secular self-deliverance.

Therefore, he says, Catholic schools must insist that all knowledge is limited and conditional (Ladenthin, 2001, 45). Ladenthin furthers his argument by calling Catholic schools a “Stachel im Fleisch der Gesellschaft, die von sich glaubt, sie wüßte schon oder in absehbarer Zeit alles über sich und die Welt,”⁴ an idea that is absolutely contrary to a concept of a rationalised school and society (Ladenthin, 2001). As far as this issue is concerned, Ladenthin’s viewpoint concurs with that of Friedrich Schweitzer who demands that religion is a key problem⁵ (Schweitzer, 1999, p. 125), an idea that corresponds with Wolfgang Klafki’s concept of key problems (Klafki, 1985) in (Protestant) schools. Clearly, the question of religiousness directly affects individual schools.

But what is the parents’ opinion of such a fundamentally critical position and of the theological justification of Catholic schools’ educational mission? What is so important to them about Catholic schools? Dikow’s survey shows the following: the majority of parents do not see Catholic schools as “Glaubenschulen”⁶ (Dikow, 2004, p. 28). While roughly 54% of all surveyed parents find that “Glaubensfragen in der Schule eine Rolle spielen,”⁷ this aspect is of utmost importance for a mere 28.3% (Dikow, 2004, p. 26). An analogous result was found for “Einführung in eine heute mögliche Glaubenspraxis”⁸ (Dikow, 2004, p. 26). It therefore appears, that the self-conception of Catholic schools, and the orientation of parents diverge. Parents choose a Catholic school primarily because they can count on a good teaching staff that encourage pupils to dedicate themselves to social causes and that cultivate the entire individual in his or her developmental process. Furthermore, it is important to parents that the school “sich um die Erziehungsgemeinschaft von Elternhaus und Schule bemüht”⁹ (Dikow, 2004, p. 26). This is understandable because in contrast to state schools, the educational mission of Catholic schools is derived directly from the tasks parents assign the school (Dikow, 1988). The high expectations placed on the power of Catholic schools to educate pupils by no means preclude the demand for a high expectation of performance (see also Sennekamp, 2001b). Thus it may come as a surprise that roughly 28% of parents hold high levels of performance for very important and approximately 60% of parents hold this for important, while only a few parents see a problem with the performance pressure placed on schools. It is therefore clear from these findings that basic inquiries into a notion of performance try to take a holistic approach to school performance and bear in mind the continual development of adolescents (Schönig, 1999).

An important question for research is, whether or not, the expectations of a consistent educational concept of Catholic schools is realised on the basis of an educational community. Arguing from an empirical standpoint, Rainer Ilgner

⁴ Translation: a thorn in the flesh of society, which believes it knows everything about itself and the world now or will know everything in the near future.

⁵ Schweitzer talks of “Religion als Schlüsselproblem.”

⁶ Translation: schools of faith.

⁷ Translation: questions of faith play a role in school.

⁸ Translation: introduction to possibilities of practising faith today.

⁹ Translation: strives to create an educational community by connecting families to the school.

critically states the following: “Wer die Realität des katholischen Schulwesens in unserem Land kennt, ist sich freilich auch darüber im klaren, daß die Idee eines solchen individuellen Erziehungskonzeptes, in dem die einzelne Schule ihr Erziehungsprogramm definiert und ihre Identität beschreibt, vielerorts erst noch entdeckt werden muß”¹⁰ (Ilgner, 1999, p. 91; see also Ilgner, 1994).

Catholic School Identity: A Balancing Act Between Tradition of Faith and Plurality of Life Spheres

Not only state schools, but also Catholic schools are confronted with the problem of the loss of tradition, secularisation, plurality of the situations adolescents face, and changes in educational requirements, all problems that make everyday school life less manageable and less secure (Rauschenberger, 1999). School has become more difficult, and especially challenges communication amongst teaching staff and with parents about their tasks and goals. In fact, it is widely believed that the quality of education received at Catholic schools is automatically better than that received at state schools. This is primarily because of the dialogue created in the teaching staff due to continuing education of teachers, teams that are organised, and the continual work done on school programmes which is institutionalised (Wagner, 2001b; Wittenbruch, 1999)—communication about experiences is an essential characteristic of parochial schools. In opposition thereto is the opinion that the trend in society towards secularisation and individualisation does not stop because of teaching staff at parochial schools, rather, individual teaching styles leave a lasting impression on pupils, thereby driving forward the dissolution of basic communal standpoints through teaching and education. But since we do not have enough empirical research (Schweitzer, 1999), such observations are rather speculative. However, this does call attention to the fact that Catholic schools are confronted with a large task, a specifically Christian task of bringing out the special denominational aspect in a world that is changing drastically.

In the discussion about the specific concept of Catholic schools there are at least two aspects of reference that must be recognised. On the one hand, there is the Catholic faith with its individual traditions and ways of life. On the other hand, there are the special working conditions of individual schools in their concrete settings. It remains to be seen which basic Catholic beliefs are able to withstand the test of time and claim universal validity and which beliefs must be revamped to conform to current goings-on in the world (Nordhofen, 2001). It is obvious that the educational contents of Catholic schools can no longer be deduced from the dogma of the Church if the Church’s work in the field of education is supposed to have a meaning for the greater public. It can only be

¹⁰ Translation: Those who are familiar with the reality of the Catholic school system in our country certainly know that the idea of such an individual educational concept, in which individual schools define their educational programmes, has yet to be discovered in many places.

“anschlussfähig,” that is connectable, if the contents of faith and education are discussed (Anhelm, 2000).

This moved Rainer Ilgner in his commentary to the first volume of the *Handbuch Katholische Schule* (Ilger, 1994), to take up the idea of “progetto educativo,” the educational concept of the Catholic Church developed at the Second Council of the Vatican. “Progetto educativo” indicates that it is no longer about specifiable, individual characteristics of Catholic schools, “sondern um die regulativen Ideen für die immer neue Auseinandersetzung mit wechselnden geschichtlichen und gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen und für die unterschiedlichen Ausformungen von Schulpraxis”¹¹ (Knab, 1998, 164). Using the idea of a project, Ilgner speaks of “projet éducatif” to emphasise the openness and dynamism of this educational concept at the level of individual schools and to make room for the idea of school development (Ilgner, 1999). Part of this “projet éducatif” is dealing with the tension between the uniqueness of Christ’s life and crucifixion on the one hand and the mission of proclaiming the Christian faith to others on the other hand (Nordhofen, 2001). Therefore, a central question for the theoretical foundation and the practical design of Catholic schools is how, on the one hand, faith can be proclaimed and, on the other hand, the dignity of *all* members of the school community can be respected. In other words, the question is how to cultivate the tradition of Catholicism while practising solidarity with people of other faiths or atheists in school.

The council text of the Second Council of the Vatican, “Nostra aetate,” holds other faiths in high esteem and emphasises the unifying moment between them with the term “Communio,” or the forging of relations (Rahner & Vorgrimmler, ¹²1978). This makes it clear that it neither makes sense to ignore religious or confessional differences nor to level them out to the greatest common denominator. Only after the differences between confessions and religions are seen, is it possible to interrelate them and to stimulate a dialogue in order to learn from one another (Scheilke, 2002) by acting in accordance with the idea that similarities strengthen and differences must not be ignored.^b At any rate, confessional differences in schools challenge new modes of encountering others, whether in the form of confessional and cooperative religious instruction (Nordhofen, 2002; Frank, 2002) or in everyday school life.

These challenges are especially controversial, in so far as a considerable share of pupils attending Catholic schools are not Catholic. Moreover, children today frequently no longer have a “konfessionelle Heimat”¹² and grow up in multi-confessional families or even have volatile family relationships (Krautter, 2000). Indeed, the above-mentioned survey carried out by Dikow (Dikow, 2004) shows that the share of Catholic pupils at Catholic schools

¹¹ Translation: rather it is about regulatory ideas for evererupting discussions about changing historical and societal conditions and for the diverse forms of everyday school life.

¹² Translation: a religious home.

^b “Gemeinsamkeiten stärken – Unterschiede gerecht werden” is the title of the religious education project in primary schools supported by the “Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaften” (DFG). This project is currently being carried out by Schweitzer (Protestant religion) and Biesinger (Catholic religion), two instructors of religious education at the University of Tübingen

has decreased in previous years, constituting roughly 77% of all pupils in the 2002–2003 school year. According to his study, one-fifth of all pupils are Protestant. And while the number of Muslim pupils is low, this particular group of pupils is growing. It may be seen as a reaction to the everchanging denominational make-up of the pupils attending Catholic schools and to a diminishing practice of faith in the home that certain practices of religious life cannot be easily realised in schools. For this reason the number of worship services and religious holidays has decreased in schools. The latter is certainly coupled with the increased workload demanded of teachers and the decreased economic buying power of some homes. Remarkable is the fact, that 15% of all pupils, or 40,000 pupils, attending non-vocational Catholic schools come from single-parent households (all statistics: Dikow, 2004). Therefore, Catholic schools are no longer excluded from the task of having to cater to pupils' special needs.

The “project éducatif” as a development of the school must be seen in light of this background. School development at the level of the individual school means today the method by which teachers collaboratively work to systematically deal with the problems of institutionalised teaching, learning, working, and living (Schönig, 2000). In this process the task of school development in Catholic schools is contingent upon the faith in contrast to state schools. Teaching and school life should be arranged so as to capture the spirit of the religion. Though religious instruction plays a fundamental role in “was unbedingt angeht,”¹³ “religion” cannot be exhausted in a single school subject. Questions about the meaning of life must be discussed in every subject (Ladenthin, 2001) because “religiöse Fragen melden sich nicht ‘diszipliniert’ im Doppelsinn des Wortes ...”¹⁴ (Knab, 1995, 70). For this reason, the proportion of individual school subjects to integrated disciplines must be taken into consideration. For where learning outside of the cellular organisational structure of school takes place, learning opportunities will arise more easily, that allow, for personal (religious) experiences and active and practical exposure to world phenomena and that make interreligious learning possible. Yet even with organised learning, faith cannot be “manufactured” because it always stands in a dialectic between freedom of the individual and a merciful gift of God. Therefore, the question is, which social environment individual schools should provide for the cultivation of decisions based on faith.

Implications of New Forms of Quality Control and Development of Quality for Schools

PISA, an international school achievement test, is a component, of a developing state philosophy of quality assurance, through a new means of monitoring school performance. This turnabout has become characteristic of all industrialised

¹³ Translation: what must necessarily be addressed.

¹⁴ Translation: questions pertaining to religion do not arise in a disciplined manner, in a double meaning of the word.

nations that wish to be competitive in the global marketplace. It is therefore not surprising that the OECD, an organisation for the *economic* co-operation and development of nations, initiated the reform of school systems through an international system of monitoring. Until recently, a close-meshed net of bureaucratic state preliminary regulations marked quality assurance of schools in a particular school system. Statutory ordinances, decrees, administrative regulations, and detailed curricula were created to ensure that schools adhered to these guidelines. This system of regulation is also known as output-oriented education and no monitoring of the actual achievements of schools took place.

Initiated by rapid societal and cultural changes, individual schools developed their own personal concepts of school. This occurred in individual countries and the various states of the Federal Republic of Germany at different speeds and led to a plurality of educational settings and a multitude of school types. Apparently, differences in quality between schools have grown larger, so large in fact, that conventional means of individual state monitoring, which aimed at school uniformity, no longer adequately controls the situation. Henceforth, the state has been changing its means for monitoring schools. In lieu of preliminary procedural standardisation the state is gradually introducing later evaluations of school quality, a phenomenon known as output-oriented education. The conventional system of regulations is increasingly being withdrawn and schools are gaining more educational freedom to develop individual school concepts. This is happening, however, at the cost of greater accountability of schools for their attained achievements aided by a sophisticated evaluation system. This process has progressed at different speeds in the various German states. While the city-states as well as Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia had already begun implementing this system of evaluation in the mid-1990s, the southern states of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria have only recently embarked upon this path (see also Schönig & Häußler, 2005).

Educational standards, which were established by the “Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder” (KMK) on 4 December 2003, are an integral part of this orchestra of reform (<http://www.kmk.org/schul/home/htm>). These are competencies that are directly related to individual school subjects and that pupils should acquire by the time they finish a certain class in school. Thus far the KMK has set educational standards for German and mathematics in the fourth year at primary schools; for German, mathematics, and the first foreign language for the ninth year at “Hauptschulen”; and for German, mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, and the first foreign language for the “Mittleren Abschluss,” which is attained after the tenth year. As a general rule, centrally administered tests monitor to what extent pupils have achieved set standards. In contrast to achievements—which define a highly limited spectrum of knowledge, skills, and proficiencies—competencies aim at the application of knowledge in particular situations. They therefore refer to pragmatic aspects of formal skills and behaviours which are defined identically for all adolescents in a particular class.

A controversial discussion has arisen in Germany over the introduction of educational standards (see also Böttcher, 2003; Brügelmann, 2003; Klieme, 2003;

Schlömerkemper, 2004). While some people expect equal opportunities, better rates of school achievement, and a means to rationally monitor pupils' competencies, others see a widely standardised school system that "teaches for the test" and sells off education. As alternative schools, non-vocational Catholic schools are dependent on state educational funding and are therefore obliged to fulfil the educational standards and demonstrate their quality of work through self-evaluation and evaluation from others. Against this background people have begun asking if Catholic schools are in the process of finding themselves or if they are "auf dem besten Wege, sich selbst zu verlieren"¹⁵ (Wagner, 2001a, V). Critics call attention to the danger for parochial schools, that the adopted course of state reform may be more about an economically motivated outlook on education, (Fischer, 2000; see also Wittenbruch, 1999) than about an increase in educational quality as a whole. Moreover, some people fear that religiousness will be expelled from Catholic schools altogether. Arguments stemming from educational theory carry a special weight in the current discussion in the context of Catholic schools and these arguments shall be discussed forthwith.

Based on the idea that the economy today is a "Form menschlicher Gesamtp Praxis"¹⁶ (Rekus, 2004, p. 287), Jürgen Rekus looks into the connection between education and educational standards. Rekus states that educational standards, which are demonstrated in competencies, do not aim at the development of an autonomous identity of individuals, rather they aim at formal behaviours that can be tested objectively and "gegenstandsgleichgültig," or without paying attention to various subject matter (Rekus, 2004, p. 287). Accordingly, he states that competencies have an affirmative character as far as they refer to behaviours that can be recalled at any time and in any place. He further claims that competencies have no value in and of themselves, rather they have a value of benefit because they have no substantial content and attempt to prove that individuals can move in a network of flexible, anonymous, functional processes under competition conditions. In line with Rekus' thinking, Ludwig Pongratz emphasises that the "Zwangscharakter," or the feeling of being forced to do something, present in modern industrialised nations not only leads to people having to market themselves but also leads to a reification of individuals. Pongratz claims that young people are supposed to learn to be "erfolgreiche, flexible, mobile, gut ankommende Selbst-Verkäufer"¹⁷ (Pongratz, 2000, p. 179). Therefore they are raised to be lifelong "Lern-Nomaden," or nomads of learning, spurred on by the concern that, they have to continually put on a show for others. In so doing, Pongratz argues, one particular characteristic of education, namely its stability and the ability to connect itself with the outside world, is forfeited. He further argues that this deformation of education must necessarily be withdrawn from the consciousness of the public through a mythological veil: "Das reformpädagogische Pathos, mit dem sich die Ökonomisierungsimperative den Praktikern andienen,

¹⁵ Translation: on their way to losing themselves.

¹⁶ Translation: an outlet for all human experience.

¹⁷ Translation: successful, flexible, well-received sellers of themselves.

lässt den realen Zwangszusammenhang hinter einer Nebelwand liberaler Wunschvorstellungen verschwinden ...”¹⁸ (Pongratz, 2000, p. 180).

According to Aloysius Regenbrecht, the choice of vocabulary used in the new educational reforms demonstrates this very camouflage. Indeed, he calls the term educational standard itself a “sprachliche Missgeburt nach PISA,”¹⁹ a means of deception. He claims that this word was chosen because it must be played down that educational standards have nothing to do with education and everything to do with monitorable rates of pupils’ achievement (Regenbrecht, 2005). The question remains how to fill the term “Bildung,” which I have here, called education with content.

Rekus alludes to a traditional understanding of education and includes it in the sphere of personality, being able to confront life, and understanding the world (Rekus, 2004). In contrast to competencies, which are a mere mastery of skills, education refers to the ability to form one’s own opinions and attitudes critically and objectively. Viewed in this light, education presupposes that reason prevails and therefore aims at “in den unvorhersehbaren Situationen des Lebens vernünftig handeln und dieses Handeln verantworten zu können”²⁰ (Rekus, 2004, p. 293). Thus education comprises a probationary criterion that is rooted in the notion that individuals are self-determined. But in light of Christian understanding, self-determination is not akin to man’s being entirely in charge of his actions. In fact, education is a decisive criterion for morality. For this reason Volker Ladenthin focuses on the moral judgement of man (Ladenthin, 2003) by which he refers to man’s ability to make decisions that serve the common good. Accordingly, he claims that such decisions aim at the whole and not at gaining quick, short-term advantages (Ladenthin, 2003, p. 70). But morality is neither sufficiently regarded by PISA nor is it adequately reflected in the newly designed educational standards. The renowned psychologist Franz E. Weinert states self-critically that there is “im Bereich motivationaler, volitionaler, sozialer, ethischer und moralischer Kompetenzen immer noch einen großen Mangel an zuverlässigen, gültigen und leicht handhabbaren Messmethoden”²¹ (Weinert, 2001, p. 358).

Apart from morality, Ladenthin also singles out aesthetics as a second constitutive characteristic of education, or “Bildung.” By this he means being able to see disregarded phenomena in a new light and “etwas auf neue Art zu gestalten”²² (Ladenthin, 2003, p. 70). Education is therefore attributed with a moment of active creation, of creative and formative access to the world. It is not, however, concerned with the adaptation of individuals to pre-existing structures, but

¹⁸ Translation: the pathos of educational reforms with which practising teachers palm off the imperative of economisation allows the current forced connection to disappear behind a curtain of liberal desires.

¹⁹ Translation: freak use of language that has arisen following PISA.

²⁰ Translation: being able to act rationally in unpredictable situations and taking responsibility for one’s actions.

²¹ Translation: still a lack of reliable, valid, and easily managed methods of measurement in the field of motivational, volitional, social, ethical, and moral competencies.

²² Translation: being able to redesign something in a new manner.

rather to the configuration of meaningful life affairs. In other words, adolescents should not just learn to fulfil predetermined standards, rather they should learn to set their own rational, morally responsible standards. Thus education means the skill of being able to set one's own goals.

By following this educational theory discussion, the danger becomes apparent that educational standards undermine an enriched education. Therefore, Catholic schools are confronted with the dual task of educating pupils because of and despite educational standards and of defending specifically Christian aspects of individual school concepts. It is obvious that Catholic schools show the limitations of educational standards and reclaim the missing dimension of a comprehensive religious education for themselves. As far as quality of instruction is concerned, educational standards are useful indicators of quality, promote reflection about instruction, and define quality of education; they are, however, only one criterion among many. It is important for Catholic schools that a distinguishing "Proprium" can take effect in their curricula. However, this "Proprium" has yet to be attached to educational standards because it cannot be restricted to individual school subjects. The specifically Christian educational and social mission of Catholic schools is realised by the fact that the various learning spaces and learning opportunities dovetail and that the schools themselves become places to meet others and experience things with a specifically Christian outlook. Only by practising the faith—by praying, meditating, and working with youths and through worship services, devotions, spiritual guidance, and counselling—is the specific educational quality of Catholic schools disclosed; educational standards are but one facet of this (Rothgangel & Fischer, 2004).

Officials of both the Catholic and Protestant Churches have quickly warned of the impending reduction of the term "Bildung" and have especially warned of the reductions in religious instruction. In fact, German bishops published "Kirchliche Richtlinien zu Bildungsstandards für den katholischen Religionsunterricht in den Jahrgangsstufen 5–10/Sekundarstufe I (Mittlerer Abschluss)"²³ on 23 September 2004 (Sekretariat, 2004). In contrast to the rather formal state educational standards, this particular set of guidelines disclose content-based competencies that should be acquired through religious instruction. They aim at establishing religious attitudes as well as making religion and faith possible. The learning processes for religious education are thereby emphasised: "Auch religiöse Bildung erfordert die Selbsttätigkeit der Schülerinnen und Schüler. Unterricht ist deshalb nicht im Sinne einer Output orientierten Systemsteuerung, sondern als kommunikativen Handeln zu verstehen und zu gestalten"²⁴ (Sekretariat, 2004, p. 11). This message is not only a rebuff for a one-sided, cognitive, and product-oriented kind of learning, but for applied religion as well.

²³ Translation: denominational guidelines for educational standards of Catholic religion classes for years 5–10.

²⁴ Translation: religious education demands that pupils act on their own accord, too. Instruction is therefore not meant as an output-oriented system of monitoring, rather it is a communicative act that should be organised thus.

Moreover, religious instruction is assigned the role of a methodical leader. It is remarkable that some sponsors of Catholic schools have compiled manuals with which teachers can define the quality of their religion lessons in accordance with a Christian understanding of education (e.g., Gandlau, 2004). Even the “Rat der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland” has looked critically at the new competence and goal-oriented learning required by educational standards and is lobbying for a different culture of teaching in which learning is personally meaningful to adolescents: “Ein solches ‘sinnvolles’ Lernen bedeutet: einhalten, nachdenken, sich sammeln, Zeit lassen zum Begreifen, zu sich selbst kommen—und so auch zu den Sachen”²⁵ (Rat,^b2003, p. 63).

Agenda for Future Research and Development

Given the diverse challenges facing Catholic schools today, it is pertinent to look at proven research findings. However, people who read the literature about Catholic schools, will be disappointed to see that a great vacuum exists in this respect. According to Rafael Frick, one indication of the utter lack of research in this field is the widespread ignorance of the theoretical foundation of Catholic schools not only amongst teachers but also in the field of education science: “In deutlichem Gegensatz zur imposanten Statistik des Systems Katholische Schule [...] steht der geringe Kenntnisstand der erziehungswissenschaftlichen Öffentlichkeit hinsichtlich der Theorie und Praxis katholischer Schulen: die aktuellen kirchlichen Standpunkte und Entwicklungen im Hinblick auf Pädagogik und Schule sind, soweit dies aus der Anzahl der Thematisierungen in wissenschaftlichen Publikationen ruckgeschlossen werden kann, in Deutschland kaum rezipiert ...”²⁶ (Frick, 2006, p. 3). In fact, there is but one research project in this field; it is solely concentrated on the effectiveness and problems of Catholic schools and has just commenced (see also Wittenbruch & Werres, 1992). The motivation that should come from Catholic schools for state schools (Dikow, 1988) would probably be stronger if only Catholic schools would let their propagated and unique educational weight be empirically proven. Based on the explanations above only a rough sketch of some goals for research and development can be given.

- One major field of research and development is Catholic schools’ understanding of achievement. It appears as though the noble claims of educational achievement and the levels of performance actually required of schools contradict each other. On the one hand, Catholic schools live off

²⁵ Translation: such meaningful learning means stopping, contemplating, concentrating, taking time to understand, coming to terms with oneself, and thereby also with the subject matter.

²⁶ Translation: the impressive statistics of the Catholic school system stand in stark contrast to the absolute ignorance of the education science public as far as theory and practice are concerned: the current standpoint of the Church and the developments with regard to education and school are—as far as can be determined from the number of discussions in scholarly publications—hardly taken up in Germany.

a culture of sticking up for, helping, encouraging, and supporting others. On the other hand, conventional teacher-centred instruction is often found in schools in which it is well known that the individual learning potential of pupils is not exhausted: “Wenn auch dem strengen, vielleicht überdimensionierten Leistungsbewusstsein durch eine engagierte Kultur des Helfens viel von seiner Bedrohlichkeit genommen wird, so ist doch nicht auszuschließen, dass gerade durch die gleichartige Struktur von Erwartungen und durch die gemeinsame Akzeptanz der Leistungsnorm von Elternhaus und Schule eine – möglicherweise nicht immer kontrollierte – soziale Verstärkung dieses Leistungsdenkens geschieht, die sinnvolle Grenzen wohl auch überschreitet”²⁷ (Vorsmann, 1999, p. 139). If the Christian idea of man refers to the dignity of the individual, his being made in God’s image and his uniqueness, then lessons must also allow for these ideas and be fostered by diverse teaching methods and individualised performance demands in order to encourage the development of the personal endowments of each and every pupil. This is not only a task of utmost importance for teachers as professionals, but it is also an important task for research. It must be demonstrated how a multidimensional individualised learning that is aimed at the individual in a Christian setting can succeed better than in conventional state schools. Therefore, accompanying pupils after they have completed school is essential in this context, for this kind of research can show what happens to alumni of Catholic schools occupationally and socially, as citizens, and as far as church activities are concerned.

- In the past few years, religious instruction has played a key role in the development of Catholic schools among others (see also Battke et al., 2002). It appears that teachers of religion, by virtue of the unique objective of their subject, use a wider variety of teaching methods than their colleagues who teach other subjects. One indication of this is Dikow’s finding that no other subject uses as many individually designed teaching materials as Catholic religion classes. This practice has been confirmed in at least 70% of all non-vocational Catholic schools (Dikow, 2004, pp. 35–36). The potential for reform contained in this type of teaching is merely suggested. It would therefore be fruitful to analyse how motivational teaching materials used in religion classes are taken up in staff discussions and transformed into concrete steps for school development. One final comment on this topic is necessary: there is a lack of case studies directly related to school development that go above and beyond mere sketches of individual schools.
- Finally, it is worth noting that we know little about the practical consequences of educational standards. Aside from school evaluations, it is necessary to implement an evaluation of educational standards. Such a demand,

²⁷ Translation: even if the threatening nature of a strict and potentially oversized performance consciousness is removed by a dedicated culture of helping others, it cannot be ignored that especially because of a similar acceptance of the performance norm by parents and schools—potentially not always controllable—an arguably irrational social reinforcement of this way of thinking about performance is encouraged.

however, infringes on the presently favoured system of empirical research in the field of education in Germany, which is concerned with the verification of the effects of education on pupils and not just with learning and achievement. This, of course, presupposes an educational theory of schools and increasingly requires the means of qualitative social research, hereby closing this circle of argumentation.

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